

The Cultural Construction of Childhood in Scandinavia, 3500 BC – 1350 AD

Stig Welinder

A set of Swedish and Norwegian burial-grounds and churchyards from the Neolithic to the Early Middle Ages (3500 BC – 1350 AD) is analysed as concerns children's graves. Patterns of burial rituals corresponding to various concepts of childhood are constructed. Childhood is looked upon as a cultural construction independent of time and space. The basic growth process from infancy to adulthood is fundamental to the concept of childhood in all societies, but its transformation into burial ritual, material culture, symbols, and ideology is varied.

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All humans have been children. In many places around the world today a third or more of the living human population consists of children. During prehistoric time that was probably the case everywhere.

The Swedish census from the 1750s is one of the world's oldest, fairly accurate, population statistics (Hofsten 1986). During that time 105 boys were born for every 100 girls. Out of 1000 newborn children, 194 girls and 214 boys died, while still in early infancy. Nevertheless, of the living population 33% was younger than 15 years. The basis of this was a high birth rate. The average number of births per female was 4.8 children.

The picture may have been about the same during prehistoric time, although marriage patterns are known to have changed during the Middle Ages (Benedictow 1993), and little is known before that. Remarkably little is known about all these prehistoric children.

THE HISTORICAL DEBATE

During the 1960s and 1970s Philip Ariès' view that parents did not show affection and love

for their children and did not take much care of them before the age of about seven years prior to the 16th and 17th centuries, provoked debate. The reasons, according to Philip Ariès, were the high number of children and the high infant death rate (Ariès 1960). Emotional ties to children did not pay until the children had passed the first risky years of childhood. Actually, childhood did not exist in the modern sense. Already at the age of about seven the children behaved and took part in various work tasks like adults.

Philip Ariès was accused of having generalised from too small a data base as concerns time and space and social class. French 17th century oil paintings of miniature persons dressed like adults do not present the contemporaneous view of children. They conceptualise adults in becoming. The absence of an explicit concept of childhood did not mean that children were badly treated and regarded without affection (e.g. Pollock 1983).

In the pre-industrial Scandinavian society (Hagberg 1949; Wikman 1949) as well as in most societies around the world (van Gennep

1960) individuals turned adult in a number of steps from birth and onwards. Now and then the steps were marked by rites of passage or festivities. These steps formed the process of bringing up the children, giving them knowledge, work tasks and responsibility. This observation will be of importance further on in the article.

The modern Western view of childhood was created towards the end of the 19th century, when the upper and middle classes decided they could afford not to benefit from their children's labour. A period of childhood and adolescence defined by upbringing, education and culture became a norm, which during the 20th century spread to all classes (Bjurman 1981; Borgnakke 1981; Ohlander 1993). People that grew up during the 1930s and 1940s tell about the importance of getting a job and getting married. People that grew up during the 1960s and 1970s tell about pop music, fashion, films for adults only, and the importance of getting a driver's license (Gillis 1974; Olsson 1981; Andersson 1985; Henriksson 1991).

Modern research stresses the variation in the views of children in various societies throughout history. Certainly also the lives lived by children were different within one and the same society. In Sweden, for example, during the last decades death rates have been higher among boys, children in single-parent families, children in urban areas, and children with parents born abroad (Österberg 1996).

THE ACHAEOLOGICAL DEBATE

During the 1980s Scandinavian archaeology stressed the conspicuous lack of archaeological research on children and a conspicuous lack of data on prehistoric children. Typical headlines are: "Where have all the children gone?" (Linderöth 1990), "The Stone Age children – can we see them?" (Sandberg 1993), and "Did the Viking Berserk have any children?" (Linder 1995).

The basis of these views was, of course, data sets like the Early Medieval churchyard of Västerhus (Tab. 1, population no. 26) with

51% children younger than 7 years and 57% younger than 14 years (Fig. 1). At most prehistoric burial-grounds the percentages were considerably lower. Demographic research suggested there should be typically 30–60% children (Welinder 1979; Sellevold 1989). They were simply not there.

Today the above statements do not hold

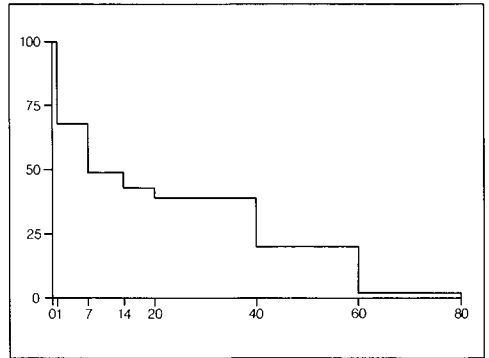


Fig. 1. The survival pattern of population no.26 Västerhus (for a more sophisticated version, see Siven 1991 a, b).

true. A host of articles on children has emerged, most of them seminar papers and popular reading, which will not be referred to here (cf. Johnsen & Welinder 1995), all of them published in the Scandinavian languages. The articles by Grete Lillehammer, already classic in their field, opened the sluice-gate (1986, 1989). She summarised almost all the concepts to be used in the following pages. Noteworthy is the distinction between the calendar age of a child, possibly to be defined from bone data, i.e. the child's biological age, and the social or cultural age of the child, hopefully reconstructable from burial rituals. The parallel to the sex-gender distinction is obvious, and no doubt the archaeological research on childhood during the 1990s has had gender archaeology as its prerequisite.

The deficit in children's graves may be approached from at least three different angles:

- (1) What happened between the points of

time of death and burial? Were the children's bodies disposed of in ways not recorded during routine burial-ground archaeology?

(2) What happened between the points of time of burial and excavation? Did the small and fragile children's skeletons, whether cremated or not, totally disappear due to biological and soil-chemical processes?

(3) What takes place during excavation and laboratory analysis? Are archaeologists uninterested in children? Do archaeologists excavate and analyse data with blinkers on?

In addition to these questions, it is well worth reconsidering the question of whether children's graves actually are too few. Our data set suggests the opposite.

THE DATA SET

Our data set consists of 26 different populations of graves corresponding to one feature, one burial-ground, several burial-grounds, all the burials in a province, or all burials in Sweden from a defined period (Fig. 2, Tab. 1). We believe this to be a fair sample of burial-data from the Swedish Neolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. A few Early Medieval populations are included (population nos. 23, 26 and, dependent on definition, nos. 24–25). The latter do not form a statistically, or in any other respect, representative sample.

From the Neolithic (population nos. 1–2) few other children's graves are known and published in detail. From the Bronze Age (population no. 4) close to all children's graves from Periods III–VI are included in the populations. At least that is the intention. Population no. 5 is a subset of population no. 4.

From the Iron Age the sample is somewhat haphazardly constructed. Some typical and some spectacular burial-grounds from various parts of Sweden are included, in addition to one Norwegian burial-ground (population no. 13). The intention is to show various kinds of burial rituals as concerns children's graves, and thus perhaps various views of childhood. Another intention is to contradict the above taphonomic points. There is no notable lack of

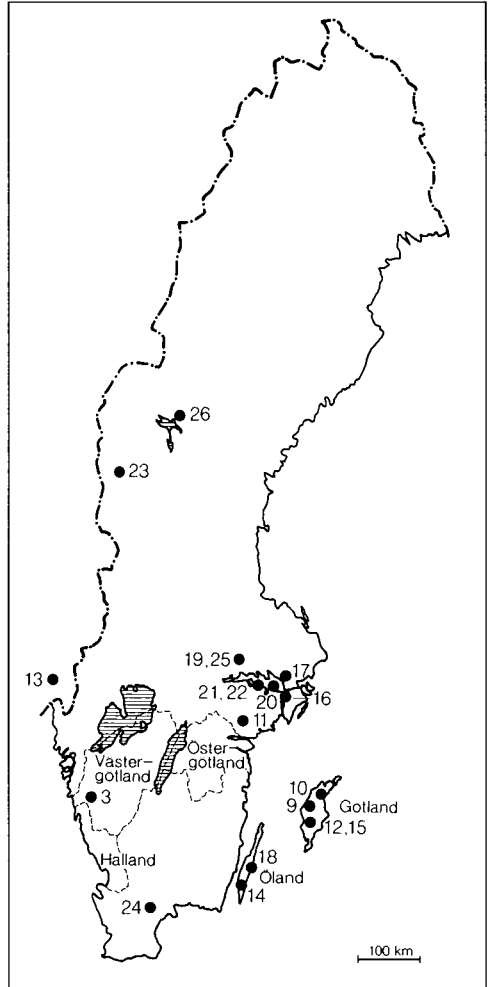


Fig. 2. The data set (cf. Tab. 1).

children's graves, when all kinds of burials are included in the analysis.

STARTING POINTS

The most obvious quality of the populations in the data set is the inherent variation. The differences in frequency and appearance among the various burial-grounds are noteworthy, even among those situated close to one another in time and space.

Nevertheless, the populations also have some characteristics in common. Among others, objects unique to children's graves are rare. To our knowledge they are non-existent

before the Viking Age. During that period small bronze jingle-bells were associated only with children and youths. They may have been toys or been attached to the dress. The latter is known for small children during the Middle Ages. Mirrors are also most often found in children's graves (Gräslund 1973). Objects especially designed for small persons are rare, although a few small dress-ornaments and weapons have been recorded together with infant skeletons at the Birka burial-ground (population no. 22). However, it is common that no or few grave-objects at all are associated with the buried children (e.g. Tabs. 2, 6).

On the other hand, many children seem to have been buried in special children's dress. When detectable from ornaments and dress-details in the graves, this may have been dress worn at ceremonies and festivities rather than everyday clothing, perhaps dress corresponding to traditional peasant costumes. Many of the children in the Early Iron Age graves on the island of Öland (population nos. 8, 14) had notably more beads attached to their dress or used as ornaments than most of the adults. Elsewise, it was common that dress-ornaments and dress-fittings were introduced into the dress at an age of about 5–15 years (Tabs. 5–8).

The overall impression is that the children have not been treated in ways very different from that of the adults. The children's graves are there, and they are fairly numerous. The children were not obviously neglected at interment, and we do not see any obvious reason to conclude that the children were neglected during their too often too short life-spans. This view cannot be argued in detail, but we want to quote the Indian poet Kalidasa (c. 380–450 AD), a contemporary to many of the children in our data set:

*With their teeth half-shown in courseless
laughter
and their efforts at talking so sweetly uncertain,
when children ask to sit on his lap
a man is blessed,
even by the dirt of their bodies.*

Cornelius Tacitus had little to write about children, although he too stressed that they "grew up naked and dirty" (*Germania* 20:1).

It is a paradox that childhood in prehistory has to be studied through populations of dead children. Thus, what we observe is not childhood but burial rituals designed for children. The two are not synonymous, but we see no other reasonable method of study for the moment. Accordingly, the patterns we will reveal in the following pages are not patterns of various kinds of childhood, but patterns constructed from various kinds of burial rituals. These patterns may correspond to different views of childhood. The minimum hope is that they correspond to various views of child-adult relations, which perhaps were not relations within the existing households and communities, but relations conceptualised in the burial-grounds, that is abstract and idealized relations to be openly displayed.

THE SELECTION OF CHILDREN TO BE BURIED

Of the Neolithic populations 15–20% are children's graves (Tab. 1). Of the Bronze Age populations, children's graves amount to about 20–30%. In the Iron Age burial-grounds of the kind commonly believed to have been used by the inhabitants of one or a few farms, the variation is 1–62% children's graves. Obviously not all deceased children have been archaeologically recorded.

Especially the Iron Age burial-grounds in the Stockholm area have few children's graves. Less than 10%, often about 5–6%, seems to be the common case (Tab. 3). Assuming a child mortality of about 30–60%, questions about missing children are justified. There are no data to explain this deficit in the Stockholm area.

The corresponding burial-grounds on Öland contain about 10–25% children's graves (Tab. 4), but in addition there are features with lots of infant skeletons. Bjärby (population no. 14) is a burial-ground, or possibly part of a much larger burial-ground, with 79% children's graves. At the Bredsåtra

3–4 burial-ground (population no. 8) children's graves compose c. 50%, but about half of the children had been buried in one and the same cairn. Another stone-setting, in the Långlöt burial-ground (population no. 18), contained fourteen infant skeletons.

The same kind of mass grave for small children is known from the island of Gotland and from West Sweden (population nos. 3, 9–10). Here tens of infant skeletons have been found in Bronze Age cairns. At least some of these children, most of them very small, were not buried during prehistoric time. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the cairns were used during the Middle Ages as an alternative to the Christian churchyard (Lindqvist 1981).

A feature at the Vallhagar settlement site is also worth mentioning. In the village's burial-ground there is only one child buried among the 140 adults. On the other hand, in a mound in the middle of the village there were two newborn children (Tab. 11) buried in the earth above a stonewall that contained an old man.

The examples demonstrate that the children were classified before interment for different methods of burial. Some were buried like the adults, some were buried in mass graves in features similar to those used for adults and occasionally together with a few adults, and some were buried in ways still not detected today. To find the norms used in this classification had better be a future task. At present we will only implicitly hint at some possibilities, when we discuss the following models of childhood.

STEPWISE CHILDHOOD

Within the Middle Neolithic Pitted Ware Culture of the island of Gotland (population no. 1) the children's graves can be classified into four groups according to age of the buried children (Tab. 5). The groups form discrete steps in a sequence of stages from birth to adulthood.

The newborn children were not buried at all in the same burial-ground close to the settlement site as the rest of the members of the settlement site group. From about the age

of 18 girls and boys were buried in equal numbers in the same way as adults, although the indigenous correspondence to adulthood may have been entered at the age of about 12–13, at least for the boys.

The age-related steps in the burial-ritual presumably correspond to steps in the growing-up process of the children. They turned adult in a series of steps. In life the children may have been subdivided into age-groups within the community of the settlement site. They had no calendar age but belonged to a stage along a defined series of more or less age-related stages.

The same kind of stepwise childhood may be inferred from the stepwise age-related burial-rituals reconstructed also for a number of other populations in our data set from all prehistoric periods, from the Neolithic (Tab. 12), the Late Bronze Age (Tab. 8), the Early Iron Age (Tab. 6), and the Saami Late Iron Age and Early Middle Ages (Tab. 7).

An interpretable stepwise childhood is displayed in the Early Medieval Västerhus churchyard (population no. 26). The steps are discernible from the position of the graves in relation to the church-building and the inherent gender segregation within the churchyard. In addition, the smallest children seldom got an individual grave (Tab. 14). Before confirmation, when still religiously ignorant and not subject to full punishment by law, the children got no individual graves. They were related to their female caretakers, in death as in life. After confirmation they were less dependent on their mothers, but still subordinate to their fathers within the household. Accordingly they were buried at the male side of the church. After becoming adults and assuming responsibility for themselves at the age of about 15, they were buried according to their gender (Tab. 15).

It is an open question whether or not the norm stating that children could not be buried inside the walls of the churchyard before baptism, was upheld or not. It has been suggested that the mass graves were the graves of these unfortunate children. The seemingly high

number of children, all younger than 4 years, in the Fjälkinge burial-ground (population no. 24) from the decades around 1000 AD have been suggested partly to be the unbaptised children belonging to a community of a nearby, although unknown, Christian churchyard (Helgesson 1992b). The find of an infant skeleton beneath the floor of a dwelling-house in the Early Medieval town of Lund is remarkable in the context (Roslund 1990).

The process of becoming an adult within the Early Medieval European Catholic society is merely a special case of the process of undergoing a series of rites of passage on the way from childhood to adulthood (van Gennep 1960). The steps may more or less correspond to the children's process of maturity as concerns motory, intellectual, and sexual ability. The latter quality stresses the process of growing into a gender. This will be discussed further on.

We presume that this kind of stepwise process of growing up is what we see in the prehistoric burial-grounds referred to in our above examples.

CHILDHOOD AS PART OF A LINEAR LIFE

The small number of children buried in the Saami Vivalen burial-ground (population no. 23) around the turn of the last millennium got new kinds of dress-ornaments and dress-fittings at certain ages (Tab. 7). A stepwise childhood may be inferred, where the first step at about the age of 5 meant being recognised as a person to be buried in the communal burial-ground.

The iron arrowheads recorded in two children's graves are reminiscent of the arrowheads, which were hung above the boys' cradles during historical time to make the boys skillful hunters. In the same way, the girls got the wings, feet, and beak of a ptarmigan to make them cleanly, well-behaved and good-natured (Drake 1979).

From the small number of graves at the Vivalen burial-ground it may be suggested that new steps were entered in the late teens and at a mature age (Tab. 7). The stepwise life

continued after childhood along a linear course. Status and, possibly, gender variation were embedded in the burial ritual, but this also seems to have been part of the maturing process. Life ran from birth, when small children were not fully recognised as the same kinds of persons as elder children and adults, to mature age and explicitly recognised prestige.

Life had a linear course from birth to death. Childhood was the start of a linear life-span. This is the most common view among Westerners of today.

CHILDHOOD AS PART OF A LIFE-CYCLE

Among non-Westerners it is a common conception that time forms a cycle, both the time of the World and the time of the human life, that is the human life is seen as a life-cycle with its start and end in the same point (Vinsrygg 1988). The metaphor of cyclical time is the annually recurring seasons or the rural annual cycle.

The Late Bronze Age childhood was perceived as a series of stages according to a stepwise childhood. In our reconstruction of the age-related burial ritual there are as many as five steps (Tab. 8). At about the age of 15 the grave-ritual was equal to that of the adults. This age may have defined the transition to adulthood. At about this age the burial ritual became gender-specific. This will be discussed more thoroughly further on.

In the full Late Bronze Age population (no. 4) the number of grave-objects increased towards a maximum among the deceased persons in their late teens (Tab. 8). After that we have no full statistics available. The sub-population from Halland (no. 5) suggests that the number of objects in the male graves continued to increase along the men's life-span (Tab. 9), while the number of objects in the female graves decreased notably. As concerns the male graves, weapons decreased in number from their maximum occurrence in the graves of men that died at an age of about 18–20 years.

The scanty data suggest that the female

burial ritual was linked to the female life-cycle mirroring pre-puberty, child-bearing age, and post-menopause age. Such a cyclic view of the female life in relation to female fertility is nicely demonstrated in the female burial ritual of the Early Iron Age burial-ground (population no. 13) of Ula, where sickles were buried together with women of child-bearing age, while young girls were given no grave-objects and old women were buried in display-dress (Tab. 10). The last-mentioned fact, however, hints at stressing status at mature age towards the end of a linear life. The male burial rituals of the two populations suggest no similar explicit conceptualisation of a cyclic view of life, although the occurrence of weapons in the Late Bronze Age graves suggests a climax in the middle of the men's life-span.

The fairly common view of life as a cycle means that childhood is the start of a run, which comes to an end at its startingpoint. Children are not newborn, they are reborn, having much or something in common with old people near the end of the cycle, or rather, they have something in common with those recently deceased, who are presumed to have been reborn as newborn children.

Westerners observe looks and idiosyncrasies in small children in an attempt to recognise parents and grandparents. We know that our findings are due to qualities transmitted between generations by DNA. Others know that lost generations are reborn in the newly-arrived children. They may give the children the names of dead ancestors, as do Swedes of today.

CHILDHOOD AS DISPLAY IN THE SOCIAL ARENA

Many children were buried, but in various ways. Some children, in some societies the majority, were buried in ways hard to detect today. The variation is remarkable between societies close in time and space as well as within one and the same society. One reason for this variation is that burial rituals were formed to stage occasions of ceremonies and

display of status and power. This is valid also for the children's graves.

ECONOMIC DIFFERENTIATION

The low percentage of children's graves in the Stockholm area is notable. Especially the burial-grounds at Helgö (population no. 21) are poor in children. There are just two children among 86 adults.

The character of the Helgö settlement site is disputed. It may have been one or a few farms, it may have been the living quarters of people associated with a manor. In any case, the site is characterised by its wealth of handicraft refuse, most conspicuously from metal-working, for example bronze-casting. The idea is that in a community specialising in handicraft, the children did not acquire the skill and status to be recognised as persons to be buried in the common burial-ground until about 15 years of age, while at least some did so at an earlier age in communities specialising in farming.

The above is not valid for the farming community at Vallhagar (population no. 12). At its burial-ground there is only one child among 140 adults (Tab. 11). At the nearby burial-ground of Styrmanberg (population no. 15), on the other hand, there are seven children among 21 adults. Six of the children had been put in the same grave as an adult.

The Styrmanberg site is a hill-fort. Some of the graves were inserted into the ruins of the stonewall of the hill-fort, others were mounds superimposing a house-foundation and a cattle-pen. Superficially the graves give a slovenly impression. They do not resemble the graves at the burial-grounds associated with the Gotlandic farms, such as the Vallhagar farm and burial-grounds. The landscape around the hill-fort is not good arable. It is a browsing and grazing area. This is stressed by the regular occurrence of bones of cattle, sheep, lambs, pigs, and dogs in the graves. Animal bones are rare in the Vallhagar burial-grounds.

In our view the population at the Styrmanberg burial-ground had lived and been

buried as cattle-herders outside the farming village. An economic system with several groups of people specialising in various subsistence tasks within a redistributive organisation comes to mind (Odner 1972). Among cattle-herders, children are useful at an early age in tending the animals.

In various kinds of societies with various economic specialisations the children mature into taking part in various tasks at a different pace. This may be one reason for children being buried together with the adults in the common burial-ground in some societies, in others not. The exceptions from this rule are many, one being the Gotlandic Middle Neolithic burial-grounds (population no. 1), where children were buried from about the age of 2–3 in the same place as the adults, while they were not regularly buried together with tools until about the age of 12–13 (Tab. 5).

INBORN STATUS

A classic debate concerns the idea that the existence of prehistoric hierarchical societies can be proved by the occurrence of children's graves with display grave-objects identical or similar to those in the graves of adults. The idea is that status was inborn and, thus, ascribed to children at birth. It is a reasonable idea that some of the variation among children's burial rituals can be explained by status variation among the children.

The Bjurhovda burial-ground (population no. 25) was used by the inhabitants of a wealthy farm for a few decades after 1000 AD. Both the deceased females and males form a ranked society (Tab. 13). A small number of women were cremated in dress with display-ornaments. Some of them wore the symbols of married housewives. Another small number of women wore dress with less striking ornaments. Most women had no dress-ornaments at all. The men were ranked as warriors. A small number of men were buried as mounted warriors with a lance and a charger. Most men were buried in plain dress with no dress-fittings (for the full argument, see Welinder 1990).

There are children buried with the symbols marking the positions all along the scale of rank. The small boys were not mounted warriors, but one infant boy was buried together with a spear and an axe that he was hardly able to lift. In their early teens the boys got their own charger and lance. One small girl was buried with a full display-set of ornaments, in fact one of the wealthiest in the burial-ground, while another small girl was buried together with one of the high-ranking housewives. Another small child, the gender of which cannot be suggested, was buried with no grave-objects at all.

At the upper half of the scale there are 42% children, at the lower half there are merely 5% (Tab. 13). It is close at hand to suggest that the total deficit in children's graves presented by the overall percentage, 19% (Tab. 1), consists of the children of the people of the farm that were not the mounted warriors and their wives. Some children were born to acquire these or similar positions, some were not. The former were buried in the burial-ground of the farm, the latter were not.

The Västerhus churchyard came into use at about the same time as the Bjurhovda burial-ground was deserted. Being a Christian churchyard all children, at least the baptised ones, were buried inside the sacred area, but some children were more equal than other children. They were buried in cists with metal fittings, some of them in prestigious positions close to the church-building. Most of them were boys, or at least buried at the southern, male side of the church.

The burial ritual of the Neolithic Battle Axe Culture was an exclusive tradition (Tab. 12). From about the age of 3–4 some children, presumably both girls and boys, were buried according to this ritual. Many of them were buried together with adults, a few were buried in graves of their own together with the same kinds of grave-objects as the adults. At the age of about 12 years some children, or perhaps young adults, were assigned prestigious objects like copperornaments and battleaxes. The latter is valid for a boy.

The children of the Battle Axe Culture were ranked in the same way as the adults. This is quite another view of children than that presented by the contemporaneous Gotlandic burial ritual discussed above.

In most societies adults are categorised according to wealth, status, rank, and other positions. The above examples suggest that the same was valid also for children in some prehistoric societies. The simplest idea is that they were categorised in accordance with their parents. How children were attributed to parents is, however, quite another problem, with the exception perhaps of the biological mother.

TO GROW INTO A GENDER

The osteological methods for sexing the skeletons of children that have not passed puberty are still uncertain. As concerns cremated bones there are, for all practical reasons, no methods at all. Thus, the children's gender has to be defined from the grave-objects in the children's graves without the, in fact, problematic test offered by sexing the skeletons. We have

seriated the children's graves in accordance with Gebühr 1992.

At the burial-grounds of the Viking Age town of Birka (population no. 22) 84 children's graves have been defined by the length of the graves. This not very accurate method is the only one available for the moment. It is worth trying because of the wealth of objects in many of the Birka graves and the presumably rigid gender patterns in the Viking Age burial ritual, for example as demonstrated by the Bjurhovda burial-ground above.

A group of 18 girls' graves is easily recognisable by the sets of dress-ornaments and beads. In addition there are keys, sickles, sewing-sets, and mirrors (Fig. 3). Another group of 18 graves contains weights and weight-like objects, penannular brooches, and arrowheads, but never any of the above girls' objects. Presumably these graves are boys' graves. Together these two groups amount to 43 % of the children's graves. The majority of the children's graves contains objects that are not gender-indicative, for example knives, pots, slag, and buttons.

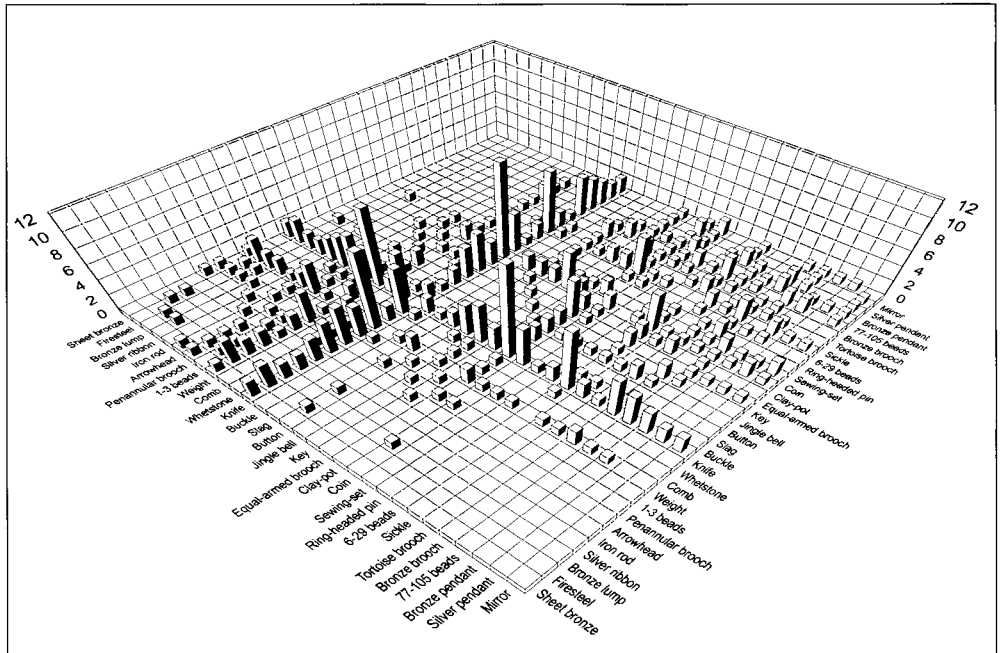


Fig. 3. Seriation of the children's graves at the Birka burial-grounds (population no. 22).

A group of boys seems to have been born to become merchants, while this position was only achieved by adult women. This may be a gender-characteristic of the early urban society of Birka.

We have applied the same seriation method also to the full population of Late Bronze Age children's graves (population no. 4) with its well-defined age-related burial ritual indicating a stepwise childhood (Tab. 8). However, the number of graves with a sufficient number of different types of objects is very small. All in all there are 22 graves and 11 types of objects, including four species of domestic animals, to be seriated. Five of these graves are osteologically sexed graves of juvenile persons.

Two groups of mutually exclusive types of objects were formed by the seriation process. When adding graves with only one group-characteristic object, an interpretation dependent on gender and age may be suggested (Tab 16). Some girls grew to become associated with the herds and the harvest at puberty, while some girls and most boys did not. The idea is in agreement with the above discussion of the Bronze Age female childhood as part of a cyclic life from birth to death to rebirth as a metaphor of the annual vegetational cycle.

Some boys of the Middle Neolithic Battle Axe Culture grew to become worthy of carrying a battle axe, others did not (Tab. 12). Within the contemporaneous Gotlandic hunting-gathering tribes, some boys were distinguished as seal-hunters when buried after the age of about 12–13 (Tab. 5), others were not. It looks as if some young men were honoured at death as being more men than others. There was a real man's world to enter for the cunning and brave among the boys. Some failed to reach it.

What kind of boys were buried in dress with bead-applications, elsewhere found only on the dress of girls after puberty and adult women, never among the adult men (Andersson *et al.* 1995)? In the old Scandinavian languages men that adopted the female sexual role in homosexual relations, or were generally

weak and cowardly, were denoted "argr" or "argr madr". In Medieval Latin they were "effeminate". This may be the background for a few men that were buried at the female side of the Västerhus church.

Children did not simply grow into adults as time went on. They had to learn how to behave as an adult according to the traditional norms of their society, and they had to learn to conform to accepted female and male norms, that is they had to adapt to a gender.

CHILDREN'S GRAVES AND CHILDREN ALIVE

All the children that figure in this article are dead and buried children. Today there simply are no concepts, methods, and data to study living prehistoric children. There certainly will be in the near future. The study of childhood in prehistory is an increasing field of interest among young archaeologists. Certainly some of them are conducting ethnoarchaeological studies of living children just now, and many of them are rethinking their own childhood in an attempt to remember what it was like to be a child, what they did, and what they did that left tracks possible to distinguish from those of adults.

Hopefully all these archaeologists will come to the same conclusion as we have as concerns the dead and buried children. Childhood is a cultural construct. There are patterns among the amazing variation of burials and burial-grounds. Probably the patterns discerned by us soon will be regarded as oversimplified generalisations, but we think that the view that there are patterns will hold. Various societies saw children in different ways, and we see the different ways as different burial rituals.

We do not think that there are patterns of evolutionary change from the Neolithic to the Early Middle Ages. There are likewise no simple correlations between economy or social structure on the one hand, and the conceptualisation of childhood on the other. But there is a basic pattern of children being dropped, totally helpless, by caring mothers and slowly

becoming more skilled at taking care of themselves and performing various tasks, finally to become those that take care of their own newborn children. This simple, perhaps self-evident, pattern is seen more or less in all our populations from the Neolithic to the Early Middle Ages. It was, however, turned into concepts, symbols, burial rituals, and material culture in various ways in various societies, sometimes stressing the very process of gradually becoming an adult, sometimes stressing the position of being born the child of wealthy and prestigious parents, sometimes stressing something quite else within an unlimited variation of human ways to culturally organise human interaction and childhood.

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TABLES

Tab. 1. *The data set.*

Population	Date	Children	Reference
1. MN Gotland	3500–2500 BC	c. 15 (24)	Andersson <i>et al.</i> 1995
2. The Battle Axe Culture	2800–2400 BC	c. 20 (13)	Andersson <i>et al.</i> 1995
3. Haralds Minne	1200–800 BC	69 (20)	Lindman & Strömberg 1993
4. LBA	1200–500 BC	c. 30 (c.120)	Sallander 1995
5. LBA Halland	1200–500 BC	19 (10)	Lundborg 1972
6. LBA & EIA Östergötland	1000 BC–400 AD	15–62 (c. 45)	Björkhager 1995
7. PRIA Västergötland	400 BC–100 AD	17–62 (301)	Lundin & Skoglund 1995
8. EIA Öland	400 BC –600 AD	48 (35)	Beskow Sjöberg 1987, Hagberg <i>et al.</i> 1991
9. Suderbys	1000–1 BC	?? (c. 30)	Sjöberg 1976
10. Stora Vikers	1000–1 BC	?? (c. 20)	Lindquist 1981
11. Fiskeby	1000 BC–1000 AD	15 (32)	Lundström 1965, 1970
12. Vallhagar	700 BC–700 AD	1 (1)	Stenberger 1955 a, b
13. Ula	100 BC–100 AD	20 (11)	Welinder 1989
14. Bjärby	1–200 AD	79 (77)	Schultze <i>et al.</i> 1991
15. Styrmansberg	1–200 AD	25 (7)	Stenberger 1955 a, b
16. Vårberg	1–600 AD	6 (4)	Ferenius 1971, Iregren 1972
17. Spånga	1–1000 AD	4–8 (14)	Biuw 1992, Sigvallius 1994
18. Långlöt	300–500 AD	c. 70 (23)	Johansson-Lundh & Rasch 1991
19. Hamre	400–700 AD	18 (5)	Welinder 1990
20. Lovö	500–1000 AD	9 (6)	Petré 1984
21. Helgö	700–1000 AD	3 (2)	Holmqvist <i>et al.</i> 1970, Sander 1990
22. Birka	750–950 AD	17 (84)	Gräslund 1980
23. Vivallen	900–1200 AD	45 (5)	Hallström 1944
24. Fjälkinge	950–1000 AD	62 (128)	Helgesson 1992a
25. Bjurhovda	1000–1050 AD	19 (8)	Welinder 1990
26. Västerhus	1000–1350 AD	57 (217)	Gejvall 1960

Comment:

Population nos. 2, 4 consist of all graves in Sweden, nos. 1, 5–8 of all graves in a single province, nos. 11–26 of the graves at 1–4 burial-grounds each, and nos. 3, 9–10 of a single feature each. The dates refer to the calibrated radiocarbon time-scale. The percentages of children's graves denote individuals younger than c. 15 years (infant, infans I–II). The intervals refer to minimum and maximum percentages among several burial-grounds. The numbers in brackets denote the total number of children.

Tab. 2. The percentage of children and adults according to number of grave-objects (AOT according to Hedeager 1978) at the burial-ground of Fiskeby (population no. 11).

AOT	Early Iron Age		Late Iron Age	
	Children	Adults	Children	Adults
0	79	40	75	6
1	21	39	25	15
2-5		20		42
6-9		1		29
10-13				8

Tab. 3. The percentage of children's graves at a selection of Iron Age burial-grounds in the vicinity of Stockholm (population nos. 16-17, 20-21).

	Children (%)	Total number of individuals
16. Vårberg	5	85
17. Spånga 156	6	88
157a	6	90
157b	8	12
158, 160, 162	4	82
20. Lovö, Viking Age	16	19
Vendel Period	5	56
21. Helgö	2	88

Comment:

Population no. 17 Spånga is subdivided into individual burial-grounds, and population no. 20 Lovö into periods.

Tab. 4. The percentage of children at the largest Early Iron Age burial-grounds on Öland (population nos. 8, 14, 18).

Population	Children (%)	Total no. of individuals
Common burial-grounds		
Population no. 8		
Bredsättra 3-4	23 (c. 50)	35 (c. 60)
Bredsättra 40	10	31
Gärdslösa 74	24	76
Algutsrum 13	19	16
Special populations		
14. Bjärby	79	97
18. Långlöt	c. 70	c. 35

Comment:

The numbers in brackets for Bredsättra 3-4 include one special feature with parts of c. 25 skeletons of children.

Tab. 5. The stepwise childhood during the Middle Neolithic on Gotland (population no. 1).

Start of age interval	Characteristics of graves (all of them inhumation graves)
0	Recognisable burials are close to non-existent
2–3	No or very few grave-objects No or few dress-ornaments
5–6	Tusks of boares are introduced
12–13	Axes, hunting and fishing gear, and other tools are introduced A new dress with numerous beads is introduced Few female graves
18–19 (until c. 20)	Equal number of female and male graves

Comment: For details, see Andersson *et al.* 1995:Tab. 1.

Tab. 6. The stepwise childhood during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in Östergötland (population no. 6).

Age interval (years)	Characteristics of graves (all of them cremation graves)
Infant (0–1)	The number of graves is small Miniature cinerary urns No grave-objects
Infans I (0–7)	No or few grave-objects
Infans II (5–14)	Metal dress-objects are introduced (e.g. needles and belt fittings)
Juvenilis (10–24)	No or few grave-objects. Metal objects are rare

Comment: For details, see Björkhager 1995:48–52.

Tab. 7. The stepwise childhood and adult life-span in the Saami population at Vivallen (population no. 23).

Age	Characteristics of graves (all of them inhumation graves)
0–5	No recognisable graves
5–10	Iron arrowheads A few metal dress-objects
12–15	New dress-ornaments are introduced, or a new kind of dress (e.g. beads, penannular brooches, finger-rings)
20–30	A division into graves with no objects and graves with the same objects as above (possibly females and males in both groups)
>35	All graves contain grave-objects. Some graves are richly furnished with exotic display-objects (possibly only males)

Comment: The total number of graves is small.

Tab. 8. The stepwise childhood during the Late Bronze Age (population nos. 4, 9–10).

Start of age interval	Characteristics of graves (Mostly cremation graves)
0	Few individual graves Double, triple and mass graves No grave-objects
1	No or few grave-objects
4–5	A few grave-objects
7–9	Tools and dress-ornaments as often as the adults, but a smaller number of various types
c. 14 (until c. 20–24)	As above. Razors and tweezers as often as the adults Weapons more often than the adults

Comment: For details, see Sallander 1995:40–43.

Tab. 9. The life-cycle during the Late Bronze Age in Halland (population no. 5).

Age interval	Number of objects per grave		
	Females	Males	Indet.
Infans I–II (0–14)			0.2
Juvenilis (14–20)	0	1.0	
Adultus (20–40)	1.2	1.5	
Maturus (40–60)	0.8	1.8	
Senilis (>60)	0.5	–	

Comment: The table is based on a small number of graves.

Tab. 10. The female life-cycle (number of graves) at the Early Iron Age burial-ground of Ula (population no. 13).

Object types	Infans I–II (0–14)	Juvenilis (14–20)	Adultus (20–40)	Maturus (40–60)	Senilis (>60)
Dress-ornaments				2	2
Sickles		2	2		1(?)
No objects	+	1	3		

Comment: From Welinder 1989:Tables 5–6.

Tab. 11. The children in relation to adults at the Early Iron Age Vallhagar burial-grounds and at the Styrmansberg hill-fort (population nos. 12, 15).

Types of graves	Styrmansberg	Vallhagar	
		Burial-grounds	Settlement site
Graves with a single child (1)	1	1	
Graves with only adults (1)	15	140	3
Double graves with one or two children and one adult (2)	6 (6)		1 (2)

Comment:

(1) = number of individuals, (2) = number of graves, number of children in brackets.

Tab. 12. The stepwise childhood in the Middle Neolithic Battle Axe Culture (population no. 2).

Start of age interval	Females	Males	Indet.
0	Recognisable graves are very few		
3–4	Generally the same grave-objects as adults Double graves together with an adult are common		
c. 12	Copper objects are introduced	Battle axes and copper objects are introduced	

Comment:

Most children's graves contain no or few objects. The same is valid for most adult graves.

Tab. 13. Status display at the Bjurhovda burial-ground (population no. 25).

Age	Females		Males		Total number of children
	Characteristics of graves	Number of individuals	Characteristics of graves	Number of individuals	
0-15	A full set of breast ornaments and a pendant with among others a needle case	1	The equipment of a mounted warrior	1	8
>15		4		2	
0-15	A full set of breast ornaments	2	A spear and an axe	1	
>15		1		0	
0-15	An occasional dress-ornament	2	Only belt-fittings	1	
>15		2		2	
No gender det.					
0-15	No or few objects, no gender-related objects			1	1
>15				c. 20	

Comment:

The gender heading is based on osteological analyses as concerns the adult individuals. For the children it is based either on the grave-object or the presence in a gendered adult grave. Individuals that cannot be unanimously labeled as concerns age are excluded. For details, see Welinder 1991.

Tab. 14. The stepwise childhood in the Early Medieval Västerhus churchyard (population no. 26).

Age intervals	Characteristics of graves	
0-1	Nearly all at the female side	Mass graves with 3-23 children at the female side A few individual graves, mostly at the male side
1-7	Predominantly at the female side	} Individual graves
7-14	Predominantly at the male side	
>14	Segregated according to sex	

Tab. 15. *The ideal Catholic childhood and the Västerhus churchyard (population no. 26).*

Start of age interval	Social status	Social responsibilities	Interpretation in relation to the Västerhus churchyard
0	Newborn	None	
<1	Baptism	Religiously ignorant Cannot distinguish the communion from an ordinary meal Dependent on its mother	Buried in the female part of the churchyard Mass graves
6–8	Confirmation	Subordinate to its father Not subject to full punishment according to law	Individual graves Predominantly in the male part of the churchyard
12–15	Adulthood	Allowed to make agreements Subject to full punishment according to law To be married	Buried totally in agreement with the adults

Comment: A simplified schedule, partly based on Nilsson 1989, 1994.

Tab. 16. *Late Bronze Age (population no. 4) gender-groups of types of objects.*

Grave-objects	Female	Male	Indet.		
	>10 yrs.	>10 yrs.	<5 yrs.	5-10 yrs.	>10 yrs.
Sickles, cattle, sheep/goat, pigs	3		1	1	5
Knives, armlets, rings, lambs	2	1	4	4	8

Comment: The table is based on osteological sex-determinations. Figures denote number of individuals.

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