



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



RE(THINKING) THE LITTLE ANCESTOR: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD. Edited by Mike Lally and Alison Moore. Pp. iv and 161, Illus 51. Archaeopress (British Archaeological Reports International Series, **2271**), 2011. Price: £34.00. ISBN 978 1 407308 45 6.

This volume comprises papers presented at the University of Kent in 2005 which birthed the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (SSCIP) and its journal *Childhood in the Past*. Containing a wealth of chronologically and geographically widespread archaeological studies, it highlights the profitability of studying past societies' youngest members. Each article discusses familiar issues within non-adult archaeology, such as taphonomy, liminality, and children / childhood as a social construct, although these may become tedious for those using the volume as a whole. More rigorous proof-reading may also have eliminated the abundance of misspellings and poor grammar in some papers, particularly translated contributions. Nonetheless, this volume presents a range of innovative studies.

In the sole theoretical paper, Fahlander rightly denounces homogenous categories of 'child', astutely engaging with this relevant and complex discourse in an accessible and dynamic way. His proposed sub-division of universal 'childhood', based on stages of social and mental development, is worthy of further discussion since it presumes these stages are empirical and unassailable (pp. 17–19). Attempting to collapse the boundaries of 'child' is commendable, but we should avoid dissecting the non-adult beyond any useful recognition.

While burial evidence dominates, it treads familiar ground. Crawford's analysis of Anglo-Saxon burials, Murphy's investigation of Irish *cillini* burials, and Lewis' bioarchaeological approach to infant abuse, all present familiar summaries of their respective studies on these topics to date. Page's work on early medieval Wales and McClaren's study on the Bronze Age of south-east England make brave, if theoretically limited, contributions by discussing non-adult mortuary variability from admittedly evidence-poor areas. Becker's otherwise straightforward appraisal of non-adult burial in Roman Tarquinia would have benefited from a more nuanced, period-specific engagement with lifecycles. Although Kellström et al.'s interpretations may be veiled by translation, their argument-by-assertion approach is frustrating. Many may find contention with their retrospective application of folkloric and oral traditions to a handful of un-dateable teeth, which incidentally were recovered from a Swedish late medieval building which had been subsequently used as a rubbish dump for several centuries.

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Nevertheless, several entries set this volume apart from more familiar studies of non-adult archaeology. Arden and Smith Bradley present sophisticated, truly interdisciplinary studies by addressing pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Harnessing contemporary texts and non-mortuary material culture, they avoid focussing purely on death rites. Arden identifies the power and agency of non-adults as divine child-kings, potent human sacrifices and much-needed labourers. Smith Bradley presents a rare and extremely welcome foray into perceptions of adolescence. Her emphasis on adolescent attitudes towards physical violence, duty and ideology in times of war at Sand Canyon Pueblo presents a fresh, exciting trajectory in non-adult studies. Likewise, Karl and Löcker's contextualization of infants on boundaries takes us beyond mere 'liminality' in Iron Age Austria. Harris' stimulating phenomenological approach to a non-adult's evolving, didactic engagement with Neolithic Windmill Hill, in Wiltshire, emphasizes positive childhood experiences such as conviviality, making a pleasant contrast with myriad suggestions of infanticide and child sacrifice. Contributions such as these present invaluable and inventive directions for future research in this often-overlooked area of archaeology.

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