

Childhood and the Construction of Gender Identities through Material Culture

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Abstract

Societies need to reproduce themselves both in a biological and in an ideological and social way. Through this paper, the author tries to understand how the process of social reproduction affects children's lives regarding gender identity. Through the material culture that can be found in archaeological records, one can try to understand how age and gender identities are interconnected and how they manifested themselves in the creation of childhood identities. Materiality is employed in the creation and experience of age and gender categories through specific costumes, ornaments and practices of body modification. From a phenomenological perspective, the author analyses the material culture from the funerary record of Bronze Age societies of the south of Spain taking into account the links between bodies and objects, and using *micro-history* to extrapolate local experiences to a broader picture in order to understand how societies deal with the phenomenon of childhood.

Keywords: CHILDHOOD, GENDER, SOCIALISATION, MATERIAL CULTURE, BRONZE AGE, IBERIAN PENINSULA

Introduction

From a look at the advertisements on television and in magazines for toys and games, one can recognise typical images that represent the roles of boys and girls in contemporary society. Even in a society where the gender roles keep changing, and where men and women are not treated separately, these representations are stereotyped in most commercials. Obviously, these are not images one can transport to the prehistoric or any other period prior to the modern day, but it does illustrate how important it is for

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any society that boys and girls reproduce the roles their society assigns to each gender. Societies need to reproduce themselves not only in a biological way but also in ideological and social ways, and gender is important to sustain both gender relationships and economic and social structures. Therefore, some kind of socialisation for gender roles seems to be an integral part of the process of growing up.

The objective of this paper is to deal with three different elements that are important for the interpretation of archaeological and historical societies – childhood, gender identity and material culture. These three elements are present in every single society from prehistoric times to the present, and archaeological methodology and theory can help with understanding childhood in any society. To an archaeologist (as is this author), material culture is the only way to understand the lives of children in prehistoric times, when there are no written sources. Later periods, however, may also have a similar problem; when, for example, infants have not been represented in the majority of written sources which tend to focus on such matters as history, economy and social organisation. Until very recent times most texts have been created by, and dedicated to, a very small section of people – these texts usually forget children. As such, in the current study an attempt is made to understand how two categories of identity, namely gender and age, are inter-related in childhood and how they are manifested in archaeological material culture which has the potential to provide evidence concerning the nature of the relationship which existed between people and objects in the past and the present.

The Socialised Child: Childhood and the Construction and Negotiation of Gender Identity

Childhood is not a stage but rather a course of action, a coherent social practice; it is not an analytical category but rather an empirical phenomenon. Children have been considered passive members of societies and perceived only in relation to adults and adult' activities; however, they are not pathological or incomplete; they are social actors and operate in everyday life (James *et al.* 1998). As is the case for adults, children play a significant socio-economic role in societies and consequently it would be helpful to know more about the contribution of children, their activities and behaviours within societies (Sánchez Romero 2004; 2007).

Childhood is a socially constructed category, and one must be concerned with its historical and cultural specificities which reveal that the socio-cultural context varies significantly; they are not essential forms or constraints, and do not exist in a finite and identifiable form, neither in historical periods (Ariès 1962) nor in ethnographic contexts (Mead and Wolfenstein 1954). Nevertheless, their manifestations vary from society to society, but it is still possible to understand the characteristics of social facts, because they are uniform within each particular society (James *et al.* 1998).

An important problem in defining childhood is its plasticity, not because its definition depends on the socio-cultural context of different societies, but because social meaning shares certain chronological characteristics with biological growth, as certain rites of passage demonstrate (Grimes 2000; Holm and Bowker 1994; Van Gennep 1994). Inevitable physiological changes of growth and maturation occur-

ring throughout the life course are culturally negotiated and incorporated into social life. As a process, ageing is both universally and culturally specific in its social and material expression, while biological immaturity is regarded as universal. Childhood is considered a social and cultural phenomenon with spatial and historical variability (Prout 1999; Sofaer Derevenski 1997; 2000). Hence, one can consider that the two forms of childhood – the biological child and the social child – can be defined very differently among cultures.

Moreover, one must bear in mind that childhood implies in its characterisation other forms of identity, such as gender or status. Gender is a structuring principle in any society; it is the way by which individuals culturally perceive the sexual differences. Gender identity is configured not only through practices, discourses and symbolic representations but also through material and physical experiences. It is a cultural construction and is defined and negotiated in different ways by each society. Members of a gender category are organised in different ways depending on their age, and the transition from one group to another will bring new rights and tasks. This variation in the definition of gender identities, between different societies, makes it clear that gender is not a universal category. On the contrary, it is a changeable category not only among societies but also through life. Consequently, gender is an identity culturally created, historically specific and essential to social organisation. It must be elaborated and reinforced in each society, and individuals must have an active role in it.

From the essentialist and constructionist perspectives, the process of identity construction of children, in terms of gender, is a central issue in sociology. It is thought that human behaviour is consciously learnt or unconsciously transmitted and absorbed through a range of social relationships and settings, and not just governed by instincts, biology or nature (Thew 2000, 133). Several studies on children's social categorisation have demonstrated that they make the same categorical distinction as adults do concerning gender, ethnicity and age (Bennett *et al.* 2000). Age-gender constructions acquire particular meanings within culturally defined settings; men and women may experience time distinctively. In many societies males and females are marked by differing age grades, rites and temporal concerns, as the cultural inscription of stages on the lifecycle causes men and women to draw on contrasting scales of past, present and future (Gilchrist 2000; Sofaer Derevenski 2000).

Hence childhood must be considered a recognisable component of all social structures across space and time. It is a specific social structure constituted by the adult society that socialises children in order to maintain it; theories of social order, social stability and social integration depend on these processes (James *et al.* 1998). In all societies, children require specific training to prepare them for the adult world. This preparation occurs by processes of socialisation and learning. These types of practices can be carried out by different members of the social group with different age and gender identities. Through socialisation and learning processes, children receive information and knowledge about 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 (Sánchez Romero 2004; 2007).

Some authors argue that mechanisms, such as learning and socialisation, render children passive but they can be seen through these means as interactive agents engaged with people, ideology and institution in forging a place for themselves in their own social world. They can be shaped by the circumstances of their lives (as adults are) but are also able to manage, negotiate and extend their possibilities (Prout 1999, 7).

Learning is the acquisition of specific knowledge and the use of certain technologies by children makes it possible for them to perform specific tasks in the adult world. How does it reflect gender category? 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. Children would have been educated differently depending on the degree of diversity between men and women in terms of their work, knowledge, responsibilities and decision-making power in the adult world and this, in turn, could vary significantly between different cultures.

However, socialisation of children does not take place only in the productive field. Many other spheres serve as a basis for the creation and negotiation of an individual's identity. Social rank also needs to be considered, particularly how it impacts on access to, and the development of, a perfectly normalised ritual within the adult world. Through these mechanisms, one can have a constant articulation of clear social differences in the political and social dynamics of the prehistoric populations of which children formed a part (Sánchez Romero 2007; 2008).

The acquisition of these principles by children can be conceptualised as *habitus* and *hexis*, as defined by Bourdieu (1977). *Habitus* refers to the practical logic and sense of order that are learned unconsciously through norms established in daily life, and *hexis* to how these social experiences created by categories of gender, class and age are reflected in the body. Both of them, *habitus* and *hexis*, have to do with agency through play. Play is fundamental to childhood; it is the primary means by which children develop and learn, because it is enjoyable and self-motivating, and it locates children within the existing social structure (Smith 2000). Childhood has been considered a transitional phase which is complete only when the children enter adulthood but, in fact, they are capable of making sense of their social environment and play and tasks operate in a double direction. Firstly, those activities that imitate the behaviour of adults, and are usually inspired and supported by them, fit within the processes of socialisation used by the adult world to assure the reproduction of social and economic systems. Moreover, the recognition of social categories, such as gender and status, involves developing these play and productive activities and taking part in the shaping and preservation of adult identities and social position (James *et al.* 1998; Nájera *et al.* 2006; Wynnes 2000).

On the other hand, however, although the notion of invisibility makes it difficult to regard children as social agents, one cannot consider adults as the only influence on the world of children. Children's culture must be regarded as a self-maintaining system of signs, symbols and rituals that prescribe the whole way of children's life within a particular society. Children perform more effectively as social agents when they are separated from the adult world (James *et al.* 1998; Wynnes 2000). In this process, play act as a metaphor of the adult world; people do not just employ and construct meta-

phors but they live through them. Moreover, Gibbs points out that no unique or special decoding processes are required to understand and use metaphors and that they are readily comprehended by children through their figurative thought (Tilley 1999, 17).

The Phenomenology of Material Culture: Children's Bodies and Objects

Phenomenology should be used to gain access to the practical facts of human life, and that is precisely what archaeology does. A human being is, in any time period, implied in its life, its worries, its feelings ... so it is necessary to revive our contact with reality, with the surrounding material world, with the objects we use in daily life (Gonzalez Ruibal 2006; Moran 1999, 227–8). If this is not done, people will be detached from their crucial relationship with objects. Through materiality one can gain access to time, space, body and object, the four concepts into which all archaeology can be condensed. Phenomenology is more a method than a set of dogmas; it is only from a phenomenological perspective that the past can be understood and interpreted in an intense human scale and this allows new perceptions on past societies (Tilley 2004). Materiality is the frame through which people communicate identities; without these material expressions, social relations have little substantive reality because objects do not just provide a stage setting to human action, they are integral to it (Gosden and Marshall 1999). The human lifecycle itself is given meaning through material culture (Gilchrist 2000).

From the archaeological records, one can try to understand, through material culture, how age and gender identities are interconnected and how they are manifested in the creation of childhood identities. Material culture is employed in creating and experiencing age grades, for example, through specific costumes, ornaments and practices of body modification throughout the life course (Gilchrist 2000; Sofaer Derevenski 2000). Bodies and objects are used as metaphors in the process of understanding and interpreting the world. Because of them, one can connect objects, events and actions. Metaphors are used because there is a gap between the world of words and the world of objects. Hence, learning metaphors becomes part and parcel of the process of acquisition of cultural knowledge (Tilley 1999, 8).

The best context for the analysis of this relationship is the funerary record, as Sofaer Derevenski (2000, 397) has stated. For understanding the performance in this context, one must consider not only the association of particular artefacts with the deceased, but also other elements such as the morphology of the artefacts that may have itself formed part of the performance. The wider social construction of the gendered life course can be traced from the level of the individual, because objects are used to add meaning to the biography of a particular man, woman or child. It happens not only because of the intimate association between the artefact and the body, but also because of the transformation of the biological sex and physiological age of the body into culturally meaningful phenomena. An object mediates a contextually specific relationship between biology and culture and acts as a link between people and society.

As such, the association between bodies and objects in the funerary context can be one of the best instruments for understanding the gendered child and how societies

create, manipulate and change this identity through time. The body is a fundamental piece for the study of childhood. Gender can be manifested through physical elaborations that can be performed on both living and dead bodies, and they can be permanent or reversible. These include bone modification, ornaments and dress, all of which can be recognised in the archaeological record.

As has been previously mentioned, childhood is a socially constructed category that can vary enormously among cultures and through time. One must find an analytical category, which affords a broad understanding of this issue. This approach can be *micro-history* – the ‘awareness of the significance of the small-scale, personal or local experience and an awakening and recognition of how small-scale studies can extend and question aggregate generalisations through the illumination of local and personal diversities’ (Drake *et al.* 1998, 3). This method can be as ambitious in its theoretical and methodological approaches as general history. If one can consider the range of approaches to, and meanings of, childhood at various points in time and in various settings, rather than obscuring the whole picture, micro-history allows the complexity and richness of this big picture to be understood (Rhodes 2000).

Case Studies: The Archaeological Record of Bronze Age Societies in the South of Spain

The aim of the case studies is to consider material culture in relation to children from the archaeological record of Bronze Age societies in the south of Spain from two perspectives. The first is from a phenomenological point of view in order to test how material culture can be used for understanding the processes of learning and manifestation of gender identity in childhood. Secondly, we will consider the micro-history level of analysis of these particular societies with the purpose of identifying possible guidelines that can be used for a general picture. We will focus on grave goods associated with children in funerary contexts, basically pottery vessels and ornaments.

The Bronze Age Site of Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada)

The site of Cerro de la Encina is located a few kilometres from the city of Granada, on the right bank of the Monachil River, one of the rivers flowing from the Sierra Nevada (Figure 1). The settlement extends over a large and steeply sloping hill bounded by two deep ravines that clearly delimit it from its immediate surroundings. These characteristics give the settlement considerable strategic importance. Research undertaken mainly in the 1970s and early 1980s documented a long sequence of occupation belonging to the Bronze Age. Two cultural periods, separated by a phase of abandonment, were identified – the first corresponds to the Argar Culture and the second to the culture of the Late Bronze Age of south-east Spain (Aranda and Molina 2006).

The Argaric settlement can be characterised by its central position in the spatial organisation of the Argaric population of the region. Cerro de la Encina would have been the settlement that controlled and centralised the exploitation of a large territory corresponding to the Vega of Granada, where other smaller settlements that focused on the exploitation of specific economic resources, were located. There are three main criteria that define Cerro de la Encina as the settlement occupying the highest hier-



Figure 1: Map showing the location of the sites of Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada) and Motilla del Azuer (Daimiel, Ciudad Real).

archical position – firstly, its considerable dimensions, occupying approximately 12 ha. Secondly, its defensive characteristics; in addition to its natural defensive location, Cerro de la Encina possesses significant defensive works. More specifically, in the area which is most inaccessible and which allows the best visual control of the surroundings, there is a large stone enclosure wall which is roughly rectangular in shape and of considerable monumentality. The habitation areas are found on the hillsides and plateaus contiguous to the fortification, following the classic urban planning pattern of this culture, with artificial stone structures, terraced into the natural slopes serving as platforms for dwellings. Thirdly, the settlement is significant for its remarkable accumulation of wealth, archaeologically documented in extraordinary grave goods, which demonstrate the power of the different social groups that inhabited Cerro de la Encina. For the Argaric sequence of the site radiocarbon dates have indicated the existence of an uninterrupted period of occupation between 2000 and 1450 cal. BC (Aranda and Molina 2006).

Following the typical Argaric funerary ritual, the burials were located within the

settlement area under the floors of dwellings and consist of single, double or, more rarely, triple inhumations in cists, pits, urns and *covachas* (artificial chambers cut into the rock). In Cerro de la Encina *covachas* are the most characteristic, although burials in pits or cists built with slabs of stone have also been documented. The bodies always appear in a flexed position. The burial rite also involved the deposition of grave goods, the quantitative and qualitative variety of which have been used to establish differential access to wealth, and consequently a strongly stratified society (Chapman 2003; Lull and Estévez 1986; Molina 1983).

In total, the necropolis of Cerro de la Encina comprises twenty-two burials, seventeen of which have been excavated systematically. The Cerro de la Encina necropolis can be characterised by the occurrence of dramatic differences among the funerary grave goods, which suggest a marked social stratification and therefore a clearly differentiated access to manufactured goods. The analysis of the distribution of tombs in the settlement has allowed us to determine a clear spatial structure based on the social identity of the individuals in two different areas. In one of them, nine burials have been identified. The fact that all grave goods are of considerable wealth would suggest that this part of the settlement corresponded to one of the residential areas for social elites. The funerary record of the other sector is radically different. Although few burials have been excavated, there is clear evidence to suggest that this area was inhabited by people of a low, or very low, social status. This form of organisation would imply that, at least in Cerro de la Encina, it is social status that gives shape to the spatial arrangement of the individuals and that nuclear families are responsible not only for the burials, but also for the degree of wealth of the grave goods. Social identity, both horizontal (social class) and transverse (gender and age), is acquired, in a strict sense, in the framework of the nuclear family (Aranda and Molina 2006; Aranda *et al.* 2008a).

The Bronze Age Site of Motilla del Azuer (Daimiel, Ciudad Real)

The second of the case studies comes from the Bronze Age settlement of Motilla del Azuer in the La Mancha area (see Figure 1). This region is located in the southern part of the central area of the Iberian Peninsula. Traditionally, the communities of La Mancha have used the phreatic levels as the main source of water, since the climate is characterised by its continental nature with significant thermal oscillations, low rainfall and a lack of permanent watercourses in large areas of the region. Hence, the scarcity of water is mitigated by swamp areas and permanent or seasonal lagoons, and especially by the importance of a large aquifer, one of the most important in the Iberian Peninsula. All these ecological characteristics of the La Mancha environment can be associated with a particular settlement pattern that differs considerably to those documented in other Bronze Age societies of the Iberian Peninsula. The Bronze Age societies of La Mancha developed a territorial organisation based on the occupation of the plain. A structured pattern of sites known as *motillas* were found throughout the low-lying areas of La Mancha. This type of settlement can be characterised by artificial mounds, which measured 4–10 m in height, produced by the destruction of complex fortifications with different lines of concentric stone walls. These settlements were characterised by their high density, distribution at regular intervals (one every 4–5 km), and location in places where the phreatic level is closest to the surface and the water has low salinity. All

these characteristics tend to imply major planning in the occupation of the territory in which water was the fundamental criterion in the relationship between these sites and the landscape. Together with the *motillas*, the most characteristic type of settlement of these societies, another two categories of sites have been identified – hilltops placed on the mountains that border the plain and small agricultural settlements. All these different types of sites were linked in a complex system marked by a high population density (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005).

The site of Motilla del Azuer is located a few kilometres from the town of Daimiel (Ciudad Real), on the left bank of the Azuer River. The site was characterised by a mound fortification measuring about 40 m in diameter with a central tower, two walled enclosures and a large patio located in the eastern area. A settlement area was documented surrounding the fortification. The necropolis, following a common pattern in most Bronze Age peninsular cultures, was situated inside the inhabited area (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005; Nájera *et al.* 2006).

The internal structure of the fortification shows an important degree of complexity due to the long-term use of the site (2200–1400 cal. BC). The fortification was organised from the beginning with different clearly defined spaces – a central tower with points of access located in narrow corridors, a large patio placed in the eastern area of the fortification that contained an impressive well, with a depth of more than 20 m, and two concentric enclosures separated by walls. The circular outer wall enclosed the fortification area. The tower is the central element of the fortification; all of the other defensive structures were organised around it. Quadrangular in shape, it is a construction of rubblework with walls measuring over 11 m high. Access to the tower was from ramps and doors located in narrow corridors that also enabled communication with other areas of the fortification. These corridors have impressive walls as well, measuring over 7 m in height and with evidence of having undergone several refurbishments. In the eastern side of the tower, the remains of a door, partly destroyed by the actions of clandestine activities, enabled access to its interior (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005).

The eastern side of the tower outlines one of the patio's borders, a large open area, trapezoidal in shape that almost totally occupies the eastern part of the fortification. Different access points to the inner area of the patio were documented. Inside this, a well was excavated by the inhabitants of the settlement by cutting into the natural terrace on which the site is located. The well first perforated the gravel deposits that corresponded to the terrace and then a limestone bank located just below until it reached the phreatic level. The well from the top of the tower to the bottom measured more than 20 m (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005).

In the western area, two large enclosures separated by defensive walls have been documented. The most important function of the two enclosures appears to have been the storage of cereals. Different storage systems have been documented in this area; rectangular structures built of stone and mud in the earliest times and containers made of pottery and esparto grass during the more recent phases. As a consequence of major fire incidents, organic material such as esparto and a substantial amount of carbonised cereals have been preserved in good condition. Narrow corridors, parallel to the outer wall, provide access to the fortification from the habitation area, thereby avoiding direct

entrance to the internal spaces. Several access points have been documented, some of which were extremely complex (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005).

The settlement area surrounds the fortification in a radius of approximately 50 m. The habitation area can be characterised by oval and rectangular dwellings, divided by walls into different rooms. Dwellings were built with stone foundations and mud walls associated with timber posts that in some cases appear carbonised. Their roofs were built with organic material waterproofed with mud and supported by posts. Inside the dwellings, different domestic activities have been identified, particularly storage areas, looms and hearths. Between the dwellings, open areas with a high concentration of pits, ovens, earth and rubbish dumps related to storage and production activities were common (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005).

As with other Bronze Age cultures of the Iberian Peninsula, the necropolis at El Azuer is located within the settlement area. Burials were normally placed under the floors of dwellings although in the later phases, at the same time that many changes in the use of space took place, several graves were documented in the peripheral areas of the fortification. Seventy-five burials have been excavated – some forty-nine adults and twenty-six children. The funerary ritual always involved individual inhumation in pits, occasionally covered with stonework or slabs. Nevertheless, some children were buried inside pottery vessels. The bodies always appear in a flexed position. Grave goods are scarce and not very representative, although some adults have been found buried with pottery vessels, and in some cases with copper daggers or awls (Aranda *et al.* 2008b; Molina *et al.* 2005; Nájera *et al.* 2006).

Learned Childhood: The Material Culture of Apprenticeship

Children use, and sometimes manufacture, three types of objects – artefacts made with a specific design only for playing, artefacts obtained from adults, and artefacts which imitate adults' objects but in a smaller size (Politis 1998, 10; Sánchez Romero 2004). Two examples of the latter will be considered for the above mentioned sites of Cerro de la Encina and Motilla del Azuer.

We must consider the characteristics of Argaric pottery. A great variety of shapes and types can be defined in Argaric pottery assemblages; one of the most characteristic sets of vessels can be identified by their carinated shapes and new and unknown shapes of ceramics also appear, such as a type of chalice-shaped pottery called *copa*; nevertheless, variation within each single group is very low. This means that a high degree of standardisation is clearly a key factor in pottery production. Regarding the morphological characteristics, standardisation has been documented in attributes related to the shape of vessel while variation has been evident in the properties linked to proportion (Aranda 2001; 2004).

In terms of the contextual characteristics of pottery assemblages, a difference between the vessels found in burials and those recovered from other archaeological contexts has been established. Some funerary wares appear to have similar technological and formal features to those recorded from domestic contexts; although the results imply that pottery recovered from graves is characteristically more standardised than that retrieved from settlements. As such, it would appear to be the case that there were some formal and technological patterns made exclusively for pottery used during funerary

rituals (Aranda 2001; 2004). A range of pottery forms and morphometrical tendencies appear specifically in grave goods, which clearly implies intentional behaviour in the selection of pottery used in funerary rites. Ceramic shapes such as *copas*, lenticular and biconical vessels, and specific metrical patterns of parabolic bowls, bottles and carinated wares are specially selected for ritual purposes. Furthermore, the following exclusive technological pattern for vessel shapes especially manufactured for burials has been found – thin walled vessels, with very little temper and intensively burnished surfaces, which provides the pottery with a metallic sheen. These vessels appear to have been fired at a low temperature of around 500°C and it is probable that they would have been unsuitable for use in domestic activities (Aranda 2004).

A high technological level can be found in every stage of pottery making. Differences found in the composition of ceramic pastes suggest considerable knowledge of the properties of raw materials and how they must be mixed, depending on the desired nature of the vessel (size, wall thickness, shape) and thus on its function. It was during the formation process that the skills of the potters must have reached their highest level. Changes in the direction of the vessels' contours are especially common – angles and convexities in the curvature of the wall give the pottery its complex morphology – and this means that the techniques used would inevitably have involved considerable care. Changes in direction are specially critical points in the process, since it is here that vessels can easily collapse or break after firing or during their period of use. To avoid these problems, pottery is normally made in different stages, separated by drying periods, so as to increase the strength of the already-formed portion to support a new section of fresh clay; the complexity of the manufacturing process, and the skills required, increase in proportion with the size and number of convexities in the vessel shape. Furthermore, although Argaric pottery is mainly undecorated, the surfaces are usually burnished, giving the vessels a higher quality degree of finish. Especially remarkable is the lustre attained in funerary ware, in which the metallic sheen on the ceramic surfaces was achieved by a greater investment of labour (Aranda 2004).

All of these features have allowed some researchers to conclude that Argaric pottery manufacture is characterised by limited production units, which generally go beyond the domestic sphere. In other words, the high degree of standardisation would involve a routine manufacturing process. This means that a few craftspeople would use selected resources and techniques in order to produce pottery with predetermined formal and technological attributes (Aranda 2001; 2004). To summarise, Argaric pottery has abundant variation in shapes and types, a high degree of standardisation, and a high technological level with evidence of a considerable knowledge about the nature of the raw materials as well as a complex manufacturing process.

Pottery vessels are not frequently recovered in the burials of Argaric children, but when they do appear they can be categorised into the following types – those similar in form and quality to vessels found in adults graves, and small ceramic vessels that resemble various ceramic pieces belonging to this culture, although with different formal and technical aspects – asymmetrical forms and no burnished surfaces. An excellent example of this case is a vessel recovered from Burial 22 at Cerro de la Encina (Figure 2). The burial comprised a cist with a double inhumation – one of the children (probably a girl aged 2 years ± 8 months) was found in a disarticulated condition in a corner



Figure 2: Burial 22 from Cerro de la Encina, Monachil, Granada (copyright – Gonzalo Aranda Jiménez).

of the cist.¹ This body appears to have been moved when a second child (probably a boy aged 3 years \pm 12 months) was buried there in a flexed position with a perfectly articulated necklace made of stone beads. The rest of the grave goods consisted of three pottery vessels – a parabolic bowl, an ovoid-shaped ware and a small carinated vessel (Figure 3). The latter pot (Figure 3, 18) had an asymmetrical form, no burnished surfaces, irregular and thick walls and was smaller in size than is usual for this carinated shape (Aranda *et al.* 2008a; Sánchez Romero 2004), in contrast to the other two wares included in the grave which were of normal size. Although we cannot assume that this vessel was made by either of the buried children, its formal characteristic and its poor quality links this ware, on one hand, to the process of learning about the technology of pottery manufacturing, as has been the case for other ceramic pieces found in domestic contexts (Figure 4); and, on the other hand, with items of material culture employed by children in different games and activities.

Psychological studies of cognitive development and motor skills have demonstrated that children pass through defined developmental levels. At each level, children are developmentally capable of only certain parts of the pottery formation process. Advancing skills are particularly necessary for certain construction and finishing techniques, vessel symmetry and form, rim angles, and vessel wall thickness. Elizabeth Bagwell (2002, 91), in her study about children manufacturing pots, argues that they are unlikely to begin making pots before the age of four years and they are only capable of making recognisable forms by the age of five years, with more confidence in this ability by nine years of age. In the case of the highly standardised pottery of the Argar Culture

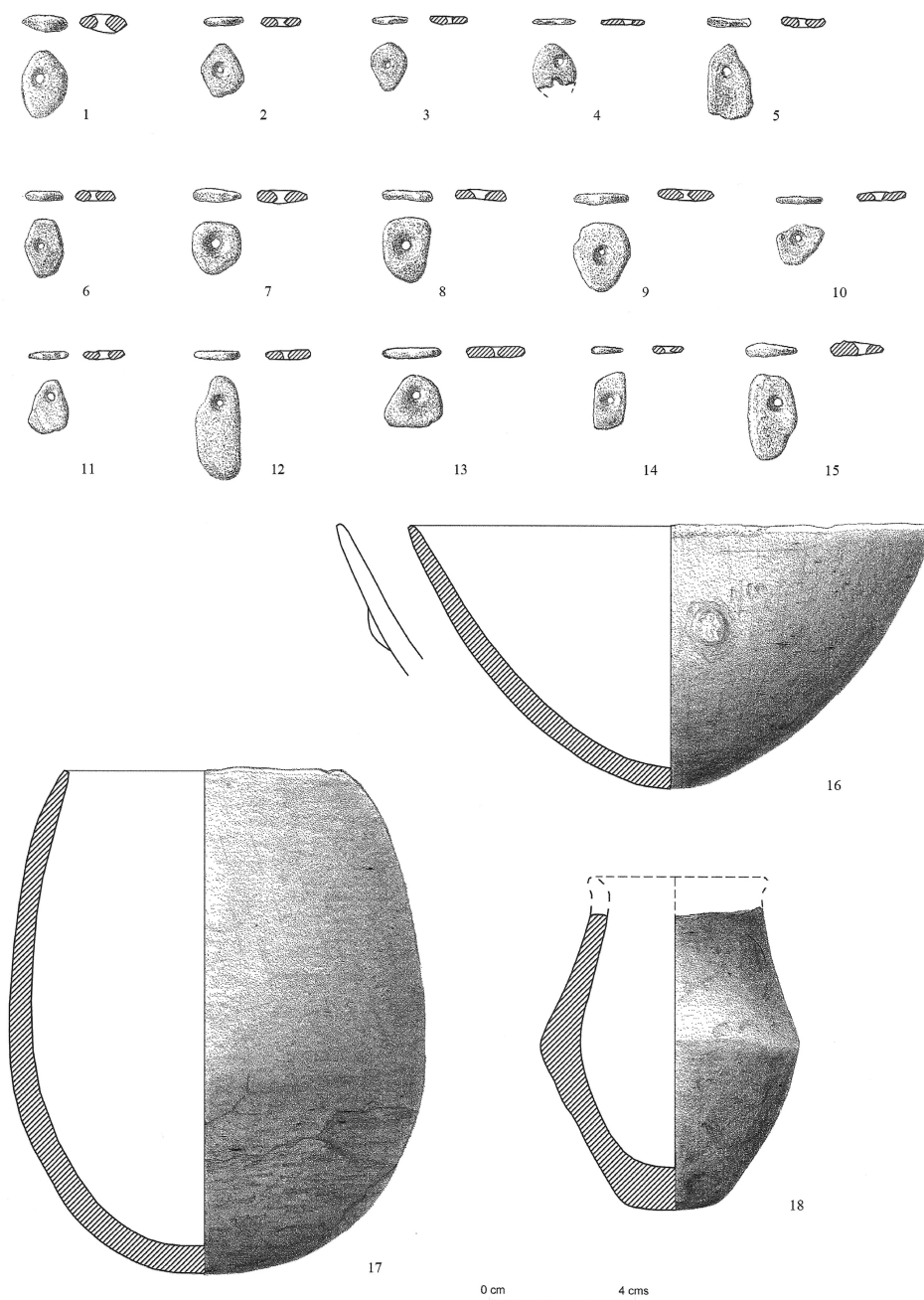


Figure 3: Grave goods recovered from Burial 22, Cerro de la Encina, Monachil, Granada. 3.1–15 stone beads from a necklace made of stone beads, 3.16 parabolic bowl, 3.17 ovoid-shaped ware, 3.18 small carinated vessel (after Aranda et al. 2008a).

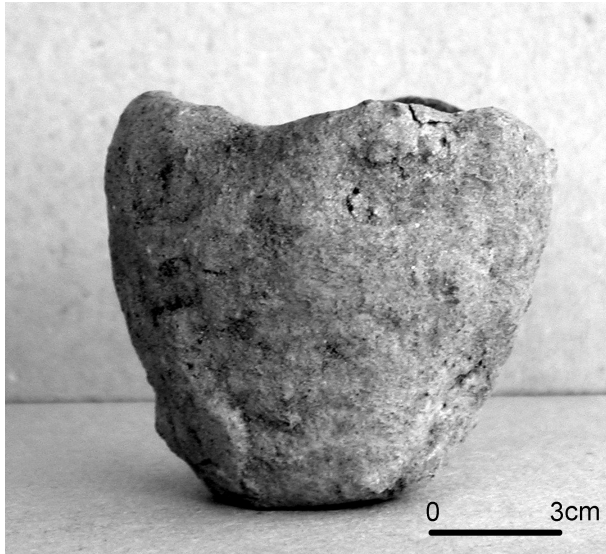


Figure 4: A small ceramic vessel found in a domestic context from the site of Cerro de la Encina, Monachil, Granada (copyright – Gonzalo Aranda Jiménez).

the characteristics of the pottery vessels found in the burials of children, with their asymmetrical forms and lack of burnished surfaces, are consistent with the processes of skills acquisition and compatible with the production of ceramics among full-time craft specialists. Among such specialists, children are often brought into pottery production at an early age through learning frameworks that include observation and imitation, verbal instruction, hands-on demonstration and self-teaching (Crown 2002, 108–9).

On the other hand we can analyse an example from Motilla del Azuer. Our knowledge of pottery production in the Bronze Age of the La Mancha area is more limited than that of the Argar Culture. In general terms, it can be said that evidence of a non-standardised domestic pottery production, with standardisation only of certain shapes with a very concrete function such as storage vessels, was present at Motilla del Azuer. Hence, the appearance of a child (probably a boy around 8–9 years old) with grave goods that comprised, among other elements, a ceramic carinated vessel (Figure 5.1), a miniature spool (Figure 5.2) and three miniature ceramic vessels (Figure 5.3–5), must be regarded with interest. We can again observe the characteristics discussed above for the small carinated vessel recovered from Burial 22 at Cerro de la Encina regarding asymmetry and form, rim angles and vessel wall thickness (Najera *et al.* 2006). The miniature pottery vessels recovered from this grave must be considered as artefacts used not only for play but as models that could be used in the learning process of both pottery manufacture and food processing (Kamp 2001, 428).

Lived Bodies: The Representation of Identity Through Ornament

On the other hand, one must consider body and the embodiment of gender and age identities. Gender is a culturally constructed process, involving social practices that deal directly with the body. Obviously, one's vision and conception today about

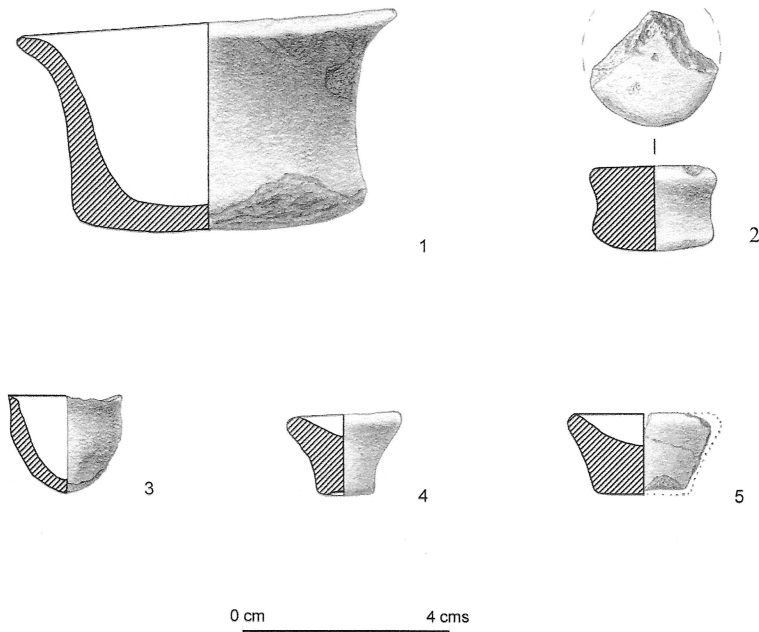


Figure 5: Grave goods recovered from Burial 39 at Motilla del Azuer, Ciudad Real (after Najera et al. 2006). 5.1 ceramic carinated vessel, 5.2 miniature spoon, 5.3–5 three miniature ceramic vessels.

what the body means is probably much different from what it was in earlier times, because of the concept of individualisation, but body treatment has been used for a long time as a way of manifesting different identities through time (Blom 2005; Joyce 2005; Schildkrout 2004). Children's bodies are not only material but representational entities, and can act both as a constraint of the social construction of childhood and as a vehicle for the manifestation of identity. Body is experienced and lived, and hence one needs to document and analyse how the body is interpreted by different actors in different social and cultural contexts, taking into account that it changes through processes that are simultaneously biological and social (Prout 1999, 4–5). Prendergast (1992, 1) has made the point:

The issue of embodiment as a cultural process surfaces most poignantly at key points in the life cycle: the trajectory of the body is given symbolic and moral value: bodily forms are paradigmatic of social transition ... Each stage requires that we adjust to and attend to our body, or that of others, in an appropriate and special way

This process of gender and age embodiment can be observed through the modification of bones or through the use of dress, hair style and ornamental objects and the different levels of embodiment construction, combination and composition (Joyce 2005; Sørensen 1997, 98). These practices generate codes that can be read by the rest of the social group

to transmit social categories, identities or changes in status; appearance is a direct visual experience (Sørensen 1997, 93) and this ability to communicate without verbal contact is useful for the archaeologist. Children's bodies were used as a raw material by adult authorities that carried out their own regimes of bodily control (Joyce 2000).

In a recent paper, an example of the gendered life course of children from the Argaric necropolis of Cerro de la Encina, Monachil, Granada, has been demonstrated through a series of gradual changes in the nature of grave goods. The identity of children was defined through the ornamental objects that appear in the grave goods of their tombs (Figure 3.1–15). Their identities changed as these individuals progressed through their life courses (Sánchez Romero 2008). The intimate relationship of elements of costume with the person's body emphasises the significance of these objects. In contrast to the artefacts deposited around the body in contact with the margins of the grave, the positioning of these dress objects seems to stress the personal nature and importance of individual age-gender identity. The link between the body and the object becomes stronger as each is converted into part of the other (Sofaer Derevenski 2000).

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 initial years of life. Although it is still very difficult to determine the sex of a child, the profusion of ornamental elements suggests a classification tied more to age than to gender – a trend that probably began to change as the reproductive cycles of both women and men changed – and to the type of work that each individual undertook. The most significant fact is the progressive introduction of metal implements as age increases, culminating in the acquisition of daggers and awls by the oldest age group (from seven years old) (Sánchez Romero 2008).

As has been mentioned earlier, objects placed on the body are crucial to understanding the social identity of children, because they are gifts that maintain an unbreakable attachment to the people who made and transacted them in the past (Gosden and Marshall 1999). In Argaric societies, bracelets, finger rings and earrings are acquired at a very young age. At the time of rapid physiological change, the spiral form of the arm ring permits its gradual adjustment to this development; it can be easily loosened or tightened by changing the diameter of the spiral. And, the open spiral design enables the ring to be removed. Sørensen (1997, 104) points out that the removability of an object is an important characteristic because it implies a physical relationship between the person and the object through the actions of placement and withdrawal. Thus, physiological changes and their cultural understanding become key points in the life course as 'the trajectory of the body is given symbolic and moral value' (Prendergast 1992, 1).

If one considers the characteristics of grave goods in adult burials, a clear gendered association can be seen. Awls and diadems are found exclusively in female tombs; while sword and halberds are male grave goods. Awls are the only tool related to daily activities found exclusively in the tombs of women. In the absence of trace analyses, and on the basis of ethnographic and textual evidence, it is presumed that this item could have been used in a variety of day-to-day activities such as leather and wood working, textiles and basketry, and the maintenance and reparation of certain objects (Aranda *et al.* forthcoming; Montón 2007). Association between awls and female tombs

in Argaric societies has been noticed since the beginning of research on this culture. This association persists throughout the entire Argaric period and is independent of other social categories (Aranda *et al.* forthcoming; Lull and Estévez 1986; Lull *et al.* 2004; Siret and Siret 1890).

The awl is the only object associated exclusively with a particular sex that is also found in the burials of children (Aranda *et al.* forthcoming; Lull *et al.* 2004). Some researchers have suggested that such burials may be those of girls. Only one axe has been found in a child burial from the El Argar necropolis, and it must be considered to be an exception and a reflection of an established social practice (Lull *et al.* 2004).

The study of commensality practices developed as a part of the funerary ritual in these societies (Aranda and Esquivel 2006; 2007) contributes to the understanding of other aspects of the gendered behaviour of children in the funerary context of Argaric societies. The regular appearance of meat offerings in Argaric tombs enables one to ascertain that the slaughter and consumption of cattle and sheep or goats took place as a part of the commensality ritual. A portion of such meat, always belonging to a leg, was offered as a grave good and signified the symbolic performance of death in the ritual. The type of meat consumed in these rituals was linked to the social status of Argaric people. Cattle meat was associated with the highest social groups and goat or sheep meat with the lowest social levels. The ritual of commensality in Argaric societies contributed to maintaining the social solidarity while at the same time it legitimised and naturalised a clear situation of social asymmetry (Aranda and Esquivel 2007).

Analysis of the distribution pattern of meat offerings by age reveals that children up to twelve years of age are associated exclusively with ovicaprid (and not cattle) meat, even if the rest of their grave goods denote a higher status. Commensality is considered crucial to the development of modes of socialisation for girls and boys, and it was through this practice that they were involved with the world surrounding them. The use of ovicaprid meat as grave goods, regardless of social rank, must be interpreted as an element of adscription to a social group that has not yet acquired certain rights (Sánchez Romero *et al.* 2007).

Final Comments on Girls, Boys, Bodies and Objects and the Manifestation of a Gendered Life Course

Throughout this paper I have tried to explore the different dimensions of childhood from a local perspective and using material culture in order to find general guidelines that can help us to understand children in other societies. It is becoming clear that bodies and objects cannot be disaggregated into Cartesian dualities of object/thing and subjective/objective (Hurcombe 2007, 536), and new approaches to the material world of prehistoric societies, such as symmetrical archaeology, draws attention to a mutual arrangement and relationship; a consonance of 'past and present, individual and structure, person and artefact, biological form and cultural value' (Shanks 2007, 591).

Children from the Bronze Age societies of south-east Spain were immersed in the process of identity construction. Their bodies and actions were linked to determined objects throughout their life courses. What children in Bronze Age societies show is that objects and bodies are useful categories for analysing the lives of children. People

and objects cannot exist separately because people produce artefacts in order to create and maintain their own existence. Identities, such as gender or status, are created and maintained through actions, that include the processes of learning and socialisation, which display children's agency and the multiple dimensions of the relationship between children and materiality.

Two social mechanisms – learning and socialisation – and two specific types of material culture – pottery vessels and ornaments – have been chosen in order to understand the world of children. Both types of artefact and the actions associated with them act as metaphors that children and adults construct in order to connect children with the adult world.

If we consider the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the appearance of miniature ceramic pieces, such as those recovered from Burial 39 of Motilla del Azuer or from Burial 22 from Cerro de la Encina, in a funerary context is important because 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. The creation and use of miniature ceramic pieces, whether for play or for learning (aspects which are often inseparable), express the way in which children made sense of the activities they observed around them. In the two cases mentioned, whether the example of miniatures from the site of El Azuer or the potteries from Cerro de la Encina, the inferred associated activities refer to the acquisition of knowledge and skills and to the everyday context in which they are located.

On the other hand, as Rosemary Joyce has stated (2005, 152): 'Under the influence of phenomenological approaches, in the contemporary archaeology of embodiment ... the description of inert (often literally dead) bodies are being replaced by analysis of the production and experience of lived bodies, in which surface and interior are no longer separated'. If we apply this idea to the analysis of ornaments found in the grave goods from Cerro de la Encina, we can consider that the profusion of ornamental objects for the youngest children suggests a classification tied more to age and status than to gender. Hence, gender differences do not seem to be very significant in the initial years of life. Moreover, the analysis of meat offering as grave goods for children seems to agree with this assumption. This trend probably began to change as the reproductive cycles of both women and men changed. From that moment, the objects linked to girls and boys were related to the type of work that each individual undertook. Axes for boys and awls for girls appear more frequently among the oldest age group.

As has been said above, gender identity is configured through practices, discourses and symbolic representations, and through material and physical experiences. In the archaeological record of the Bronze Age societies in the southern Iberian Peninsula we can find evidence of practices such as learning and socialisation, discourses about gender, age and status identities, symbolic representation through the deposition of artefacts and bodies in the funerary context as well as information about material culture such as pottery vessels, tools and ornaments. All these occurrences give us clues about the variation in the definition of gender identities in these societies.

All these practices are related to children's experience of the world – with the ways in which boys and girls interacted with the surrounding world, with artefacts and with other people – and this is phenomenology. The materiality of the miniature

vessels from Motilla del Azuer links children with the idea of technology and the social organisation of production; the materiality of the stone bead necklace from Cerro de la Encina connect the child with his/her status or gender identity. Through material culture, one can recognise how children construct their identities, how they consider themselves and how they are regarded by their societies.

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Note

- 1 The sex of the children was determined by Al-Oumaoui and Jiménez-Brobeil (2005) on the basis of the mandible and the ilium following the method of Schutkowski (1993).

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