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ARTICLE

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD: SHORT VERSION OF A FACTUAL STORY WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH

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### ABSTRACT

A presentation of ideas, concepts, and events that inspired, influenced, and guided the author's motivation in the search for approaches to discover and work with the material evidence of ancient children. As a social group of people in the human past almost invisible in archaeological discourse of the present, mainstream archaeology should take more notice of the vigorous specialization that has evolved over more than 40 years. The archaeological perspective of children and childhood should form the regular part of an ever expanding meticulously archaeology of research practice on the macro/micro levels.

**Keywords:** Gender and Identity; Marginality; Objectification.

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## A ARQUEOLOGIA DA INFÂNCIA: BREVE VERSÃO DE UMA HISTÓRIA FACTUAL COM UM TOQUE PESSOAL

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### RESUMO

Uma apresentação de ideias, conceitos e eventos que inspiraram, influenciaram e orientaram a motivação da autora na busca de abordagens para descobrir e trabalhar com as evidências materiais de crianças antigas. Como um grupo social de pessoas no passado humano quase invisível no discurso arqueológico do presente, a arqueologia tradicional deve tomar mais conhecimento da vigorosa especialização que evoluiu ao longo de mais de 40 anos. A perspectiva arqueológica das crianças e da infância deveria constituir a parte regular de uma arqueologia meticulosamente em constante expansão da prática de pesquisa nos níveis macro/micro.

**Palavras-chave:** Gênero e Identidade; Marginalidade; Objetificação.

## LA ARQUEOLOGÍA DE LA INFANCIA: BREVE VERSIÓN DE UNA HISTORIA FÁCTICA CON UN TOQUE PERSONAL

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### RESUMEN

Una presentación de ideas, conceptos y eventos que inspiraron, influenciaron y guiaron la motivación de la autora en la búsqueda de enfoques para descubrir y trabajar con la evidencia material de niños antiguos. Como grupo social de personas en el pasado humano casi invisible en el discurso arqueológico del presente, la arqueología tradicional debería prestar más atención a la vigorosa especialización que ha evolucionado durante más de 40 años. La perspectiva arqueológica de los niños y la infancia debe formar parte de una arqueología meticulosamente en constante expansión de la práctica de investigación en los niveles macro/micro.

**Palabras clave:** Género e Identidad; Marginalidad; Objetificación.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the archaeology of childhood is an ongoing process of thrilling detection. Since the early beginning of 1970s, various types of childhood memoires have tickled the archaeological academy. Articles, essays, papers, theses, and dissertations about children and childhood in the past have followed in the wake resulting in a stage of development that promise further new advancements in the future (THOMPSON *et al.*, 2014; COŞKUNSKU, 2015; CUNNAR & HÖGBERG, 2015; MAYS *et al.*, 2017; MURPHY & LE ROY, 2017; CRAWFORD *et al.* 2018; BEAUCHESNE & AGARWAL, 2018; LILLEHAMMER, 2015a). Altogether, these endeavors have established a creative space of study situated interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary between the arts and sciences. The birth and development of the archaeology of childhood are accomplishments to promote proudly in mainstream archaeology and beyond (CRAWFORD *et al.*, 2018).

This journal introduced the readers to the subject of childhood archaeology in 2017 (NEUBAUER & SCHAEFER, 2017) and has invited me to write an overview/history of the archaeology of childhood on basis of my previous publications. However, for fear of repetitions, I have decided to take a swing of a personal kind. History is a method for discovering the past and in this relationship, it is through the lens of childhood that we can make new discoveries about both children and adults in the past. History is however also personal in itself (BAXTER *et al.*, 2017). From where I sit, I intend to present – not mainly in the usual chronological style – some of the stepping-stones that guided me on the way – a personal narrative. During the years having been part of the unfolding story, first tentatively and then directly using every opportunity to reflect and look forward to new achievements, this has been an exciting venture of joint forces. To mention everyone's contributions are impossible here but certainly, everyone learned something on the way. At least I recognize how much my fellow travelers have been inspirational in driving me on (LILLEHAMMER, 2000, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2010a, 2010b, 2015a, 2015b, 2012, 2018), also so on this occasion. Now revisiting the paths of travelling the childhood road to the past, I will pick up and highlight some treads that bound this story together.

## WERE THEY ALL MEN?

In the American movie “Hope floats” (1998) the heroin, Birdie Calvert says at the end:

Childhood is a period you use the rest of your life to overcome.

Is this perspective upon the human life course why today we find it easy to explain the marginal position of the subject in archaeology – as a sideshow that lingers in the forgetfulness of a childhood in the present, or be it the opposite? We find it hard to accept why the subject does not form the heart of archaeological research and enterprise. As the waves of sociological critique on biased research started to roll in the US from the beginning of the 1970s (ROSALDO & LAMPHERE, 1974) it landed also in Scandinavia – Were the all men? This essential question raised at a research seminar conducted by the society of Norwegian Archaeology Association (NAA) in 1979 focused on the examination of sex roles in prehistoric society. However, it took nearly eight years of counteracted struggle to publish the content (BERTELSEN *et al.*, 1987), as noted by LILLEHAMMER (1999: 23-24):

If only demography had been the topic (MANDT, 1995:12, *my translation*).

The sex and gender issues were hot and avant-garde as well as controversial including political topics. The approach was difficult to introduce due to opposition and resistance in the archaeological community. Among the content in the book was a chapter on the small-scale archaeology of children inspired by UN's International Year of the Child in 1979 (LILLEHAMMER, 1987). A mass media issue in the Western world at the time, the celebration came to play a turning point in setting children's life conditions on the global agenda as not only a separate cause, but becoming a part of every cause (SHAM POO, 2010:146). Then why shouldn't children also become a part of every case in archaeology? Therefore, in the discussions of feminist critique to give voice to the perspectives of underrepresented groups in the past, Neubauer and Schaefer have brought forward a significant point about the purpose of children:

Considering children as social and cultural actors allows us to understand that they are capable of making important decisions, to effectively contribute to their families, communities and societies, and were contributors in the creation of the archaeological record (NEUBAUER & SCHAEFER, 2017:148).

Accordingly, there is more to the history of the archaeology of childhood than the influences of ideas or occasional celebrations to appear on the archaeological scene. While cracking biological, cultural and social codes about becoming human, from the very start both men and women as students and researchers paved the way. They made innovative experimentations in search for archaeological evidence of children among the main categories of materials in museum collections, settlements and funerary remains, discards and garbage dumps, and stray finds. They followed their own curiosity to experience success or failure in the work to locate and analyze direct or indirect evidence of children (BONNICHSEN, 1973; GRÄSLUND, 1973; HAMMOND & HAMMOND, 1981; KNUTSSON, 1986; WEBER, 1982).

Today, and after more than 40 years of working with the academic issue, we see the outcome of responses to the initial calls for the recognition of archaeological children. We have managed to cross over a variety of historical records with the aim to eliminate children's invisibility in archaeology. However, in this story there is also more than the findings of proofs for the self-evident fact of children's existence in the past. We have acknowledged that the data and evidence situate in various places and spaces on macro/micro levels in the investigation of childhood characteristics of both children and adult. Detection of reliable evidence go on around the world in the extraction of data from the collected remains of organic and inorganic materials in museum storages; in the diversity of cultural heritage unearthed during archaeological fieldwork in landscapes and settlements, or in the build environments where people once lived. Descriptive documentation distributed in written accounts, narrations, records, annals, chronicles, and sagas verify or disprove the archaeological material evidence of ancient children and childhood. Play, song, dance, and spoken words passed down as cultural transference through the generations supplement the material relics with an immaterial cultural heritage of childhood. However, in approaching the amalgamated data and evidence we may have to balance on a tightrope line in the present – between promoting trendy or strictly scientific versions of facts about the past.

## TURNING POINTS AND EFFECTS

The earliest presentations of ancient children in archaeology represent modest forerunners of isolated bravery. UN's focus on the condition of the worlds of children was an impetus within the feminist critique to link children's development together with gender and identity issues. Several stimulating ideas of historical, sociological, and

biological significance came together inspired by gender and feminist discourse outside and inside archaeology and anthropology. At the time – and still is – the response of the isolated initiatives was dependent on willingness of the academic establishment to listen, accept, and publish reports from the initial trials and efforts.

In 1985, and in my part of the world, the society K.A.N – Kvinner I Arkeologi I Norge (1985-2005) (Women in Archaeology in Norway) – was established. In the currency of its second issue the K.A.N journal chose to publish a trial lecture on children in Nordic prehistory given by the examination committee at the University of Bergen addressing source material and methods suitable for doing children research (DOMMMASNES, 2008: xiv-xv). The revised and extended version of the examination lecture – *A child is born. Child's world in an archaeological perspective* – published by NAA in its journal Norwegian Archaeological Review in 1989 brought the issue of archaeological children from the local to international scene in the academy (LILLEHAMMER, 1989). In retrospect, the decision of the editors to publish was good timing in acting upon intuition, the feeling for an international movement of emancipation and liberation going on in society. Interests in the small-scaled subject was however not an unique endeavor on the northern margins of the world but a pioneering enterprise of highly motivated researchers running the forefronts of an expanding archaeology on either side of the Atlantic Ocean (cf. CRAWFORD, 1991; SCOTT, 1992; SOFAER, 1996, 2000; BAKER, 1997; WELINDER, 1998; KAMP, 2001; ALT & KEMKES-GROTTENTHALER, 2002; BAXTER, 2005).

In order to advance further we realized that the archaeological perspectives of children and childhood had to find a way out of the cradled framework of gender research to form a separate center of network on its own. An important steppingstone was the international Kent conference in 2005 (LALLY & MOORE, 2011). Coming face-to-face with and listening to other researcher's curiosity and interest in the topic was a brainstorming event. Projects, seminars, and workshops to move the topic out of its isolated position resulted in the establishment of an interdisciplinary international forum – Society for the study of Childhood in the Past (SSCIP) in 2007 (CRAWFORD, 2017). From 2008, SSCIP's journal *Childhood in the Past* started to run. In the years to come, gradually the archaeology of childhood went global advocating different themes both within and outside the SSCIP fora on different continents around the world. The SSCIP society established a web site for information <https://sscip.wordpress.com/> with a news blog, and a Twitter (@SscipChildhood) and Facebook account. Altogether, the commitments resulted in a breakthrough for the survival of a new field of specialization in archaeology. A diversity of crossover questions about both children and adults and their childhoods gave rise to collaborative initiatives of interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multi-periodic approaches in the archaeology of childhood. Knowledge and understanding about the variety of complex interrelationships between children and childhood perspectives made great leaps ahead (THOMPSON *et al.*, 2014; COŞKUNSKU, 2015; CUNNAR & HÖGBERG, 2015; MAYS *et al.*, 2017; MURPHY & LE ROY, 2017; CRAWFORD *et al.*, 2018; BEAUCHESNE & AGARWAL, 2018; LILLEHAMMER, 2015a).

The ten years running of the journal *Childhood in the Past* demonstrates the full status of the effect and outcome of the academic work (MURPHY, 2017: 3-5, Figs. 2-7): Following the quantitative distribution from the highest to the lowest representation of articles in the journal, the contributors represent fourteen countries around the world. Their disciplinary backgrounds are in archaeology, history, classics, education, and anthropology. The different forms of data and evidence used to gain insights into past children and childhood are from burials, material culture, written sources, skeletal

remains, images, living people, buildings and settlements. The main themes in the research and review articles address social identity, life course, religion and ritual, play, impact of war, theoretical considerations, infant feeding, learning, migration, health, memory and taphonomy. The geographical focus of the research and review papers represent Britain, USA, Greece, Norway, Ireland, Sweden, Argentina, Australia, Finland, Italy, and Spain. The chronological span of the contents are from Early Modern, Modern and Early Medieval to Roman, Bronze Age, Later Medieval and Mesolithic & Neolithic periods (MURPHY, 2017: 3-5, Figs. 2-7).

### CHILDREN, CHILDHOOD, OR WHAT?

In 1997, the genealogist and historian, John Baker, presented the cross-disciplinary research of his African ancestors (BAKER, 1997). According to the media presentation, his study was a collaboration with archaeologists conducting a dig at Wessyngton plantation, the home and workplace of his ancestors and the primary subjects of his research since 1976. He made interviews with children and grandchildren of slaves of Wessyngton and described what he learned about their identities and lives through the study of genealogy and history during the work with the archaeologists. In part, these were thoughts on what directions archaeologists should take in working with the people who need their help in answering important questions.

Crossover and transcultural approaches have potentials to gain knowledge about individuals and social groups within and across the generations (LILLEHAMMER & MURPHY, 2018). When seen from the position of classic archaeology the early calls for archaeology to take part in the advancement of the study of childhood came mainly from prehistorians who had to rely entirely on material culture (BEAUMONT, 2012:9). While the contributions mainly have been empirical studies and analyses of various types of materials and sources, presumably this is why fewer of the output falls within the area of theoretical considerations. The recognition of limitations in thinking ancient children and grandchildren are that they are mute. Their agencies go unnoticed and overlooked in the pathways to the archaeological record (CRAWFORD, 2011: 629, Fig. 32.1). They cannot speak up for themselves!

A discussion at the Kent conference in 2005 (LALLY & MOORE, 2011) was a wake-up call to the question of epistemological contingency (SOFAER, 2000: 7-8). Would the application of common or parallel epistemologies prove fruitful in a holistic approach to the past? Would the historical study of vernacular versus literate languages be relevant? Would this prove helpful in the approaches to understand and explain ancient children in their own native environment? Would it break down the purely western perspectives of the archaeology of childhood?

Using different approaches to define, model, and structure the spatiality of social identities – ‘child/children’ and ‘child world/children’s worlds’ outside, within, between, and beyond ‘adult/adults’ and ‘adult world/ adults worlds’ – I experimented with the concepts in English, Norwegian, and Old Norse to understand better the historical, cultural, and biological background, nature and complexion of ‘child’ versus ‘childhood’. The exercises centered upon the concepts to contest the strong impact of adult discourse in mainstream archaeology and the traditional objectification of children in society. In this, I kept company with the words of the anthropologist Fredric Barth that children are the product of the adult world (BARTH, 1976:43), but I wanted to move also further from words to agency. The philosopher Judith Butler (1988) inspired the work by saying:

Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed (BUTLER, 1988:527).

If we were to perceive ancient children as gendered with attributes, according to Butler these attributes are not expressive but performative, then also these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal (BUTLER, 1988: 528). At a closer examination of the definition of 'performative' in the Oxford Dictionary (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>) of acts not so much to say something as do something, the archaeological "child the doer" materialized as someone performative in becoming a social agent with gender qualifications, faculties and functions. In tandem with the development of bio-archaeology and historical archaeology, 'memory' as both physical and mental capacity of human development, growth and decline triggered a deeper understanding of historic perceptions of the human life course. What represents the prime of life may seem culturally to be the ultimate fulfillment of human survival, in which childhood is a stage and a state that binds together or split the upgrading or downgrading of generations of children in the past.

## OBJECTIFICATION OF CHILDREN

In the spring of 2018, the news of an archaeological oddity from the past went viral about a ceremonial child sacrifice site, Las Llamas, discovered in Peru. Probably the outcome of a ravaging natural disaster of flooding on the coast over 500 years ago, the archaeologist put forward the following proposal :

They were possibly offering the gods the most important thing they had as a society, and the most important thing is children because they represent the future (Gabriel Prieto, *The Guardian Weekly* 04.05.18, p. 25).

On one hand, the nature of the media and press release thrived on the mediation of a dramatic event in the spectacular find from the South-American past to catch the eye of the public – the sacrifice of children. However repugnant it may seem in the present, on the other hand the press managed to communicate a contradictive perception about the past – the powerful value of sacrificed children in ancient societies (LILLEHAMMER, 2008, 2011; ARDREN, 2011). The world round up clipping was a reminder of the mummy children from the Incas ceremonial traditions on the snow-capped Andean peaks in Peru, Chile and Argentina, and the belief of mummified corpses to be the intermediaries between the human world and the world of deities (CERUTI, 2010). The role of children was a central expression of state level ideology based on a belief that children are in a privileged position in their association with the dead and deities (SILLAR, 1996:58-59).

The initial reports of children and childhood in the 1970s and 1980s make up a striking difference in contrast to the present media hype of a spectacular archaeology of childhood in focus of the public eye. In large the media hype touched upon a longstanding historic controversy on European medieval and early modern history (ARIÉS, 1962) and the long-term psycho-evolutionary model in the development of child-rearing (DEMAUSE, 1974). Were adults indifferent (Ariés) or abusive (deMause) to children in the past and/or did they love their children (GILCHRIST, 2012:145)? There are not one but many answers to these questions. The views accentuate contradictive perceptions and attitudes of the vulnerability or invincibility of children, a demographic group playing a fundamental part in the continuous bio-human process of reproduction for survival in the past.

The way society behaves towards children is the essence of its humanity. The upgrading and downgrading of someone/body to the status of a mere object is however where we may find the greatest challenges in the theory and practice of archaeology. In 1998, the Swedish archaeologist Stig Welinder published an article on the cultural

construction of childhood in Scandinavia 3500BC-1350AD (WELINDER, 1998). His study of childhood was on the long-term scale on basis of funerary remains and revealed variations in the representation of children in afterlife as dead and buried human beings. He acknowledged however the limitations and shortcomings of the results and yearned for the living prehistoric children to materialize in the use of concepts, methods, and data in the future. Eventually at the end, he concluded that childhood was a cultural construct, and today we acknowledge that the childhood construct is also a process developing in conjunction with narratives in the wider society (CRAWFORD *et al.*, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Theory and practice go hand in hand in the archaeology of childhood. It is easy to advocate that new spectacular discoveries about children and childhood in the past will lead mainstream archaeology to take notice of this vigorous specialization. It is the time to set the critical focus on the state of affairs (LILLEHAMMER, *in prep.*) and to what extent the children and childhood perspective should form the regular part of an ever expanding meticulously archaeology of research practice on the macro/micro levels. The advancement of the archaeology of childhood relies on the unexpected discovery to happen during archaeological fieldwork and research. The critical focus has been set on the practice of discarding indistinct and undecided features for archaeological recovery, analysis, and research. That is why we have joined collaborative force and effort on several scales and levels and worked for the integration of childhood archaeology into mainstream archaeology. In the future, we should use every opportunity to develop relevant archaeological survey, excavation, and research methods to observe, salvage, process, analyze, and report recovered data and evidence. We should continue with carrying out regional/over-regional regional studies to analyze new discoveries and differences in the evidence or approaches of scholars from different countries. Not at least, we should teach courses in the archaeology of childhood on BA/MA university levels and promote the representation of archaeological sites of childhood on the World Heritage List.

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