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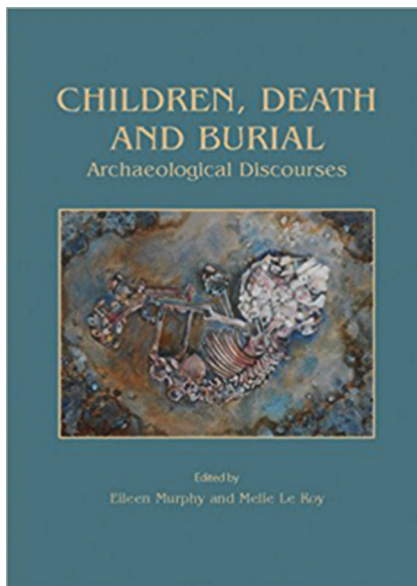
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Book Reviews

Children, Death and Burial: Archaeological Discourses.

(Archaeology of Childhood), 1st Edition
Eileen Murphy, Melie Le Roy (Eds.)
Oxbow Books 2017, ISBN 1785707159,
9781785707155, 240 pages (hardcover).



Osteoarchaeology of children has developed over the past several years as a relatively new subdiscipline within archaeology. The study of childhood in the past has been considered as a part of the archaeology of gender that was formed by feminists in 1980's (Baxter 2005). Children structure adult lives, influence their options, their global view of the world, and any interpretation of the past that overlooks children is incomplete. Children are not only people who learn to be adults, but they form their own culture within the majority of adult societies.

Children, Death and Burial: Archaeological Discourses is a collection of 15 contributions regarding child burial practice from the Neolithic to the early modern period of Europe and Africa (Sudan). A total of 24 authors from several European countries contributed to the book. The publication is based on a day-long session titled:

“Archaeological Approaches to the Burial of Children”, which took place at the EAA (European Association of Archaeologists) in Glasgow in 2015. The book was published in 2017 by Oxbow Books and edited by Eileen Murphy (Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast) and Mélie Le Roy (Archaeologist at Montpellier University).

The volume is structured chronologically according to major archaeological periods. The first three contributions provide an overview of the Neolithic in France (by Mélie Le Roy), in Anatolia (by Belinda Tibbetts), and in Sudan (by Emma Maines *et al.*). Further seven contributions present investigations of the Eneolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age in Romania (by Catalin Lazar *et al.*), Anatolia (by Jayne-Leigh Thomas), Bulgaria (Kathleen McSweeney and Krum Bacvarov), Greece (by Katerina Kostanti *et al.*), Russia (by Natalia Berseneva), Crete (by Nathalie Calliauw), and again from Romania (by Valeriu Sirbu and Diana-Crina Dăvîncă). The last five papers present studies from Medieval and early modern period. These are studies from Britain (by Christine Cave and Mark Oxenham), Denmark (by Jane Jark Jensen), Britain (by Heidi Dawson-Hobbs), and two from Ireland (by Eileen Murphy and Jonny Geber).

There are two papers that impressed me the most. The first one is written by Kathleen McSweeney and Krum Bacvarov and entitled: “Processed Babies: Early Bronze Age Infant Burials from Bulgarian Thrace” (p. 91, chap. 7), and the second one by Jonny Geber, entitled: “Interring the “Deserving” Child: The Archaeology of the Deaths and Burials of Children at the Kilkenny Workhouse during the Great Famine in Ireland, 1845–1852” (p. 241, chap. 16). Kathleen McSweeney and Krum Bacvarov deal with funeral practice of newborns in Bulgarian Thrace. In their study, they describe a new practice that has not been identified until recently. Based on neonatal bone disarticulation and the presence of cut marks on bones they suggest

that babies were processed prior to final deposition. If the authors are right in their statements then it is really a very fascinating finding; however, extreme caution must be paid to this interpretation. In cases of jar inhumations, the disarticulation of bones is very common, suggesting that the jars collapsed after long enough time: when the body had totally decomposed and soil had allowed the joints to come apart (Hillson 2009). Likewise, cut marks on bones can never be absolutely confirmed without proper investigation using scanning electron microscope: all such findings thus need to be interpreted with attention. The other author, Jonny Geber, presents his research on the Great Irish Famine and its impact on children living in union workhouses. He brings new insight on the phenomenon of union workhouses in Ireland, a subject less known in Central Europe. J. Geber describes the intramural burial ground in Kilkenny Union Workhouse from the Famine-period. This case study points out two basic social behaviours during the Famine. Firstly, despite the deep famine crisis, bodies were treated with respect and care. Secondly, high proportion of the children's remains reveal the reality of incomplete and destroyed families in workhouses. Once inside a workhouse, families were split up, with each family member going to his/her own section. When children died, nobody cared where they would be buried since their parents were also dying from starvation, typhus and other famine-related diseases. J. Geber cites an emotional story that was recorded as Famine folklore in northwestern Ireland. The story reveals the trauma of losing a child in the workhouse, later buried in the workhouse burial ground away from the local graveyard, and lost to local memory.

Children, Death and Burial: Archaeological Discourses is a collection of valuable contributions put together by researchers from all over Europe. The enthusiasm of the authors for their topics is obvious throughout the proceedings. More careful proofreading of the map on page 5 could have eliminated some confusion caused by

mistaking Czech Republic and Slovakia for Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, the credibility of this book does not suffer from this one oversight.

Anna Pankowska

References

- BAXTER, J.E. 2005: *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture (Gender and Archaeology)*. Walnut Creek, CA, USA: AltaMira Press.
- HILLSON, S. 2009: The World's Largest Infant Cemetery and Its Potential for Studying Growth and Development. *Hesperia Supplements*, 43, 137–154.