

***The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Childhood***  
***By Sally Crawford, Dawn M. Hadley and Gillian Shepherd***

2018. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hbk. 784 pp. 150 B/w illus.

ISBN: 978-0-19-967069-7

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Archaeology was somewhat late to consider childhood; the ‘birth’ of the discipline is often cited as Grete Lillehammer’s 1989 article ‘A Child is Born’. Nevertheless, emerging in the wake of archaeologies of gender and as part of the drive to understand past societies through more than the adult male lens, childhood has increasingly become an important strand of archaeological research. Indeed, looking back, it is difficult to understand how we ever ignored children and their lives, given that they likely formed at least half of most past populations (Chamberlain 1997: 250, 2000; Grimm 2000: 53). However, despite its growing prevalence, childhood archaeology has traditionally still been considered a niche field, whose methodologies are argued to have little impact on wider archaeological thought (Lillehammer 2010: 16; Cunnar and Högberg 2015: 76). As we reach 30 years since the child was ‘born’, therefore, it is timely that childhood archaeology finally boasts a dedicated Oxford Handbook, a volume which firmly proves how the discipline has matured.

A quick glance at the contents reveals how widespread childhood studies have become. One enduring criticism of studies of childhood has been

its focus on Western Europe (Fass 2008; Stearns 2008). The history and archaeology of childhood was largely pioneered by those working on Classical Greece and Rome, and prehistoric and Medieval Europe, and subsequent research has tended to preserve this geographical bias. The Handbook, however, contains Chapters on childhoods as far apart as Harappan (Supriya Varma), Inuit (Robert Park) and Egyptian (Nicola Harrington), with a time-span from prehistory to the nineteenth century (Chapters by Rebecca Yamin, Craig Cessford and Ceridwen Boston) and even present day (B. Sunday Eiselt). However, regions such as Mesopotamia and East Asia are conspicuously absent—perhaps a symptom more of lack of research than oversight on the part of the editors.

Following the editors' summary of the Handbook's scope and contents, Grete Lillehammer introduces and summarises the development of childhood archaeology alongside key literature—an easily-digestible synopsis for those new to the subject matter. The research proper is then split into seven thematic sections over 35 chapters: *Defining Children and Childhood*; *Children, Families and Households*; *Learning, Socialization and Training*; *Self, Identity and Community*; *Health, Disease and Environment*; *Death, Memory and Meaning*; and, intriguingly, *Seeing, Presenting and Interpreting the Archaeology of Childhood*. These sections are well considered, with an effort made to cover a geographical and temporal range of scholarship within each (the decision-making process behind the structure is outlined on pages 10–11), and allow the reader to easily dip into a particular topic. A handbook such as this always has to find a difficult balance between introductory primer and comprehensive, in-depth overview of the field, especially as the papers inevitably present snapshots of research with a particular specific focus. However, it is a testament to all the authors that the papers are written in such a way that their approaches to evidence can readily be adopted and utilised by those working in other areas.

Given the large number of chapters, an individual review of each is not possible, yet some warrant specific mention. Jo Buckberry's paper (Chapter Three), outlining techniques for identifying age and sex from skeletal remains and the reliability of each, is a fantastic introduction to the topic, and—crucially—written in an easily understandable manner for

non-specialists. Supriya Varma's paper (Chapter 10), discussing evidence for children's play activities at Harappan sites, is a useful reminder of the problems with having to rely solely on older excavation reports when analysing material. However, Varma sometimes agrees too readily with the twentieth century interpretations regarding miniature items and figurines, and the division between those for 'ritual' and 'play'. More problematisation and discussion of possible other uses, or even potential multivocality, would have been welcomed. Vicky Crewe (Chapter 16) manages to consider nineteenth century evidence for children's introduction to labour at six sites across three distinctly different geographical arenas, Britain, North America and Australia. Nicola Harrington's paper (Chapter 29), on artistic depictions of Egyptian children, represents one of the first contributions on pre-Classical Egypt to a wider volume on childhood, as well as a succinct reflection on an artistic record that reflects an overwhelmingly elite experience. Finally, Sally Crawford and Katharina Ulmschneider's paper (Chapter 34) explores a type of evidence many archaeologists do not have at their disposal-photographs of sites in which children feature (often unintentionally), and how these reflect the photographer's own priorities. As well as fitting into a growing body of literature 'deconstructing' nineteenth and twentieth century photography, this essay provides a very visual demonstration of the sorts of cultural biases which influenced twentieth century archaeological thinking about childhood, that one otherwise primarily encounters through the written word, and interpretation of archaeological material within excavation reports.

The final section deserves a further specific comment, as it is unexpected, but to me perhaps the most interesting. Two papers by Claudia Lambrugo and Sharon Brookshaw (Chapters 35 and 37) consider how children are presented in and even catered for within museum contexts, and one by Mark Hall (Chapter 36) contrasts how medieval childhood is displayed within both cinema and museums. These closing papers act as a reminder that academic scholarship is only one small aspect of archaeological endeavour, and that outreach through exhibitions and mass-media are equally critical in helping to inform public understanding of the past. They also force one to remember that we cannot try so hard to better understand

children in the past without considering how we engage with those in the present.

If I have one criticism of the Handbook, it is a minor one. It has been stated that bioarchaeological and social (archaeological) studies of childhood are often distant, with more work needed to marry the two (Halcrow and Tayles 2008). Rebecca Redfern's paper on infant feeding (Chapter 24) performs this particularly well, considering stable isotope evidence alongside pottery and written records, as does Ceridwen Boston's discussion (Chapter 15) of evidence for the lives of 'ship's boys' in the British Navy. That said, much of the bioarchaeological research is still contained to a discrete section (*Health, Disease and Environment*). It is interesting that Dawn Hadley's chapter (22) on children and migration falls within the *Section Identity, Self and Community*, yet Katie Hemer and Jane Evans' paper on the same topic, but explored through stable isotopes (Chapter 27), does not. This is by no means a criticism of the research, but I would have personally preferred to see more bioarchaeological studies placed within the other thematic sections.

Overall, the Handbook is a long-awaited compendium that lives up to expectations. The scholarship is first rate and production values outstanding, although some images (especially those of osteological conditions, as Figures 15.2-4) might have benefited from being in colour. Even in a volume this size, in a random sample of 10 pages I found no typos or other errors. In short, this volume is a must for anyone involved with or simply interested in childhood archaeology, and will remain a core text for years to come.

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