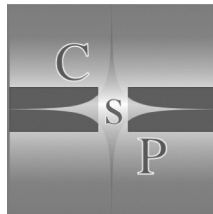


Children, Identity and the Past

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Edited by

Liv Helga Dommasnes and Melanie Wrigglesworth



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Children, Identity and the Past, Edited by Liv Helga Dommasnes and Melanie Wigglesworth

This book first published 2008 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-84718-590-8, ISBN (13): 9781847185907

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LEARNING AND SOCIALISATION IN CHILDREN DURING THE SPANISH BRONZE AGE

Margarita Sánchez Romero

In all societies throughout time, children have required specific training to prepare them for the adult world, not only on a productive level, but also on an ideological plane. This preparation occurs via processes of socialisation and learning. These types of practice can be carried out by different members of the social group with differentiated age and gender identities. Through socialisation and learning processes, children receive information and knowledge related to production and technology that enables them to enter the productive sphere of their societies and learn about their own identity. They place themselves in a specific social sphere, learn the characteristics of their gender identity and come to understand and share the way that these societies see the world in order to be successful in both biological and social reproduction.

The acquisition of these principles by children can be conceptualised as *habitus* and *hexis*, as defined by Bourdieu (1977, 1990). *Habitus* refers to the practical logic and sense of order that are learned unconsciously through norms established in daily life, while *hexis* describes how these social experiences created by categories of gender, class and age are reflected in the body (Gilchrist 1999, 81). All these processes must leave their trace in the archaeological record. Objects related to the world of children, therefore, serve as evidence of the transmission of cultural messages through which adults define and reinforce identities of age, gender and social class to ensure that certain tasks and responsibilities are assumed (Sánchez Romero 2007).

Between work and play: the acquisition of knowledge

We understand learning to be the acquisition of specific knowledge and the use of certain technologies by children that makes it possible for them to perform specific tasks in the adult world. Usually, the acquisition of this knowledge takes place through imitation and helping adult members of the community. Societies with a written language provide direct information about places of teaching, texts used and utensils for learning. For groups with no written language, evidence of the development of learning processes comes from the archaeological record and through interpretations based on ethnographic data

One of the most common ways that children learn is through performing certain tasks with different and progressive responsibilities. We can be certain that in most societies and most of the time, children participated actively in subsistence tasks. The rejection of and concern about the exploitation of children that began in the middle of the 19th century in the western world has caused the importance of children's work in societies in the past to be progressively forgotten, leaving them unconnected to productive tasks in prehistory (Baxter 2005, 65, Wileman 2005, 55). What is clearly evident is that the economic contribution of children's work varies considerably from one society to another. Among hunter-gatherer groups, children's work is determined more by culture than subsistence. For example, among the Hadza in southeast Tanzania, children are involved from a very early age in collecting fuel for fire and in transporting water. However, among the !Kung, whose economy is similar, the life of children is limited to games inside and outside the camp. We can assume, therefore, that children in Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer societies would have the same variability and the activities that they might carry out would include harvesting, hunting small animals and caring for younger members of the group. The continuous performance of these activities would also imply the acquisition of knowledge relating to the environment, types of dangerous plants and animals to be avoided and the search for raw materials for manufacturing tools (Wileman 2005, 55). However, in addition, children would become progressively more involved in the manufacture of different artefacts; for example, in the Palaeolithic populations, we can assume that learning to manufacture lithic tools would have begun at a very early age. Indeed, many of the settlements with tools and debris accumulations in French Palaeolithic sites have been interpreted as places of learning (Finlay 1997, Grimm 2000).

However, it is the changes in productive work that take place after the establishment of farming and herding economies and the progressive

sedentariness of these groups that show the true potential of children's work (Stearns 2006, 11). These changes affected all members of the social group but had special impact on women and children. The establishment of agricultural work considerably worsened life for women due to the new workload (Ehrenberg 1989, Claassen 2002). Osteological evidence such as stress markers and the pathologies of bone remains indicate an increase in time spent preparing food, particularly grinding (Crown 2000, 283). With respect to reproduction, the data speak of a considerable increase in the population at this time, which suggests another change for women; an increase in the frequency of pregnancies, previously once every three or four years. The ever growing need for a work force in these productive economies probably brought about the appearance of some kind of control over the reproductive capacities of women and led to children beginning to work at younger ages than in hunter-gatherer societies (Sánchez Romero 2006). To the aforementioned collecting tasks and the care of other members of the group provided by these individuals, we must add the care of livestock and help in planting, harvesting and processing the harvested goods. Additionally, the innovation of ceramics is a new element to be considered. A relationship between miniature ceramic pieces and children has already been shown through the analysis of the fingerprints on a series of clay figurines and ceramic vessels of different sizes belonging to the Sinagua populations in northern Arizona. This research suggests that learning processes might have been structured by means of games and the production of toys in order to familiarise children with clay and the process of manufacturing pottery. In this way, children entered the learning process from a very young age (between two and five years old) and, therefore, their incorporation into the economic system as competent artisans took place at a very early age (Kamp 2001, 14). Indeed, many of these objects that clearly show the learning process of a specific product have been considered elements of play in a relationship between work and play that does not always differentiate between the use of specific objects by children, their involvement in manufacture or their enjoyment as toys (Nájera *et al.* 2006).

Another aspect to bear in mind in the learning process of children concerns questions related to gender identity. The division of labour along gender lines makes it possible for members of a social group to use a much more extensive, more productive and beneficial range of resources for the group as a whole and it is quite logical to think that this differentiation is manifest from the first productive phases in a child's learning process. Children would be educated differently depending on the degree of diversity existing between the work, knowledge and responsibilities and the decision-

making power of women and men in the adult world and this in turn could vary diametrically between different cultures (Keith 2006, 27).

The analysis of the meaning of games and children's work in prehistoric societies can be carried out from an ethnoarchaeological perspective, taking into consideration, for example, the study done by Gustavo Politis on Nukak populations in the Columbian Amazon. According to his categorisation, possible toys include objects made by adults to serve as toys, discarded or broken objects from the adult world that were used by children and finally, untransformed objects (Politis 1998, 10). In addition, the archaeological record makes it possible to include objects manufactured by children during the process of learning and socialisation (Nájera *et al.* 2006). Finally, in this section we must mention those games that left no trace in the archaeological record and were related to oral traditions; through stories and tales, adults initiate children not only in social behaviour and norms but also in the ritual and religious beliefs that sustain their world (Breedon 2003).

Children's learning in prehistoric societies

From an archaeological perspective, in the material record of the Iberian Peninsula we can cite two examples of objects probably used and/or made by children. Both examples belong to the Bronze Age, although to two different cultures, cf. map fig. 1. The first comes from the Argaric Culture, which flourished in the south-eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula in the second millennium BC. Its settlement patterns were characterised by a high level of hierarchy, with centrally located sites controlling specific territories, resources and populations. Settlements were normally found on steep slopes, and in many cases, especially at central sites, complex fortification systems were developed. During the Argaric period the funerary ritual involved individual inhumations (although we also find double and even triple inhumations) within the inhabited area, normally below dwellings. Grave goods varied dramatically in number, variety and quality, ranging from burials with no grave goods at all to burials with great quantities of wealth and symbolic items. Such variations in grave goods have been interpreted in terms of differential access to wealth and a strongly stratified society (Lull 2000, Chapman 2003, Aranda Jiménez 2004). In the Argaric settlement at Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada), small ceramic vessels that imitate different ceramic pieces belonging to this culture have been found, although with different formal and technical aspects: asymmetrical forms and no treatment of the surfaces, in contrast to the high quality of the Argaric ceramics. In our opinion these ceramic forms would be toys made

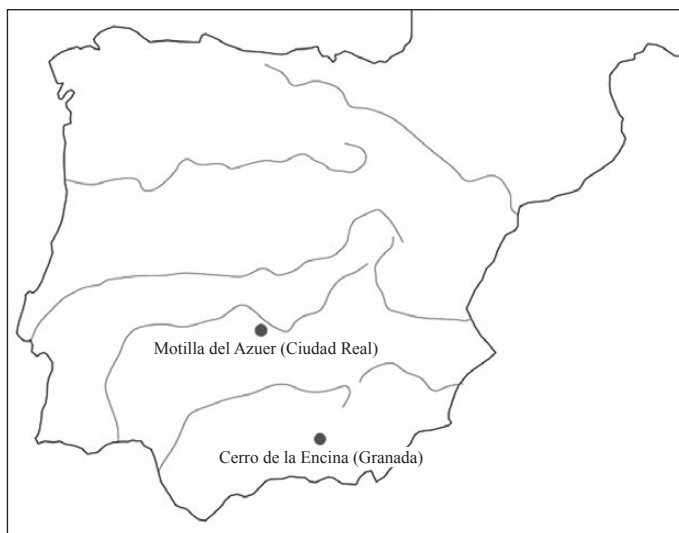


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the sites

by children while learning how to manufacture pottery and they appear in domestic contexts and are also associated with children in burials (Sánchez Romero 2007).

The second of the examples was found in the Bronze Age settlement at Motilla del Azuer. The archaeological site known as Las Motillas is one of the most remarkable types of prehistoric settlement on the Iberian Peninsula. Located in the central area of Spain called La Mancha, this type of site is characterised by artificial tells produced by the destruction of a complex fortification with different lines of concentric stone walls. Another important feature is the regular distribution of these sites over the plains of La Mancha; settlements have been documented every 4 or 5 km, and are normally associated with the river basins and low areas. These features are especially related to the adaptation to the peculiar ecological conditions of the La Mancha environment. The funerary ritual usually involved individual inhumation in pits, occasionally covered with stonework or slabs. Nevertheless, in some child burials the ritual included pottery urns. The bodies always appear in a flexed position and the burials are normally placed next to the dwelling walls or near the outer line of fortification. Grave goods are scarce and not very representative, although some adults have been found buried with pottery vessels, daggers or



Fig 2. Grave 39. Child burial from the site Motilla del Azuer, Ciudad Real (La Mancha). Photo: Departamento de Prehistoria y Arqueología/GEPRAN

awls made of copper (Molina *et al.* 2005). At this site, a child, probably male and eight or nine years old, was documented in a burial (fig. 2) with grave goods made up, among other elements, of three ceramic vessels, a miniature spool and a ceramic carinated cup (fig. 3), manufactured quite like the goods documented at Cerro de la Encina (Sánchez Romero 2004). The appearance of these pieces in a funerary context is important since it indicates the use of objects characteristic of daily life in the processes of socialisation and learning and links them closely to a specific individual through the funerary ritual (Sánchez Romero 2004, 2007). The creation and use of these miniature ceramic pieces, whether for play or in a learning context (aspects which are often inseparable), express the way in which

children made sense of the activities they observed around them. These games, which imitate the behaviour of adults and in a certain way were motivated and promoted by adults, were set within the processes of socialisation used by the adult world to ensure the reproduction of social and economic systems (Nájera *et al.* 2006).

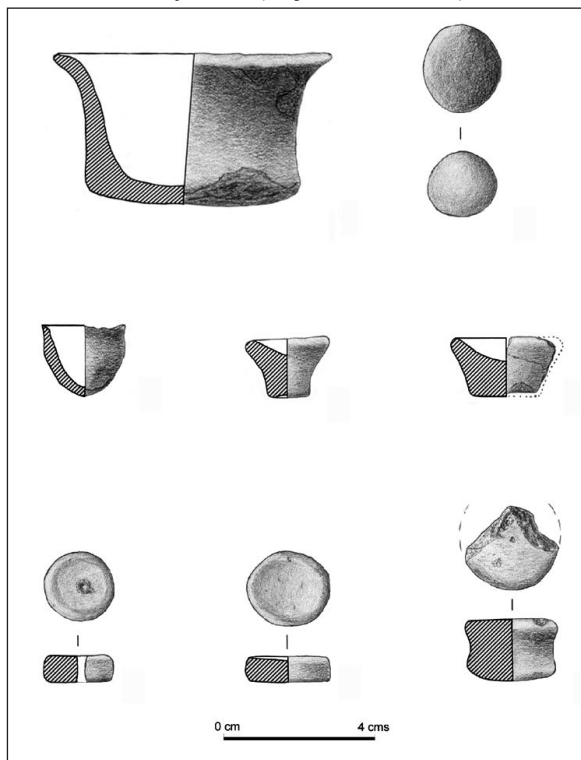


Fig 3. Grave goods from the burial shown in fig. 2. (after Nájera *et al.* 2006)

Creating identities: the socialisation of children

The socialisation of children does not only take place in the productive sphere. Many other spheres serve as a basis for the creation and negotiation of an individual's identity. To the aspects mentioned above in reference to technical or technological training we must also add psychological aspects and those reflected in access to and development of a perfectly normalised ritual within the adult world. Through these mechanisms we have a constant

articulation of clear social differences in the political and social dynamics of the prehistoric populations of which children formed part.

As mentioned above, the funerary pattern of the Argaric Culture consists of burials below floors in houses. This type of funerary ritual reflects a series of beliefs that show a very specific world view that enveloped these prehistoric groups. In this cultural context not everyone was buried and yet children made up a very high proportion, between 25% and 50% of the total individuals buried, meaning that they were very much included in the ritual organisation of these societies (Sánchez Romero 2004). A study of grave goods in children's burials in different settlements belonging to the Argaric Culture in the southeast Iberian Peninsula indicates how children were integrated into the social group in the funerary world as a reflection of their active participation in the daily life of these populations. The analysed sites were El Argar (Antas, Almería) (Siret and Siret 1890 Kunter 2000), Gatas (Turre, Almería) (Castro *et al.*, 1999), Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada) (Aranda and Molina 2006), Cuesta del Negro (Purullena, Granada) (Molina and Pareja 1975) and Peñalosa (Baños de la Encina, Jaén) (Contreras 2000).

Children's grave goods from this period—like the adult world of the time—show everything from burials with no offerings to graves that contain metal objects, ceramic containers or implements and ornaments made of stone, bone or other types of materials, which indicate clear social differences in which children participated (Sánchez Romero 2007). For our analysis, the children were divided into four age groups. The first category is made up of neonates (up to one month old). A second set holds children between 0 and 3 years old, since this is a critical age due to changes in eating habits after weaning. The third category includes children between 3 and 7 years old and the fourth brings together individuals between 7 and 15 years of age. The inclusion of this category is an attempt to discover whether it is possible to establish the beginning of adulthood through changes in the funerary context. Only individual children's graves were taken into account in the statistical analysis.

The analysis of the grave goods makes it possible to classify them in five different categories. The first (1) category is individuals with no grave goods and the other four are as follows: 2) grave goods with stone, shell or bone ornamental objects, which on some occasions are accompanied by ceramic vessels; 3) grave goods mainly characterised by metal ornamental objects, in some cases of gold and silver and in which ornaments made of other materials can appear; 4) grave goods made up of metal implements (awls, knives or daggers) and in which ornamental objects of all types of materials

and/or ceramic vessels may appear; and finally (5) a category formed by elements that seldom appear, such as ceramic pieces or meat offerings. The analysis carried out shows that the objects that best define the grave goods of children during the Argaric era are ornaments (bracelets, necklace beads, earrings), which appear in 80% of the grave goods studied (fig. 4).

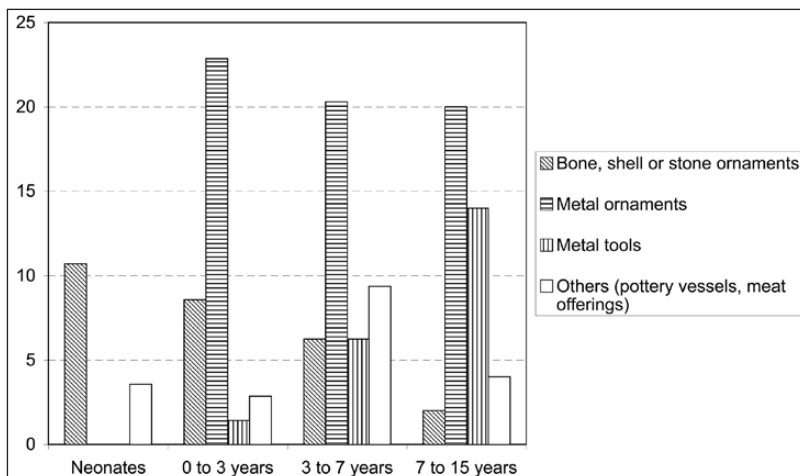


Fig 4: Graph showing the distribution of grave goods within different age groups during the Argaric era

Towards a conclusion

The results show that the neonate group has the highest percentage of burials with no grave goods, 85.71% of the total. This fact indicates that recently born individuals or those that do not reach a certain number of weeks were not considered to be members of the social group. When grave goods did appear, they were either bone, stone or shell ornaments (10.71%) or a ceramic vessel (3.57%). Within the age group taking in children from the first months of life to three years of age, the cases of individuals buried with no grave goods decrease to 64.28%. Of these individuals, 8.57% have grave goods consisting of bone, stone or shell ornaments, which is a decrease from the percentage for the neonates, and the strongest trend is in grave goods made up of metal ornaments, which appear for the first time in 22.85% of the burials. Metal artefacts also begin to appear in the grave goods (1.42%).

In the case of individuals between three and seven years of age, these trends continue, with a reduction in the number of individuals with no grave goods (57.81%), with 6.25% of the buried individuals having bone, stone or shell ornaments, and metal ornaments making up 20.31%. The number of tombs with metal implements in this category reaches 6.25%. Within this group it is worthwhile to note the richest grave goods found for a child from the Argaric period, in grave 8 at Cerro de la Encina, in which the child was buried with a gold bracelet, a dagger with four silver rivets and a carinated cup (Aranda and Molina 2006). Finally, in the group made up of individuals between seven and fifteen years old, 60% of the individuals were buried with no grave goods, with the most significant fact here being the increase in metal tools among the grave goods for 14% of the individuals buried, clearly showing a change in the social consideration of these individuals.

In our opinion, during the Bronze Age in southeast Spain, the identity of children was defined through the ornamental objects that appear in the grave goods in their burials, an identity that changed as these individuals progressed through their life courses. The most significant fact is the progressive introduction of metal implements as age increases, with the acquisition of daggers in the oldest age group. The differential status among these children is marked by the use of certain metals like silver and especially gold in ornamental objects. Gender differences do not seem to be very significant in the first years of life. Although it is still very difficult to determine the sex of a child, the profusion of ornamental elements suggests a classification more tied to age than to gender, a trend that probably began to change as the reproductive cycles of both women and men changed, and tied to the type of work that each individual undertook (Sánchez Romero, 2007). These differences have been clearly shown in studies on different ethnographic populations today, in which, although gender identity is assumed from the earliest infancy, its real manifestation in the division of labour or in the acquisition of certain habits in daily life and uses of space only appears in older individuals (Keith 2006).

Abstract

The potential information provided by learning processes and the socialisation of children during the Bronze Age includes not only ideas regarding the creation of identities and relationships but also insight into spatial and social organisation, subsistence activities and the production of tools. We analyse here the archaeological

record of Bronze Age societies in southeast Spain considering, on the one hand, the material culture produced by or for children and on the other, the physical remains of children through the analysis of funerary records.

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