

Susanne Moraw, Anna Kieburg (Hrsg.). *Mädchen im Altertum / Girls in Antiquity. Frauen - Forschung - Archäologie 11, 2014*. Münster: Waxmann. 436 Seiten, 68,00 Euro. ISBN 978-3-8309-3101-0.

Uroš Matić

The volume discussed here is a collection of papers in hardcover format with 429 pages of text and 6 additional pages with information about the contributors. It results from a conference organized by FemArc-Network<sup>1</sup> in cooperation with the German Archaeological Institute in October 2010 in Berlin. The papers of the volume are organised chronologically: Prehistory (Kerstin P. Hofmann, Julia K. Koch, Wolf-Rüdiger Teegen), Early Civilizations (Helga Vogel, Manuela Wangert, Stephanie L. Budin, Ute Günkel-Maschek), Greece (Cecilia Nobili, Claudia Merthen, Michaela Stark, Katrin Bernhardt, Caitlin C. Gillespie, Marion Meyer, Viktoria Räuchle, Jochen Griesbach, Olympia Bobou), Rome (Anne Weis, Eve D'Ambra, Peter Emberger, Kathrin Schade, Kathrin Kleibl, Günther Schörner), Late Antiquity (Claudia-Maria Behling, Susanna E. Fischer) and Early Middle Ages (Susanne Brather-Walter, Doris Gutmiedl-Schumann). They are written in German or English with every paper having abstracts in both languages. Bearing in mind the vast chronological and cultural span covered by this volume, a chronological and cultural order of the papers is reasonable and offers the reader a well-structured overview. The introduction (Susanne Moraw) of the volume sets a series of research questions and problems with which the authors of the volume dealt with, and gives a short overview of the papers. One of the crucial problems discussed in the introduction is the definition of the term 'girl'. Since reviewing each paper of the volume in detail requires archaeological, historical and philological knowledge of disciplines dealing with different and often not related societies, this review will rather concentrate on the theoretical and methodological aspects of the studies.

Archaeological research on identity in the last two decades insists on acknowledgment of the intersection of different categories such as age, gender, status, ethnicity, sexuality, class etc. (MESKELL 1999; MESKELL & JOYCE 2003). Gender archaeology has moved away from the chase for the women in the past towards exploring the difference between biological aspects of sex

difference and their cultural interpretations and finally towards the deconstruction of sex/gender binary system in seeing sex/gender as performative (GILCHRIST 1999). Although it was often insisted to intersect different categories it is exactly the intersection which was rarely explored in archaeology. Girls, as one of these intersections, are the theme of the volume, and, as it is stated in the introduction (MORAW, p. 13), there is no publication encompassing this problem until now and covering such a wide range of evidence at the same time.

Here emerges the first theoretical problem which has to be grasped. Namely, how do we understand age and gender and their intersection? It can be noticed that most of the authors in the volume who deal with the problem of the definition of girls (Kerstin P. Hofmann, Julia K. Koch, Marion Meyer), engage with age and gender as preceding the intersection and not as emerging from the intersection itself. Surprisingly, the osteoarchaeological contribution to the volume classifies female individuals of age groups Infants I-II, early and middle juvenile and young women under 25 years old under the term "girls". The explanation being the bad material background (Teegen, p. 62). The problem is that this grouping nevertheless does not allow a closer differentiation and neglects cultural specificity of intersection of age and gender stated in the volume's introduction. Additionally, the reference in the introduction to the one sex model in antiquity, argued by Thomas Laqueur (1990), is used to build a hypothesis that, "in the popular perception of their contemporaries, an ancient girl was *made* female, while a modern girl is *born* female" (S. Moraw, p. 16). Such a hypothesis is first and foremost problematic because of its generalising aspects, grouping not only all girls into premodern and modern, but also grouping different societies in the same manner. The second problem is the very antique/(pre-) modern binary opposition with no proper explanation behind it. Finally, that modern girls (and boys) are also made female (and male) cannot be more clearer only when one looks at the corrective procedures performed on intersex individuals after birth (BUTLER 2004, 4-6) or general modern heteronormative performativity of gender (Butler 1993). This is also well illustrated in the first paper of the volume (K. P. Hofmann, p. 29) with the example of the "Girl from Windeby" who was considered female before the DNA analyses showed that she was a 16 year old boy. Thus, the boy was made into a girl on the basis of the fragile

Received: 26. Febr. 2015  
accepted: 2. March 2015  
published online: 9. March 2014

Archäologische Informationen 38, 2015, 513-515

Rezensionen

body build. Several other authors in the volume stress the problem of proper sex determination of young individuals, criticising the uncritical sexing based solely on morphology (K. P. Hofmann, J. K. Koch). It is also argued in the volume that, in the case of early Middle Ages Merovingian girls, modern age differentiations do not differentiate a lot from the Merovingian (S. Brather-Walter). The children were in burial contexts gendered in the same pattern as adults (D. Gutschmidl Schüman, p. 426). Nevertheless, certain aspects of age-gender intersection and difference are not observable in mortuary data and should not be uncritically transferred to other cultural spheres.

One notable problem is that certain theoretical models are mentioned in introductions of the papers (e.g. life history concept of Joanna Sofaer [2006] in the paper of J. K. Koch) but are soon lost in the text, without being clear how they really affected the conducted research. Very problematic is also the use of the term “cross-gender” for individuals whose osteological sex does not match their socio-cultural gender (J. K. Koch, p. 48). This indicates the use of a heteronormative model as explanation and not testing this model on the data before providing conclusions (EUSEBIO 2014; JENSEN 2007; MATIĆ 2012). That the change of sex in myths can indicate the protective nature of a goddess and not solely the solution to a “gender not matching sex” problem is shown in the case of Iphis, a girl who had to act a boy (P. Emberger). One more uncritical modern transfer is the definition of disabilities of the “International Classification of Functioning, Disabilities and Health” used when referring to osteoarchaeological evidence for the past societies (W.-R. Teegen, p. 64-65).

Sometimes the argumentation behind certain conclusions is not clear. The fact that a girl was pregnant and buried does not unquestionably indicate that she was married (contra W.-R. TEEGEN, p. 69). Also, that bronze weapons found in graves of adult men are missing in the graves of boys in the Early Bronze Age necropolis Mokrin (Serbia) does not necessarily mean that boys were not gendered and were girls, because they were buried with artefacts appearing in graves of adult females (contra J. K. Koch, p. 44). One other possible explanation for such a distribution of bronze weaponry could be scarcity.

It is no wonder that the papers offering more detailed insight into different cultural age-gender divisions, orderings and *rites de passage* are those dealing with textual and/or iconographic evidence and not with osteoarchaeological evidence or other forms of material culture.

Indeed, the majority of the papers in the volume deal with visual representations of girls and the problems of recognising girls in visual representations. Sometimes the girls are missed because the women are looked for, as is the case with interpretations of Minoan figural art (S. L. Budin, p. 106). The knowledge of iconography is of paramount importance for proper understanding of certain images. This is nicely shown on the example of the attestation of girls in tombs of men from Old to New Kingdom Egypt where femininity of girls is used by their fathers to grant themselves regeneration. Given that girls could not grant regeneration to women they in some cases depicted themselves as girls to achieve it (M. Wangert, p. 97-98). Iconographic approach showed itself fruitful in investigating goddesses without childhood in ancient Greece. Here it is shown that the female divinities are not depicted solely as girls but rather having some masculine elements too, because of the negative association of girlhood in polis society (M. Stark). That adults can be represented as childlike in order to diminish their status or to change their gender is well illustrated by the image of the slave girls in Classical Athens (V. Rächle, p. 247). Sometimes girls are depicted in activities in which they are usually either not expected or not depicted, as in the case of the sarcophagus of Octavia Paulina. Here fighting sports are depicted in order to show *virtues* of the deceased, and not the activities which she probably never conducted (K. Schade, p. 338-339). One problem which should be considered is the use of later, well known iconographic evidence, for the interpretation of the earlier evidence, where the interpretation of later evidence is transferred in the past by simple analogy. This is the case with the study of girls in lamentation on Greek vase paintings from 8th to 5th century B.C used to interpret some imagery from 14th-13th century B.C (C. Merthen).

That girlhood can be an especially dangerous period in the life of women is shown in the study of girls in the Greek abduction scene from 6th to 4th century B.C. (K. Bernhardt) as well as in the case of Medea as a nymph having indeterminate cultural status with its own specific disadvantages on the one side, but also power to act on the other (C. C. Gillespie).

One excellent study of the active role of material culture in performance of gender and the construction of girlhood and womanhood is offered in the investigation of toys in Greece from 5th century B.C. to Late Antiquity. Change of future ideals also affected the change of play

(J. Griesbach). Dolls in graves of girls could have signified that they died unmarried (E. D'Ambra, p. 319). Changes of conceptions regarding girlhood with the advent of christianity (S. E. Fischer) are also reflected in visual culture (C.-M. Behling).

The role of girls in religious rituals, festivities, processions and performances is studied by several authors dealing with Late Bronze Age Akrotiri, Thera (U. Günkel-Maschek), Sparta (C. Nobili), Greek sanctuaries at Messene, Cyrene and Eleusis (O. Bobou), sanctuary at Latin Lavinium (A. Weis), Graeco-Egyptian cult of Isis (K. Kleibl) and province of Africa (G. Schörner).

Several authors point to the scarcity of sources (H. Vogel, E. D'Ambra) and their visibility depending on the model applied to the studied material (S. L. Budin). Namely, the girls are there when they are looked for, which brings us to the theoretical problem of the appropriation of the concept of a girl before the study itself is conducted.

Finally, the variety of case studies, the wide chronological and cultural frame, together with the different approaches to girls in antiquity, definitely justifies the statement that the volume is a pioneer project aiming to set some foundations and to develop the discussion on this theme further. The research problems exemplified in this review also aim to enhance this discussion further, both for the authors and the readers of this highly recommended and exciting new volume.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> "FemArc - Netzwerk archäologisch arbeitender Frauen e.V." is a work group of German archaeologists with gender as research focus founded in May 1991 (<http://www.femarc.de/en/> [25.02.2015]). The members have organized several conferences and edited several volumes on gender archaeology. Some of the members are founders of "Archaeology and Gender in Europe", a work group of the European Association of Archaeologists (<http://www.archaeology-gender-europe.org/> [25.02.2015]).

## References

- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Eusebio, E. M. (2014). ¿Es el sexo al género lo que la naturaleza a la cultura? Una aproximación queer para el análisis arqueológico. *ArqueoWeb* 15, 248-269.
- Gilchrist, R. (1999). *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past*. London: Routledge.
- Jensen, B. (2007). Queer Bedfellows: Gender Ambiguity, Shamans, Hijras, "Berdache" and the Problems of Using Ethnographic Record. In P. Jensen, S. Sindbæk & H. Vandkilde (eds.). *IX Nordic TAG, May 2007, Globalization, identity, material culture and archaeology* (p. 25-32). Århus: Århus Universitet.
- Laqueur, T. W. (1990). *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Matić, U. (2012). To queer or not to queer? That is the question: Sex/gender, prestige and burial no. 10 on the Mokrin necropolis. *Dacia* LVI, 169-185.
- Meskel, L. M. (1999). *Archaeologies of Social Lives: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Meskel, L. M. & Joyce, R. A. (2003). *Embodied Lives. Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sofaer, J. R. (2006). *The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Uroš Matić, Ph.D candidate  
Institut für Ägyptologie und Koptologie  
Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster  
urosomatic@uni-muenster.de

