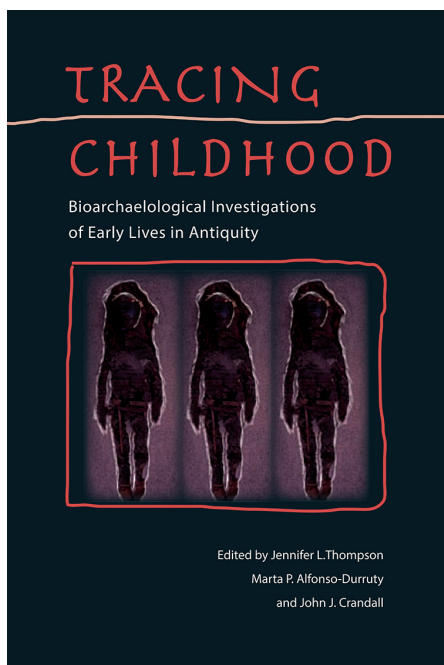


Tracing childhood. Bioarchaeological Investigations of Early Lives in Antiquity

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In the foreword to this book Clark Spencer Larsen has written that “Once invisible, childhood now takes a central place in the archaeological record in reconstructing and interpreting the physical and social lives of children in the past, in all places and in all times”.

In analysis of past populations juvenile skeletons give anthropologists a considerable insight into human adaptive transitions (Lewis 2007). Health conditions in infancy as well as prenatal and perinatal development are critical periods programming human postnatal life. Results of analysis of accentuated lines in the enamel of primary teeth from skeletal remains indicate that mortality reflected in skeletal samples was not determined exclusively by the influence of random adverse external factors, as individuals predisposed by an unfavourable course of

prenatal and perinatal growth were more likely to die in early childhood (Żądzińska et al. 2015). Health conditions in the subadults years predict quality of future life and mortality in adulthood (Barker et al. 1989; Armelagos et al. 2009; Risnes et al. 2011).

The presented book *Tracing childhood. Bioarchaeological Investigations of Early Lives in Antiquity (Bioarchaeological Interpretations of the Human Past: Local, Regional and Global Perspectives)* edited by Jennifer L. Thompson, Marta P. Alfonso-Durruty, John J. Crandall and published in 2014 by Florida University Press is an excellent supplement of still increasing scientific interest in this topic.

The book consists of fourth different parts giving the readers a broad perspective, both social and biological, of childhood in the human past. Each part is dedicated to one scientific problem interpreting the biological and social lives of children in the past populations.

The first part entitled *The Chosen Child* consists of four chapters: *Death and the special child: three examples from the Ancient Midwest* by Della C. Cook, Andrew R. Thompson and Amanda A. Rollins; *Beyond victims: Exploring the identity of sacrificed infants and children at La Cueva de Los Muertos Chiquitos, Durango, Mexico (AD 571–1168)* by John J. Crandall and Jennifer L. Thompson; *Chinchorro mortuary practices on infants: Northern Chile archaic period (BP 7000–3600)* by Vivien G. Standen, Bernardo T. Arriaza and Calogero M. Santoro; *The “Other” burials at Torre de Palma: childhood as special death in a medieval Portuguese site* by Sarah Holt, Stacey Hallman, Mary Lucas Powell and Maia M. Langley.

This part presents research that explores the experiences of children whom society has selected (for example because

of childhood illness caused microcephaly) for exceptional social treatment (sacrificed infants, infant’s bodies with artificial mummification).

The second part entitled *The desecrated child* consists of three chapters: *The bioarchaeology of the homicide of infants and children* by Simon Mays; *Sense or sensationalism? Approaches to explaining high perinatal mortality in the past* by Helen F. Gilmore and Siân E. Halcrow; *A disciplined childhood in Nineteenth – Century New York City: a social bioarchaeology of the subadults of the Spring Street Presbyterian Church* by Meredith A. B. Ellis.

This part as has been written in the Introduction “examines the abuse, social ostracism, oppression, inequality, and resulting trauma, ill health, and death faced by children in the past”.

The third part entitled *The working child* consists of three chapters: *Childhood, colonialism, and nation-building: child labor in Virginia and New York* by Autumn Barrett; *Little helping hands: insights from Punta Teatinos, Chile* by Marta P. Alfonso-Durruty and Jennifer L. Thompson; *Children of the working class: environmental marginality and child health at Black Mesa, Arizona (AD 900–1150)* by Debra L. Martin, Jennifer L. Thompson and John J. Crandall.

This part of book analyse the influence of economic conditions and labor on children health, physical condition and skeletal morphology.

The last part entitled *The cultured child* consists of two chapters: *Surviving childhood: health, identity and personhood in the prehistoric American Southwest* by Ann M. Palkovich; *Tracing Tiwanaku childhood: a bioarchaeological study of age and social identities in Tiwanaku society* by Deborah E. Blom and Kelly J. Knudson.

This last part addresses very important issues (from both biological and

sociological point of view) regarding changing identity from childhood into adulthood.

The book is ended with the editors Conclusion entitled *Little bodies, big voices: the lives of children in the past*, which contains a summary of an interesting discussion presented in all chapters of this book.

I warmly recommend the book to all anthropologists.

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