

Motherhood in archaeology & matricentric feminism



This on-line round-table will address the difficult relationship between motherhood and feminism in archaeological practice. It aims to gather voices on motherhood as an identity concept and as lived academic practice. The workshop will consist of two parts:

1. Current research on motherhood in archaeology

This section will showcase current projects, books and articles on motherhood in the past in no more than five minutes per speaker. All aspects of motherhood, mother-child relationships and mothering in the past are invited. The discussion will focus on current research themes and new methodological approaches to address motherhood in the past.

2. Feminist struggles with motherhood

Not all women in archaeology are mothers – do mothers need a feminism of their own? How can we avoid a mothers vs. non-mothers split in feminism, if life-ways and problems might be quite different? How do gender equality measures ensure fair treatment of mothers/ persons with/without caring responsibilities? This part of the round-table will discuss combining motherhood and careers in archaeology, from the marginalization of new mothers in research to support measures and recommendations for mothers in academia.

To register

Please e-mail Katharina Rebay-Salisbury (Katharina.Rebay-Salisbury@oeaw.ac.at) to register. You will be sent a ZOOM link after registration.

This workshop is connected to the project "The value of mothers to society: responses to motherhood and child rearing practices in prehistoric Europe", which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 676828).



Programme

1. Welcome & introduction: current research on motherhood in archaeology

2. The value of mothers to society: towards a (bio-)archaeology of motherhood

Katharina Rebay-Salisbury

Analysing the link between reproduction and women's social status, the ERC project "The value of mothers to society" explored social responses to pregnancy, birth and childrearing from the late Neolithic to Iron Age (c. 3000-15 BC) through case studies in Central Europe. We integrated osteology, ancient DNA, protein and isotope analyses, histology, and organic residue analysis, as well as various modelling and imaging approaches to explore lifeways of mothers and their children in prehistory.

3. New theoretical directions in bioarchaeology: the maternal-infant nexus and care

Siân Halcrow

There has been a recent surge of interest in modelling the social implications of care provision for people with serious physical disabilities in bioarchaeology. However, there is a general lack of acknowledgment of infant and child care in bioarchaeology, despite the significant labour and resources that are required, and the health implications this has within societies. This paper presents ways bioarchaeology may draw on research developments from other fields to advance a more holistic understanding of the evolutionary, social and health significance of infant and children care in the past.

4. Births, mothers and babies: prehistoric fertility in the Balkans between 10000-5000 BC

Sofija Stefanovic

ERC BIRTH project discovered biological evidence of the increased physiological stress of the Neolithic females compared to Mesolithic ones and that Neolithic pelvises were more obstetrically efficient. Our simulation model provided demographic reconstruction of the Neolithisation of Europe at its very beginning, from 6200 BC and suggested a high fertility rate, probably 8-10 children per female and high speeds of the Neolithic expansion across the Balkans (1.5-2 km/year on average). We found that the appearance of new weaning food for babies was important not only for female shorter lactation but also contributed to new organization of baby care from the Neolithic.

5. Contributions of archaeogenetics to motherhood research

Zuzana Hofmanová

Recently, and much more in near future, archaeogenetics is turning to investigate complete cemeteries uncovering close biological relatedness among individuals. Careful consideration of how to use that information in investigation of kinship will be urgently needed. However, this also brings many opportunities. Notably, the ability to unambiguously detect pairs of a biological mother and her child will open new avenues of research. It would be a shame if the main narratives were aimed at overreaching quantitative measurements only (like naively estimating fertility by counting detected offspring as already happens), when more productive lines of thought could shape the direction.

6. Of fertility and figurines: but not as you know them

Bisserka Gaydarska and Emma Watson

Fertility is a much-loved and long-lived theme in archaeology, ranging from soil fertility being used to explain settlement patterns to female figurines being linked to regeneration, earth cycles and fecundity. However, actual human fertility in the past - that is the ability to have children - does not enjoy such attention, with infertility attracting even less research interest. This short presentation will draw attention to two sets of figurines, traditionally viewed as Goddesses, that were re-interpreted as infertility aiding kits. It also exposes the reaction of two male archaeologists deeming such approaches to (in)fertility as non-scientific.

7. Ideas on wet nurses in the Early Bronze Age

Philipp Stockhammer

In my paper, I will re-evaluate the evidence for non-local women from afar identified via bioarchaeological studies in the Bell Beaker and Early Bronze Age farmsteads in the Lech valley in Southern Germany. So far, it is clear that the distance of the origin of the non-local women determined their role within the farmstead and only women from surrounding Southern Bavaria had the chance to become biological mothers. However, women from afar (400-600km distance) seem to have been excluded from reproduction over the course of 700 years, although they constitute up to one third of all adult women buried in the Lech valley. We have already argued that these women had an important role as mediators of knowledge. Additionally, I will propose the idea that these women also might have acted as wet nurses in the valley's farmsteads.

8. Motherhood and Infancies in the Mediterranean in Antiquity: recent research in Spanish archeology

Marga Sánchez Romero

The volume "Motherhood and Infancies in the Mediterranean in Antiquity" explores the images of motherhood and the identification with women and womanhood in prehistoric and classic societies with examples from Mesopotamian, Phoenician or Iberian Peninsula societies. Aspects such as the crucial role of maintenance activities and care, the processes of socialization and learning, the impact of the infant death, the religious discourses about motherhood, the rules on parental rights, the transgressions of traditional motherhood or the emotional aspects of the mother-child relation are analysed. I will use this as an excuse to talk about these themes in Spanish archaeology.

9. Unbreakable bound: A case study of a mother-foetus relationship in Medieval Santarém, Portugal (XI-XV)

Adriana Leite, Anne-France Maurer, Cláudia Relvado, Cláudia Umbelino & Ana Maria Silva

Motherhood in the past is key aspect to understand the complex and intimate relationship between women and infants. We present a mother-foetus case study from a Medieval Necropolis in Santarém. Carbon and nitrogen values of the mother ($\delta^{15}\text{N}=10.9\text{‰}$; $\delta^{13}\text{C}=-15.2\text{‰}$) and foetus ($\delta^{15}\text{N}=12.5\text{‰}$; $\delta^{13}\text{C}=-19.9\text{‰}$) suggest a shift in diet during pregnancy and the stress that the mother endured, therefore, affecting the foetus. The archaeological record lacks more studies targeting the hazards and difficulties of motherhood in the past, specifically in Medieval Portugal. This case is extremely relevant as it addresses these issues and provides insights into the mother-infant interaction.

10. Traces of mother-child relationship in protohistory in southern Carpathian Basin

Daria Ložnjak Dizdar & Petra Rajić Šikanjić

The Late Bronze and Iron Age burials in the southern Carpathian Basin (1300-200 BC) contained cremated remains of the deceased. There are several examples of double graves of females aged 20-35 and children of different age: newborns, infant I (0-5) and infant II (6-12). Double graves indicate infant-mother or close emotional relationship even in death which happened at the same time. All cases had their own personal stories about the possible mother-child relationship.

11. Basic instinct? Violent mothers in ancient Egypt

Uroš Matić

Motherhood is traditionally associated with care which principally involves protection when necessary. Protection can involve a reaction to violence, either through retreat or confrontation. Nevertheless, acts of violence are culturally framed. Cross-culturally some acts of violence are tolerated to some, but not to others. Ancient Egyptian textual and iconographic sources present us with an ideology in which violent acts committed by women were against social norms. However, in some cases these acts were legitimized, e.g., queens depicted acting violently against foreign women. The paper analyses one more until now neglected case of legitimate female violence in ancient Egypt-violent mothers.

12. 'Mother's home!' Relationships between a mother and her adult child

Beatriz Noria Serrano

Motherhood in ancient Egypt has been studied mainly from a biological point of view, addressing the pregnancy and the childbirth. However, the relationship between the mother and the adult child has not yet been discussed. Despite being aware of the presence of the mother in the filiations of ancient Egyptian individuals, Egyptology has not paid attention to what happens between mother and child when the latter already has a family of its own. My PhD aims to address the social and cultural aspects of this relationship during the Middle Kingdom (1800-1760 BCE), through archaeological, textual and iconographic sources.

13. Oh Mother! Where Art Thou? Representations of Mothers in the Ancient Greek Archaeological Record

Amy O'Keeffe

Biases against motherhood in the ancient Greek archaeological record trace back to the inception of Classical archaeology as a discipline. These biases have become an unconscious status quo within the discipline, which are rarely questioned. They reflect harmful perceptions of ancient and modern women, especially mothers. The corpus of Mycenaean figurines illustrates this issue, in which the specialised types of kourotrrophic figurines (woman and child), and charioteer figurines (perceived as male) are interpreted. The male figurines are perceived as depictions of everyday life, while the female and child figurines are interpreted as depictions of a "Mother Goddess". Ancient women are rarely afforded the courtesy of their mortal agency and are instead diminished and obscured.

14. Healing Shrines and Lactation Grottoes in North Lebanon

Sarah Mady

My research examines healing shrines in pre-modern North Lebanon with a special focus on those that were used by women and mothers. Not enough scholarly attention has been given to such spaces that are typically identified as chapels. However, their names, local oral history, and other evidence suggest that their use does not fit in the official liturgy. Women and mothers have used them through different stages of their lives: from conception to delivery, lactation, and infant health. I will present results of my survey and discuss their use as paraliturgical shrines as well as new approaches to study them.

15. Roman 'Baby Bottles' in Britain?

Kayt Hawkins

This short paper focuses on research into specific ceramic form, a distinctive small spouted vessel often found in association with infant burials in Britain and elsewhere in the Roman empire. Organic residue analysis on prehistoric examples of similar ceramic objects from the continent has confirmed their probable use in infant feeding practices. Within Romano-British studies these vessels are also often referred to as 'infant feeding bottles' although arguments over this functional interpretation remain. What has become increasingly clear through recent research is the relationship between these vessels and the Roman army in Britain and, by extension, their use by those families connected to the army.

16. Menarche, Maternity, and the Moche: Iconographic and Bioarchaeological Insights on Motherhood from North Coastal Peru

Aleksa K. Alaica & Alannagh Maciaw

Direct lines of evidence for maternity are often absent in the archaeological record. On the North Coast of Peru, however, extensive iconographic depictions of pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding provide an important visual record to understand how motherhood was experienced among the Moche (CE200-900). In this paper, we present poignant examples of maternal depictions from the broader Moche iconographic corpus to compliment our bioarchaeological evidence from Huaca Colorada, a Late Moche (CE600-900) site in the southern Jequetepeque Valley. Burials of pregnant women, young mothers, and their infants attest to the value that these offerings, in some instances sacrifices, held for ceremonial events. We argue that motherhood among the Moche was not a dichotomy between mothers and non-mothers, but rather structured through an ethos of care.

17. The Mesoamerican cult of women who died in first childbirth and were deified

Pénélope Trahin

In some parts of Mesoamerica during the Postclassic period, childbirth was considered a fight against death. A woman who died with her child in her womb during her first childbirth was honoured and deified like a warrior who died on the battlefield. My PhD research revolves around the cult of these women, called Cihuateteo ('divine women' in Nahuatl), as well as the iconography of these deities, the feasts and ceremonies dedicated to them and the temples where they were honoured. This research is based on archaeological and ethnohistoric data as well as comparative analysis and ethnographic analogy.

18. 'Mothers' of Irish archaeology? Investigating the lives and careers of some of the earliest female archaeologists in Ireland

Penny Johnston

Early female pioneers in archaeology helped to create the archaeological record that we study, revise and build on today. Historiographies of women's contributions can help to illuminate how gender ideology has influenced knowledge formation (see Sorenson 1998). The early female pioneers of archaeology in Ireland include Louisa Beaufort (1781–1863), Margaret Stokes (1832–1900) and Helen Roe (1895–1988), all described as antiquarians. They were followed by Ellen Prendergast (1918–1999) who was described in her obituary as the 'first woman archaeologist in Ireland'. None of these women married or had children yet they are the 'mothers' of our discipline. In this paper I will explore how feminist historiographies can be augmented by viewing the contributions of women through the additional lens of motherhood. These readings can add another dimension to our understanding of the epistemic foundations of our discipline.

19. Matricentric Feminism and Archaeological Mothers: A History of Mothering in the Field

Elizabeth Hoag

One of the central principles of matricentric feminism as identified by Andrea O'Reilly is "contesting and challenging the patriarchal oppressive institution of motherhood by imagining a maternal identity and practice that is empowering to mothers", and reframing motherhood as a "socially engaged enterprise and site of power". My recent research has focused on how we can empower mothers in the field of archaeology by telling their stories and reframing the narrative around field-work and mother-work. Here I discuss my recent research utilizing historical/biographical accounts motherhood from women archaeologists throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how women (including myself) talk about motherhood in the field today.

20. Discussion: Feminist struggles with motherhood

