

ROBIN DERRICOURT, *Unearthing Childhood: Young Lives in Prehistory*. Manchester University Press, Manchester 2018, xxvi+276 pages, 52 b/w illustrations, paperback, ISBN 978-1-5261-2808-9.

Robin Derricourt's 'Unearthing Childhood. Young Lives in Prehistory', published by Manchester University Press in 2018, sums up the present state of research into childhood in prehistory and offers ideas for further research on intriguing topics. The title indicates the author's intention to inform and educate his readers, but also to encourage them in their own research. This book is a good starting point for professionals and interested amateurs who wish to explore open issues relating to childhood in the past. It was clearly designed with this purpose in mind.

The book's eleven chapters provide a good overview of the research methodology applied to the study of childhood in prehistoric times. The particular research topics are well described by keywords that double as chapter headings. This concept allows for easier reading and for later use as a handbook on specific subjects. The references at the end of each chapter are another helpful tool for further reading.

The author starts by presenting the objectives and scope, comparisons and analogies, book structure and terminology. This introduction is followed by a chapter on the history of the study of childhood, entitled 'Understanding. The deep past of childhood'.<sup>1</sup> All the other chapters, with self-explanatory titles, deal with biological and social processes during childhood.

'Being. Birth, motherhood and infancy'<sup>2</sup> presents the subjects of birth and motherhood through their biological and evolutionary development from primates to hominids. It shows the complex physical, biological, emotional, and social entanglement of childbirth, which required a survival strategy for the child's first few years. 'Growing. The child in the family'<sup>3</sup> considers the traces of visual representations of the prehistoric family. These rare traces are examined from the aspect of children's role in the creation of such images. Another crucial evolutionary issue is care of the infant in the family. The modern ethno-anthropological data on contemporary small societies of foragers and farmers in Paraguay, Siberia, and Australia are compared in order to identify the mobility of mothers with infants and their contribution to society through everyday activities while taking care of the child. The author uses these examples to

underline the limitations of today's archaeological view of these activities in prehistoric societies. However, he points out the possibilities opened up by archaeological data on children's diet, clothes, skills, play, and conflicts, followed up in the next chapters.

Diet and health, as major elements of growing up, are covered in chapter 4, 'Feeding. Weaning, eating and health',<sup>4</sup> which presents the subjects vital for survival in childhood through a diachronic evolutionary overview with examples of archaeological traces in agricultural societies. This subject has great potential, especially for the interdisciplinary study of anthropological remains of mothers with children, combined with analyses of stable isotopes. The author includes a very detailed bibliographic list, outlining the potential of such research with examples.

Chapter 5, entitled 'Wearing. Clothing, adornment and body shaping',<sup>5</sup> deals with a fascinating subject, which is deeply rooted in archaeological data, primarily from graves. The author calls for caution when interpreting the data from child graves, since they are related not only to everyday life, but also to the idea of death.

'Learning. Knowledge and skills'<sup>6</sup> examines the process of learning and teaching, which is crucial for the transmission of civilisation. The acquisition of knowledge and skills by prehistoric children is a very promising subject for further archaeological research. Regardless of the contexts of space, time and culture, childhood is the experience of watching the surrounding world. Children constantly create meaning through the materials they come across,<sup>7</sup> while interactions with surrounding objects promote the development of the child and his or her skills. In fact, this is the story of the evolutionary development of humanity. The active and problem-solving exploration of the surroundings contributes to the development of children as they face their natural, social and cultural environment.<sup>8</sup> The world of children is seen as an adoptive or creative process of learning and copying the world related to the biological and cultural development, with cultural transfer and innovations in the production and

1 p. 1–32.

2 p. 33–54.

3 p. 55–74.

4 p. 75–96.

5 p. 97–122.

6 p. 123–155.

7 SOFAER DEREVENSKI 1997, 194. – SOFAER DEREVENSKI 2000, 10.

8 BUCZYNSKI et al. 2019, 17–18.

reproduction of material culture.<sup>9</sup> The prehistoric world offers lots of data for exploring this interesting topic.

The chapter entitled 'Playing. Fun, games, toys and culture'<sup>10</sup> presents play as the central activity of children, which was important for satisfaction and social adaptation, and crucial for gaining skills.<sup>11</sup> Again, after listing examples from prehistoric and modern forager and farming societies, the author focuses on the archaeological material traces of toys and small objects, emphasising all the pitfalls in their interpretation. This chapter includes the fascinating subject of human figures and toys, which has been little researched from the perspective of prehistoric societies. It is important to interpret the contexts of finds in a methodical and open-minded way in order to shed light on this most important activity in childhood.

The process of growing up includes fighting, presented in the chapter entitled 'Fighting. Conflict and violence'.<sup>12</sup> Once again, the author supports the subject with traces of children from the earliest societies such as burials, toys and miniature weapons. One of the subheadings deals with child sacrifices, which often baffle interpreters of prehistoric societies. Since violence frequently resulted in death, the following two chapters deal with the subject of death in childhood as a primary source for the study of childhood, by means of the anthropological and archaeological remains from children's graves.

These two chapters ('Dying 1' and 'Dying 2') follow a chronological order: the first examines 'Death and burial in forager societies'<sup>13</sup> and the second deals with 'Death and burial in Old World farming societies'.<sup>14</sup> In the first chapter, the author deals with the death of children in Palaeolithic societies and in modern forager societies. By comparing archaeological and anthropological examples, and showing processes in contemporary societies, he tries to depict the final biological event of life (as opposed to birth, covered at the beginning of the book) and shows how communities dealt with death. The author takes care to emphasise the inestimable value of the archaeological context as a vital source of data for current research, with the potential to incorporate genetic links, diet, health, and demographic information into the cultural interpretations. The second chapter on dying is a chronological presentation of Neolithic, Eneolithic, and Bronze Age burials in Europe and the

Middle East, as well as also those of Iron Age Europe and African farmers.

In the final chapter, 'Progressing. The future of childhood's deep past',<sup>15</sup> the author exhorts the reader to research childhood by tackling the challenging issues that have been presented to the professional public in other works. He also provides an overview of promising research avenues applied to particular research issues, which, by necessity, apply interdisciplinary methods to the study of childhood. Researchers are faced with many challenges in their work.<sup>16</sup> The numerous examples provided in the book motivate the interested reader to explore further issues of past childhood, as the most intense and sensitive period of human life,<sup>17</sup> involving the greatest number of changes.<sup>18</sup>

Derricourt's book presents specific childhood-related subjects in distinctive chapters that can be read singly or in a sequence. The author pays particular attention to perspectives within specific issues, such as researching diet in prehistoric childhood in the light of the development of analytics in the natural sciences and interdisciplinary research and the possibility of their application in the study of childhood in prehistory. He weaves a fine network of data by using archaeological, anthropological, and ethnographic studies to depict particular processes within childhood, with the emphasis on archaeology as the primary discipline for the research of material remains through which children's traces can be interpreted.<sup>19</sup>

This book is intended for all those interested in the subject of childhood. Readers profit from it on several levels: by learning the basics of childhood in prehistory, with a comprehensive bibliography on each subject; by being inspired to research a particular topic in more detail; or by understanding the wider temporal and spatial framework of childhood in prehistory.

Derricourt has written a book that merits a place of honour in the growing number of works on childhood, an important subject that is still largely neglected in archaeology.<sup>20</sup> The author helps to fill that void, all the while nudging the readers to make use of the research questions, methods, and bibliography provided, in order to embark on their own research of childhood in prehistory.

Translation: Marko Maras

<sup>9</sup> LILLEHAMMER 2000, 20.

<sup>10</sup> p. 156–175.

<sup>11</sup> p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> p. 176–197.

<sup>13</sup> p. 198–232.

<sup>14</sup> p. 233–261.

<sup>15</sup> p. 262–267.

<sup>16</sup> BAXTER et al. 2017, 67.

<sup>17</sup> LEWIS 2007, 19.

<sup>18</sup> SOFAER DEREVENSKI 1994, 19.

<sup>19</sup> PAWLETA 2009, 19.

<sup>20</sup> COŞKUNSU 2015, 1.

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