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## The archaeology of childhood in the Etruscan-Italic world

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GOVI, E., ed. 2021. *Birth: archeologia dell'infanzia nell'Italia preromana*, 2 vols. Collana Disci. Bologna: Bononia University Press. Pp. 930, figs. ISBN 978-8-8692-3884-0.

The archaeology of childhood, like other current trends in archaeology, answers a need to reflect on the gradual shifting of interest – in the humanities, in history, and in social science – from general systems and laws to the variability of microhistory, from norms to differences, the particular, the contingent, a shift reflecting deep changes in the global politico-social scenario. It answers a need to investigate the ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions that run through societies and the material culture that is an integral part of social contexts. As the editor points out, the papers in this book outline a polyhedric semantic picture that does justice to the variability and complexity of the phenomenon.

The peculiarity of the Italian situation is due to the multiplicity and polymorphism of Etruscan-Italic archaeological contexts, which, along with Italian scholars' strongly historicist approach, has made it difficult to follow a uniform theoretical path, despite the fact that the archaeology of funerary contexts in Italy has had a sound theoretical basis ever since the late 1970s. At that time, B. d'Agostino and A. Schnapp laid the foundation of a semiology of necropoleis by recognizing the multifunctionality of funerary signs.<sup>1</sup> From the 1980s onward, d'Agostino addressed the question of the demographic representativity of

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<sup>1</sup> d'Agostino and Schnapp 1982.

the necropoleis of Pontecagnano, following in the wake of I. Morris's investigations.<sup>2</sup> In those same years, M. Bonghi Jovino discussed the well-known emblematic case of a child burial in the institutional and sacred area of the Civita of Tarquinia,<sup>3</sup> and A. M. Bietti Sestieri and A. De Santis studied the necropoleis of Osteria dell'Osa<sup>4</sup> and the Latial phenomenon of the *suggrundaria*.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, the research of J. Tabolli has brought the spotlight back onto these themes in the light of international debate.<sup>6</sup> The study of behavior towards different young age groups starts from a reflection on the very concept of "childhood," which constitutes a social and cultural category. As ethnographical work shows, modern Western conceptions differ from those of many societies studied by ethnographers, wherein the different age groups – often from earliest childhood – are involved in social and ritual activities following specific paths, in specific stages, and in specific ways.

V. Nizzo stresses in the conclusions to the book that the thematic complexity of this subject has the question of formal burial as its point of departure, the question, that is, of the demographic and social representativity of necropoleis and the existence of discriminating social strategies. Access to formal burial in the ancient world seems in most cases to have been reserved for a privileged few. The norms regulating formal burial depended on political, social, and religious mechanisms that need to be investigated case by case, in each individual context. As is well known, Morris's reexamination of the burial grounds of Athens and Attica during certain chronological phases revealed a rigid subdivision of the population into a visible elite and a wide invisible majority, formal burial appearing to be reserved for only a quarter of the adult component.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as the contributions in the two volumes bear out well, research on young age groups must involve (846 ff.):

- an analysis of the demographic representativity of burial sites
- an investigation of changes in mentality evidenced by changes in the treatment of children
- an investigation of the meaning of cults centered on children
- an analysis of the representation strategies employed for different young age groups, and particularly of the social construction of gender and social prerogatives
- an investigation of the modes of expression of ties with the adult component
- the individual and emotional or situational dimensions

No less important is the question of ancestor cults. The object of a cult can be an "anonymous," recently deceased person, as C. Antonaccio showed for Geometric Greece.<sup>8</sup> This can also be the case for children, as I showed in a study of the Orientalizing necropoleis of

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<sup>2</sup> Morris 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Bonghi Jovino and Chiamonte Trerè 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Bietti Sestieri 1992.

<sup>5</sup> The theme was then taken up again in 2006 at the conference "Sepolti fra i vivi" and subsequently in the acts thereof (Bartoloni and Benedettini 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Tabolli 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Morris 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Antonaccio 1994.

Pontecagnano.<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon is investigated, in a broader perspective, by V. Nizzo in his studies on “Antenati Bambini.”<sup>10</sup>

Many anthropologists have placed the stress on the distance between the analytical categories used by specialists and the individual or collective perception of funerary ritual as a means of social recognition and social identification. Burial ceremonies are undoubtedly a construction of each sociocultural context, but they are also emotionally charged rites of passage, perceived as such by those who identify in them.

Starting from these premises, this book is the result of a convergence of interests in the theme of childhood both in sacred areas and in funerary contexts – a convergence that came to be at the height of the pandemic. It is a beacon for this particular branch of archaeology in Italy. The aim of the editor was to gather testimonies on work on this theme from specialists in the study of most of the regions of Pre-Roman Italy. The book encompasses 34 papers by over 70 authors. It is organized as follows: it is divided into two volumes and three parts. It opens with three introductory and methodological chapters (by E. Govi, M. Bonghi Jovino, and D. Dominici for the anthropological part). Then there is a section devoted to the case study of a perinatal burial in the sanctuary of Uni at Marzabotto (Part I). Part II focuses on the evidence from Etruria. Part III focuses on Pre-Roman Italy.

The large number of contributions can be grouped into the following larger thematic groups:

- Chapters on burial in sacred places: E. Govi, M. Bonghi Jovino, G. Bagnasco Gianni et al., S. Stopponi and A. Giacobbi
- Chapters on formal cemeteries in Etruria and in Italic areas: R. Vanzini and C. Cavazzuti (Bologna), G. Morpurgo (Bologna, fase Certosa), A. Serra et al. (Spina), L. Rosselli (Pisa e Volterra), V. Amoretti et al. (Vetulonia e Populonia), F. Trucco (Tarquinia), M. Micozzi (Cerveteri), A. Piergrossi et al. (Veio), M. Arizza (Veio e Roma, età arcaica), C. Pellegrino (Pontecagnano), M. Rapi and L. Lamanna (Golasecca), F. Bortolami and G. Gambacurta (Veneto), M. Natalucci (Piceno), J. Weidig (Umbria), L. Michetti and M. Bonadies (Agro Falisco), P. Carafa and P. De Paolis (Lazio), V. d’Ercole et al. (Abruzzo), T. E. Cinquantaquattro (Pithekoussai), P. Contursi (Poseidonia-Paestum), C. Lambrugo et al. (*Apulia*), D. Costanzo (Calabria greca)
- Iconography of childhood in Etruria: C. Pizzirani
- Conclusions: V. Nizzo

The point of departure of the book is the extraordinary evidence from E. Govi’s excavation underneath the enclosure of the temple of Uni at Marzabotto, on which archaeometric tests were performed (see chapters by Mariotti et al., Morigi et al., Modi et al., and Belcastro and Mariotti). A pit along the western enclosure wall of the temenos of the Tuscan temple of Uni yielded evidence for a ritual that was probably related to the rebuilding of the wall. This evidence includes the foot of a bucchero cup with an incised cross sign oriented towards the cardinal points. The cup was placed upside down directly

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<sup>9</sup> Cuzzo 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Nizzo 2011.

underneath the burial of a child laid in the bare ground. Based on the relationship between the sign, the position, and the context, Govi relates this burial to a foundation rite performed when the northwest corner of the temenos perimeter was rebuilt. I agree with the author that this evidence can only be convincingly understood as the sacrifice of a child or the burial of a perinatally deceased child, possibly in connection with building or rebuilding rituals, or rituals to propitiate the *sanctitas* of the limits of the temenos of Uni. This hypothesis is made highly likely by the sacral nature of the find spot, the relationship of the goddess Uni with childbirth, and the relationship of the goddess Vei with fertility, including fertility of a chthonic nature, as well as by the presence of other ritual indicators in the same pit or in the surrounding space. This burial is not an expression of a single family but of the entire community, being located in the temple from which the town originated.

The child might have been perceived as a sign of the divine, an expression of the supernatural. The ritual could have been either the offering of a premature infant or a propitiatory sacrifice performed in connection with agricultural rites or with human fertility – an offering, or sacrifice, made at the time the sanctuary and the town itself were founded. After all, the sacrality of limits plays a central role in the *Etrusca Disciplina* and in foundation rites: a ritually founded town is under divine protection.

As to G. Bagnasco Gianni's paper, the nature of the context raises no doubt about her interpretation of the burials found in the sacred area of the Civita of Tarquinia as evidence of a cult. Children are an essential component of the ritual geography of the whole site from the 9th to the 7th c. BCE, in a perspective where the funerary aspect does not seem to be the main point of the burial ritual. As A. Giacobbi and S. Stopponi clearly show, the funerary aspect prevails, on the other hand, in the child burials within Temple C in the sanctuary of Campo della Fiera at Orvieto. This was also the site of a *prodigium*, but in the 4th or 3rd c. BCE, under the protection of the goddess Menerva.

In the cases of Marzabotto, Tarquinia, and Orvieto, the burying of children in temple areas seems informed by a consistent ritual logic that also influences the cultic organization of spaces, as at Civita, or dialogues with them, lending ritual substance to some significant phases in their structuring or de-structuring. Infant burials therefore seem to comply with specific ritual prescriptions reflecting cultic and devotional logics of sacrifice and offering.

M. Bonghi Jovino and G. Bagnasco Gianni underline the ambiguous and liminal character, between the mundane and ultramundane sphere, of the presence of children in sacred contexts. The role of these children here is not unconnected to the fact that they were ascribed magical powers, notably the ability to tell the future and communicate with otherworldly and chthonic forces.

As regards the case of Marzabotto, in particular, the buried child seems to correspond to this liminal physiognomy, between life and death, outlining a sacral horizon that possibly also included an oracular function – if it is admissible to draw a parallel with the figure of Tages, the founder of the *Etrusca Disciplina*. According to E. Govi, the child may have been a *genius loci* of sorts, who was worshiped and buried on the occasion of an exceptional event, such as the refoundation of the temenos of the sanctuary, and of the city itself.

Moving on to the formal burial grounds of Etruria and Pre-Roman Italic communities, analyses of the demographic representativity of necropoleis – in cases where it was possible

to carry them out, such as at Veii (Piergrossi et al.) and Pithekoussai (Cinquantaquattro), and in Abruzzo (d'Ercole et al.) and Veneto (Bortolami and Gambacurta) – have revealed a massive presence of children, including perinatal infants, buried individually or in double or multiple graves, usually inhumations, although some of the burials are cremations. Still, the authors deem that in most cases these cemeteries do not reflect the actual demographic weight of children, which in preindustrial agricultural societies should be around 50%, especially if we include the perinatal deceased in this calculation. This is indeed the percentage one observes at Pontecagnano (Pellegrino) where we can follow the history of a whole family group over more than two centuries.

Specific rituals were often reserved for perinatal infants, such as enchytrismos burial in transport amphorae at Pithekoussai, in pithoi or ollas in Umbria and at Populonia and Bologna (Certosa phase), or in roof-tiles, as in Umbria (Weidig) and Abruzzo (D'Ercole et al.). Burials in stone sarcophagi at Cerveteri and Veii look like signs of inclusion rather than discrimination – although they usually lack grave goods (Micozzi; Piergrossi et al.).

In my opinion, the organization of the sepulchral fabric, and particularly the grouping of infant burials observed, for instance, at Veii are not evidence of a discriminatory treatment, but of a specialization of burial grounds. Such a specialization of funerary areas is attested, for example, at Pontecagnano, where the infant cemetery of via Sicilia has, in a central position, a small altar used for specific rituals for the buried children.<sup>11</sup>

The papers on the question of the so-called young princes are especially interesting. One cannot but agree with Nizzo that there is a tendency to bury children with grave goods at least from the age of two, and that status indicators appear from the age of three or four, then are even more evident from the age of five or six. In some cases, however, these prerogatives can be bestowed at birth, as in the necropolis of Piazza d'Armi in Spoleto (Weidig). An important way to emphasize children's status was to equip them with function-specific objects, related to early childhood itself or to roles they might have performed later in their lives.

The behaviors observed seem to evoke complex phenomena – possibly the bringing forward of passage rituals to early childhood, or a symbolic forward projection of these rituals and of specific prerogatives that seem to privilege particular ages. As I. Hodder observes: “In death people often become what they have not been in life.”<sup>12</sup>

Outstanding examples of projection of and compensation in death for identities one did not get to assume can be found especially in the cemeteries of Tarquinia, Villa Bruschi, and Spoleto in Umbria. In the necropolis of Piazza d'Armi in Spoleto, J. Weidig notes the presence of the tombs of very high-ranking children aged one to two, both male and female. These tombs are evidence of hereditary political, military, and religious power. Tombs 17 and 15, male and female, respectively, are especially significant. The former contained a panoply comprising two small cuirass discs, an “*a stami*” dagger, and an iron knife, as well as furnishings, ornaments, imported objects, and an elaborate array of pottery. The latter deceased was lavishly attired and equipped with ceremonial-type rattles.

Hereditary roles for children of either sex from the ruling families have also been recognized by F. Trucco at Tarquinia, in the cemetery of Villa Bruschi Falgari. Both males and

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<sup>11</sup> Cerchiali et al. 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Hodder 1982, 201.

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females may be buried with grave goods similar to those of adults, as well as ritual vases graced with anthropomorphic figures, symbolizing prerogatives in the ritual and cultic spheres.

Moving to the miniaturization of burial assemblages, or parts thereof, I found the evidence from Greek Calabria particularly interesting. Here, from the Classical age onward, a “feeling for childhood” took hold, a higher awareness of childhood manifested in an evident trend to specialization in children’s burial assemblages (Costanzo).

I agree less, on the other hand, with interpretations of, for example, the miniaturization of burial assemblages in terms of fear of the return of the dead (Nizzo, 876).

Finally, the case of Poseidonia-Paestum (P. Contursi) sheds light on the development of the civic body that participated in the cultural construction of individual identity. Nevertheless, alongside cases where gender and status are the key criteria for the definition of a funerary image of the preadult deceased, there are cases where this image seems to be related to emotional and situational factors, as has been said for 6th–5th-c. BCE Poseidonia.

I conclude my review by quoting the case of the burial of children next to or underneath settlements. As is well known, this pattern occurs repeatedly at Cerveteri and in Latium, Veneto, and Peucetia. I will not dwell on this theme, which was already investigated as part of the conference “Sepolti tra i vivi” (Rome 2007).

As V. Nizzo stresses in his concluding remarks, birth only marks the beginning of a complex anthropopoietic process that may last one’s whole lifetime, and even beyond. One of its fundamental passages is the winning of a collectively acknowledged identity.

This book is a well-produced and well-illustrated collection of essays and a stimulating contribution to the study of childhood and the role of children in life and death in Pre-Roman Italy. We cannot be anything but grateful to the editor for having collected new and important data and presented it impeccably to the public and to scholars in these two valuable volumes.

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## Egyptian Art (as Greek Art) as Roman Art: historiographies and potential futures

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PEARSON, S. K. 2021. *The Triumph and Trade of Egyptian Objects in Rome: Collecting Art in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Berlin: De Gruyter. Viii + 264 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-070040-4.

In this 2021 monograph by Stephanie Pearson (P.), the author continues to advance the theory of her UC Berkeley 2015 dissertation that “Romans used Egyptian material as highly prized collectables” and expands that work by adding jewelry, textiles, and sculpture to the dissertation’s corpus of frescoes (vii). In the framework of a global pandemic, 2021 was a difficult time to release a book, especially one updating the highest student academic exercise to a relatable and informative scholarly volume meant for a readership well beyond the dissertation committee. I note this timeframe and contemporary global context because just as P. was eclipsing the pinnacle of her work as a student with her first monograph as a scholar, practitioners of the many humanistic and scientific disciplines of which it is a part felt the force of the world’s tragedies and reached a similar defining moment. Injustices/inequities stemming from Western structures of thought that could be held at personal arm’s length pre-2020 were harder, if not impossible, to ignore and fueled a desire for change in the profession of our scholarship. Recent publications in disciplines like those identified by *Triumph and Trade’s* publisher, De Gruyter, such as Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Classical Studies, Classical Archaeology, and Egyptology, concentrate more intently on restructuring colonial cores and remaking the fields anew.<sup>1</sup> This is similar for art history, and I situate P’s book most firmly within ancient art history and archaeology. The publisher also lists art historians as a primary audience. For 2020/2021+, we talk about pre-pandemic/post-pandemic; for the art history of the Roman world, and the many modern disciplines that deal with objects in the ancient Roman empire, we can talk about historiographies/potential futures. I see this book on the cusp in terms of this timeframe and these ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Langer and Matic 2023; Eccleston and Padilla Peralta 2022; Mazurek 2021; Friedland 2020.