BOOK REVIEWS


This book comprises an important set of chapters by leaders in the field of childhood archaeology, which will be useful to anyone doing research in this growing subfield. This volume represents the proceedings of the Third Annual Institute for European Mediterranean Archaeology Visiting Scholar Conference at the University of Buffalo, USA, with the stated aim of investigating the ‘evolution of childhood through time’ and the question of whether children were visible or invisible in the past. The book opens with a summary of the state-of-play of childhood in the past research by the editor drawing on main works from archaeology, social anthropology and biological anthropology, and also psychological and historical perspectives. Although this chapter has an understandable preoccupation with the absence of children from past interpretations in archaeology, many of the following chapters work to move beyond this, and offer constructive approaches to incorporate children into archaeological studies in meaningful ways.

Part One, ‘Theorizing (in)visibility, legitimacy, and biases in archaeological approaches to children and childhood’, includes a set of rigorous, mostly theoretical, chapters covering aspects of childhood identity, social aspects of age, and cultural bias in research. Jane Eva Baxter starts this section by investigating the varying ways that archaeologists may move between different understandings of children and childhood using a case study from seventeenth century New England. She makes the pertinent point that in defending why we study childhood in the past may actually detract from the development of theoretical and methodological advances in the field and focuses on the ideas of materiality and embodiment to investigate childhood. Kathryn Kamp evaluates a number the different approaches and perspectives to the study of childhood in archaeology including texts and art, human skeletal remains, mortuary treatment, hand and foot prints, artefacts, and space use. Scott Hutson argues that the archaeology of children should be an archaeology of age investigating the interactions between social age groups. Joanna Sofaer’s work echoing the theoretical bent in her book ‘The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology’ (Sofaer 2006) works to expand the place of childhood in archaeology when there are no child bodies describing an approach that recognizes the interrelationship between the physical body and material artefacts. Nurit Bird-David offers an interesting perspective on the study of infants and children through ethnography. She argues that there are inherent biases with using the English language that hinder the ethnoarchaeographic investigation of childhood in contemporary hunter-gatherers.

The second section of the volume is entitled ‘Interdisciplinary and archaeological approaches to studying children and childhood in the past’. Although the chapters are not necessarily interdisciplinary per se, the contributions investigate childhood from different perspectives: bioarchaeological, anthropological genetics and psychological, respectively. Eva Rosenstock investigates the agricultural transition using sexual dimorphism in childhood growth, interpreting this in the context of nutritional changes over this time, but does not consider infection. Keri Brown offers a molecular approach to the study of childhood through the study of sex and kinship of infants and children from the Neolithic cemetery of Eulau in Germany. Jack
Meacham presents a psychological approach to children in the past, considering different metaphors and how some approaches may result in better visibility of the roles of children in archaeology.

Part Three of the book, 'Case studies in the archaeology of childhood' comprises seven chapters, most of which investigate childhood material culture in Europe, ranging from the study of Neanderthal childhood by Paul Bahn, the investigation of palaeopathology and burial practices from the classical period infant cemetery of Lugnano in Italy by David Soren, to play figurines in Neolithic Çatalhöyük by Sharon Moses. Susan Langdon investigates the mourning of children in early Iron Age Greece, characteristic of a recent surge of research interest in the archaeology of grief. This approach is important as it acknowledges aspects of emotion with infant loss and the social participation of children in the past.

The volume closes with commentaries of the chapters by Frank Hole and Traci Ardren, which review the common themes among the contributions. Hole, reviewing the theoretical contributions in Part One of the volume, concludes that rather than conceptualizing children as a separate group, they need to be viewed as part of the larger family and social units that they form. Ardren's commentary does an exceptional job of drawing together the main themes of the book including the construction of age identity, death and grieving, individual agency and group membership, and gendered practices.

I recommend this book to academics and postgraduates from a range of disciplines investigating childhood in the past, and in particular as a central text for archaeological theoretical approaches to childhood. Despite the book's slow gestation as indicated by a lack of references post-2009 in most chapters, this volume does offer a comprehensive collection of research that represents relatively recent advances in theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate children. Importantly, this book emphasizes the point that childhood research in archaeology may benefit from considering the relationships between infants and children with adults, rather than categorizing childhood as a separate category, with some chapters (e.g. Soafa) also representative of true interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the child in archaeology.

Reference


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Historians of childhood seldom take what was sung by, to and about children seriously. This book shows why it is a mistake to ignore songs as historical sources. Alisa Clapp-Itnyre’s interesting book offers a labour-intensive survey of over 200 children’s hymns books published in English across the nineteenth century. A database of over 16,000 hymns is used to analyse the
most commonly appearing hymns, their words and some aspects of their musical forms. The central argument that emerges from this study is that hymns were central to nineteenth-century children’s experiences and especially to how adults understood childhood. Clapp-Ittyre documents a childhood musical culture that was designed to be shared across divides of class and gender. The message that these hymns sought to convey changed across the century as they grew to become a large and diverse body of texts. Childhood also became increasingly sentimentalized as hymn texts moved away from their early-nineteenth-century focus on sin. This attention to children’s musical culture thus also contributes to central debates about religious cultures as Protestants left the ‘age of atonement’.

In common with much recent scholarship on childhood, children’s agency forms one of the central themes of the book. Clapp-Ittyre argues that hymn singing was empowering for the young. This argument is demonstrated most convincingly in chapter 5 in relation to children’s associational life and philanthropy. There is also an interesting argument about the politicization of the image of the child in hymns that sought social and political reform, including through the ‘community of song’ created by the factory reform movement in the 1830s (chapter 1).

The wider claim that hymn texts were innately empowering through their use of active verbs and children’s ability to shape how they were sung is less persuasively demonstrated by the evidence presented here. Claims for empowerment are often speculative, written with conditional verbs or in the present tense. Alongside the analysis of intended audiences listed on the hymn-books and the images of childhood that texts offered, it would have been revealing to have examined in more depth the contexts in which these hymns were actually sung and what precisely their singing allowed nineteenth-century children to do. Clapp-Ittyre presents a very positive story of hymn singing across the century as children formed an increasingly sentimentalized centre to musical culture. The power dynamics that underpinned practices of singing are left largely unexamined – who taught children these hymns and what happened if they refused to sing? Clapp-Ittyre ignores the vast literature on social control to which the institutional power of schools and churches has been central since the 1960s, but these texts do raise important questions about these power dynamics. Clapp-Ittyre suggests an important route to develop her claim for empowerment further, through examples taken from 22 children’s diaries and marginalia in chapter 6. These are exciting sources and the reader is left wanting to know a lot more about the children who left manuscript traces of their hymn singing. For instance, the concluding intriguing example of Mary Ann Hadfield’s marginalia suggests the potential held by these sources to uncover real children’s interaction with music and to contextualize their individual lives through archival sources that stretch beyond the hymn book.

Chapter 3 on ‘cross-over children’s hymn texts and tunes’ very usefully demonstrates the overlap between hymns designed for adults and those designed for children. This supports evidence from other published genres, such as novels and poems, which similarly suggest the hybridity of nineteenth-century texts that were read by adults and children alike. This raises important questions for histories of publishing. To understand these patterns better, it would perhaps be useful to examine more closely exactly which publishers, in which towns and with what denominational affiliations were publishing which hymns when. Clapp-Ittyre’s evidence also raises important questions about how far the unclassed and genderless culture that adults sought to construct through hymns really was peculiar to childhood. If adults were also expected to sing most of these hymns, could it also have been part of a much broader attempt to create an English-speaking non-denominational Christian culture that encompassed adults and children globally? As historians, we tend to adopt age as a
category of analysis without always testing its limits or analysing how childhood and youth interacted discursively or experientially with categories of adulthood and maturity.

The richness of singing culture that Clapp-Itnyre describes also suggests the potential to draw out the implications of this evidence for our understanding of nineteenth-century religion, popular culture, family and identity further. It is a pity that there is no conclusion to make the wider significance of the book’s arguments explicit. Nevertheless, this is a very useful study that suggests the insights that emerge when scholars of childhood take musical sources seriously.

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Historians of emotions must talk more with historians of childhood to enrich both fields, introducing historical specificity to the former and raising new questions about the universality (or otherwise) of childhood. Thus declares Stephanie Olsen, editor of Childhood, Youth, and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives – part of the Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions – a book based on a 2012 conference at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development. Overall, this strong collection of essays achieves this goal and it is to be hoped that it will spark greater cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches.

Themes tackled include: the national, local, and even familial specificity of the experience of childhood emotions; the value of looking beyond Western emotional values; the importance of borderlands (emotional frontiers) and war in emotional formation; and the significance of childhood as a time for developing appropriate emotional reference points. The first essay, ‘Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood’ by Stephanie Olsen, Karen Vallgård and Kristine Alexander stresses the need to understand the history of emotions and childhood in global terms, arguing that a global study undermines the commonly held modern Western view of childhood innocence and lovableness, showing that different and even contrary assumptions can be found in other cultures and at other times.

Essays in this important collection have a wide range, covering Africa, Europe, the Americas, and the Pacific, and they explore the emotional experiences of children and how these have been shaped by adults and authorities. The authors of this introductory essay note an ‘assumption among adult agencies that the child is eminently makeable: tabula rasa in terms of knowledge, but innocent in terms of emotions’ (p. 15–16). The introduction stands out because, as well as a series of excellent chapters on the subject, it includes a methodology for historians of childhood. Most studies of emotions lack this methodology and this volume seeks to explain how the history of the emotions can be used by historians of childhood as a way to approach the experience of the child. This insightful essay outlines the key issues that are explored in the collection’s other 11 essays.

Imperialism – in its British variety – features extensively. Kathleen Vongsathorn examines the emotions expected of children in Uganda where British missionaries imported imperial ideals
and middle-class Victorian assumptions about of childhood. Swapna M. Banerjee tackles the ‘everyday emotional practices’ of fathers and children in colonial Bengal, while Hugh Morisson explores the attitudes of Protestant Christian settlers in New Zealand. Ishita Pande examines the conflicting emotions expected of a child bride in nineteenth-century India, concluding that the concept of childhood and childhood emotions for Indian girls became focused on the fraught relationship between sexual norms and childhood innocence.

Back in Britain, Lydia Murdoch considers the anti-vaccination movement’s exploitation at the end of the Victorian period of the newly emerging view of the innocence of childhood and the grief felt when a child died. Jane Hamlett’s contribution is a fascinating investigation of the dynamics of public schools in Victorian and Edwardian England. She shows how the space of the dormitory was crucial to the development of children’s emotional security and equilibrium, and highlights the conflict between officially sanctioned emotions of self-reliance, obedience, moral living, and brotherhood, and the realities of brutality and sexual depravity among boys living in spaces ungoverned by adults.

Chapters by Juliane Brauer, Susan A. Miller and M. Collette Plum explore the ways in which political ideologies manipulated children’s emotions. The success of such projects in imposing ideas of nationhood or community varied considerably and children were often able to undermine or rebel against official regimes of feeling.

Exploring Columbia between 1800 and 1835, Marcelo Caruso depicts the battle between liberal and conservative politics, expressed through the privileging of ‘hot’ emotions by the former and ‘cool’ emotions by the latter. Liberal republicans sought to stimulate revolutionary fervour in the young through dancing, public examinations, and prize days in schools. In contrast, conservative governments sought to damp down emotions, focusing on teaching penmanship rather than politics.

Roy Kozlovsky builds a critical theory on the way that the design of children’s spaces was used to introduce and reinforce acceptable emotions. His discussion of British playground and school architecture from the mid-Victorian to the post-war era argues that spaces for children focused on creating and disciplining emotions or, in certain experimental post-war schools, on liberating them.

As the essays in this collection demonstrate, parents, communities, teachers, and governments believe that emotions can be taught or otherwise controlled from without. Thus, hot or cool emotions were taught in nineteenth-century Colombia, joy and patriotic fervour in East Germany, rage (against the Japanese) in wartime China, patriotism in the United States, and a stiff upper lip in Edwardian England. How successful was this teaching? Were these emotions transferrable? Were they necessary or disruptive to their culture? These questions outline areas for future research by historians of emotions and childhood.

It is clear from Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History that contemporary scholarship in the history of childhood and the history of emotions is in good shape. This highly recommended book points the way to future research, and it is to be hoped that this will give more space to the voices and actions of children themselves and to the importance of the figure of the child in other historiographies.

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When author Paula Fass begins her acknowledgements in The End of American Childhood, she tells us, ‘This book has occupied me for years ....’ It shows Fass’ work is impeccably researched and elegantly written, and has a depth and breadth that can only come from years of careful and deliberate thinking in the course of a rich and productive career. Paula Fass is an American historian who has been publishing on topics relating to childhood since the 1980s, beginning with her early works on American education and immigration. These works have been followed by research on kidnapping, globalization, policy, memory, and family life, as well as more critical and comprehensive works tackling broad issues in the historical study of childhood. Much of her writing also establishes frameworks for considering the particular circumstances, events, and attitudes that combined to create something that might be best defined as an, ‘American Childhood’. In this, Fass’ tenth monograph-length work, she brings all of her previous writing to fruition in a cogent and dynamic historical analysis of that very topic.

This particular work arrives on an already crowded landscape of publications addressing American Childhood. The 1990s saw a proliferation of edited volumes on the subject and several early monographs on childhood histories of particular regions. The twenty-first Century has seen historians tackle America as a concept for understanding childhood in relationship to particular topics (play, nature) and different childhood populations (slaves, pioneers, urban labourers). Authors of these works have each developed their own unique approaches to handling time and change when telling the American story. Most often, the issue of change takes on a tone of marked declension, with American childhood being increasingly lost to interventionist parents and concerns for risk, health, and safety. Fass’ book looks at childhood with a historical gaze in the service of understanding contemporary American childhoods, but her emphasis on parenting and family allows the work to take a somewhat different tone.

This work begins in 1800 in the early years of the new republic and traces developments and change in American childhood to the present day. The introduction of the book acknowledges the difficulties and tensions in bridging scales from the intimate world of family life to the broad sweeping ideas of America, but also notes that there is a distinct and abiding relationship between the two that demands historical attention. Chapters are organized based on major shifts and changes in the American mindset on a very broad scale, from the revolutionary spirit of the Early Republic to the emergence of institutions for child care in the later nineteenth century that ultimately gave rise to a new twentieth century science of childhood. These historical periods are not abrupt or episodic, but rather are woven together as broad changes on a national stage and are made relevant based on the repercussions that percolate into the lives of families and children. For each era, Fass repeatedly asks a reciprocal question of what is it believed that parents owe children, and what do children owe their parents? This theme of mutual, intergenerational responsibility and obligation takes many forms over time, but helps to create a comparable structure for understanding family dynamics across periods of broad historical change.

The argument for a uniquely American childhood is also a most convincing one in this work. Beginning with external observers such as Toqueville, Fass characterizes American childhood as one rooted in the values of what was itself a young nation including independence, risk, and opportunity, as well as one grounded in the abundance of resources of a geographically expanding nation. Looking at how these values morph and change through major
historical shifts is one aspect of Fass' work. The other is a skilful application of individual life histories and personal narratives taken from an array of archival sources. Many of the American's profiled in her work are known only because of the accidental preservation of their words across time, while others such as Ulysses S. Grant are famous products of particular American childhoods.

From a broader perspective of childhood studies, this work is an excellent example of how childhood offers a very potent and germane platform to examine aspects of human communities on many scales. The consideration of how parenting, community investment, and American ideals all intersect around the idea of childhood across a 200-year period of history is a powerful illustration of how the cultural construction of childhood reveals much about a particular society. This book is highly recommended for those seeking an introduction to American childhood, to those interested in engaging ideas of parenting and family in the past, those undertaking multi-scalar studies of childhood, and those wishing to introduce students to the historiography and social history of childhood.

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This is perhaps an unusual volume to review, one of a series of culturally significant 'Forgotten Books' which are out of copyright but subsequently digitized and made available in several formats (including eBooks which can be downloaded free of charge). First published in 1911, it offers a fascinating insight into contemporary aspirations and ambitions for children in early twentieth-century America. It documents a practical experiment in housebuilding which actively involved school children aged between twelve and eighteen years of age and resulted in the construction of a 'model' American home, 'designed by girls and built by boys' (p. 2), incorporating the latest designs for household equipment and furnishings.

The book is presented in twelve chapters, commencing with an introduction to a public (i.e. state-funded) school project in an un-named New England city, building a simple one-story timber house 24 feet by 35 feet (7.3 x 10.7 m) in a corner of the school yard. It was to serve as a model dwelling for girls undertaking practical classes as part of their Household Technology course, and one thousand dollars was allocated for building and furnishing it. The house itself had eight rooms (kitchen, pantry, hall, living and dining rooms, bedroom, bathroom and a linen closet), thought to be the minimum requirement for the aims of the course in teaching practical housekeeping skills.

It is clear the division of labour was very largely determined by gender. Girls made the outline drawings incorporating their designs for room size, function and desirable materials for interiors. Preliminary drawings requiring 'much study on the part of both boys and girls' (p. 22) were passed to boys in the Mechanical Drawing class who drew up working blueprints. These were for the use of the boys in the vocational elementary classes (aged fourteen years upwards) who would be undertaking the actual building. Although qualified adults would be
available, the most competent pupils were appointed as ‘Boy Foremen’ to manage the site and ‘Supervisors’ were older boys from Technical High School. In practical terms, boys carried out building, wiring, and plumbing work and made the furniture. Girls determined the layout of the floor plans, and designed and made curtains, cushions, table linen and rugs, as well as decorative items in metal work, leather and pottery.

The next ten chapters work through the skills used in construction of the household furnishings, with the aim of spreading the wider application of basic design and building principles for ‘clever boys and girls throughout the country’ (p. 33) and illustrated with examples created by schoolchildren. Chapter II include rules for decoration and furnishing based largely on the work of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement which had been in vogue in America from the later nineteenth century. Three subsequent chapters lay out rules for framing and displaying pictures, arrangement of flowers and foliage (harmony and creativity in this being considered important for boys as well as girls) and creating decorative fabrics, which included instructions for block printing figures designed by schoolgirls after studying old rugs and Coptic motifs.

Chapter VI digresses a little to dwell on women’s fashion and its relationship to the principles of decoration, in which the author gives a little insight into the trends in children’s fashions, lamenting the addition of lace, ruffles and even jewellery to their clothing, and disparaging schoolgirls with ‘plumed hats and high heeled shoes’ (p. 128); interesting to see how this intergenerational issue has not altered much in a hundred years. Chapter VII offers detailed plans for constructing furniture and the following chapter gives details of the stains and finishes used. The next three chapters deal with decorative furnishings, detailing practical techniques in handweaving, pottery and work in leather and metal, again illustrated with examples designed and created by school children. The sheer volume of decorative articles deemed appropriate for the ‘model’ home indicates the rise of consumerism and the changing ways in which ‘ordinary’ Americans were relating to material objects in the early twentieth century.

It would perhaps have been more interesting for a present-day audience if the final chapter had analysed the challenges and successes of the project, and incorporated more opinions from the participants. Instead it concludes with a tribute to the benefits of ‘country homes’ (i.e. holiday homes) particularly on the creative development of children; it is difficult to imagine that most of the children who worked on the model house project came from families who would be able to build a summer home, even if it could be ‘beautifully furnished by clever boys and girls at an expense … of one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars’ (p. 373). It is easy to disparage the outdated restrictions imposed by class and gender in early twentieth-century America, but perhaps it needs to be remembered that girls in the Household Technology classes had made a contemporary career choice and had determined to put their skills to the test in a house they specifically designed for ‘modern’ living. It would be very interesting to see if such an experiment could be repeated successfully among children in early twenty-first-century state schools.

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Current understandings of adolescence date back to late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the conceptualization of the years from thirteen or fourteen to the early twenties as a distinct phase in life gained prominence in the emergent fields of sociology, psychology and psychiatry. Generally associated with modernization and industrialization, adolescence is also closely linked to the expansion of formal education which was accompanied by the increasing segregation of children from adults. Despite growing public and academic interest in children and child welfare, there is relatively little scholarly work on the history of childhood in Ireland or the role of children or young people within the family or Irish society more generally. As the first academic study to address the topic of adolescence in Irish history, this volume is therefore a welcome addition to a developing field.

The introduction to the volume provides helpful contextual material outlining the development of professional thinking about youth and adolescence and highlighting the importance of the work of Granville Stanley Hall whose seminal study Adolescence: Its psychology and its relation to anthropology, sex, crime, religion, and education (1904) established a new understanding of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Keen to establish new field of scientific enquiry, Hall characterized adolescence as a period of ‘storm and stress’, but also of energy, dynamism, and potential. The editors claim that this collection demonstrates awareness in Ireland of adolescence as a transitional phase associated with ‘heightened emotions, intense affections ... and moral malleability’.

Contributors to the volume explore adolescence from a variety of perspectives from concerns about immoral and criminal tendencies among particular sections of Irish youth to associational culture and youth groups; Marnie Hay, for example, examines the activities and membership of Na Fianna Éireann, a nationalist version of the British boy scouting movement. All of the chapters offer interesting case studies but few have anything conclusive to say on the central question posed by the volume, whether there was such a thing as a distictively Irish adolescence. There is a welcome attempt to focus on individual as well as collective experience but we learn almost nothing about what contemporaries thought about adolescence, either what it was or what they felt it should have been. Conor Reidy, for example, provides a useful empirical study of Ireland’s only borstal established in 1906 to punish and potentially reform habitual male juvenile offenders, but does so without referring to adolescence or adolescents. Contributors who engage more actively with the subject are often limited by the narrow focus of their research. Thus J. J. Wright claims to have found evidence of a close-knit coterie of adolescents’ amongst Belfast Presbyterians ‘drawn together both by similar social and cultural backgrounds, and by a range of shared interests’, but the material cited offers little insight into the characteristics or experience of adolescence; and since he is only looking at a small number of individuals in a single city, there is no point of comparison. In one of the few chapters directly to address Irish adolescence, Mary E. Daly questions whether the term can meaningfully be applied to Ireland in the period from the Great Famine to the mid twentieth century, an unfortunate conclusion given the title of the book, arguing that a significant proportion of young people had no opportunity to experience adolescence being required either to adopt the premature responsibilities of adulthood by having ‘to support their family or survive independently as an emigrant’, or being ‘trapped in a quasi-childhood type of dependency’ due to the lack of paid employment.

Failure to engage analytically with the concept of adolescence is particularly problematic in the contribution by Ann Daly which examines medical views of female puberty. The chapter
contains interesting material, particularly in relation to the cross-class nature of menstrual complaints. As Daly notes, menstrual problems were often seen as a middle class complaint, yet in Ireland young women of all classes including working girls were hospitalized with menstrual irregularities demonstrating that sensitivity to their psychological impact was not restricted to the middle classes. Although making valid points about the tendency among medical practitioners to pathologize female sexuality, Daly consistently confuses puberty and adolescence using the terms interchangeably. She cites a pamphlet written in 1839 by Dr Samuel Fox as 'a pamphlet on adolescence', yet her notes make it clear that the pamphlet is not on adolescence but chlorosis, an iron-deficiency anaemia associated with unfinished puberty. This suggests confused thinking as well as poor scholarship that the editors should have queried and clarified.

While the collection would undoubtedly have been stronger if the contributors had been encouraged to make direct connections between the subject matter of their chapter and the themes addressed in the introduction to the volume, it remains a valuable publication and one that marks out a new area of historical enquiry.

Reference

The Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (SSCIP)
www.sscip.wordpress.com/

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CHILDHOOD IN THE PAST

Contents

Editorial
Ten Years of Childhood in the Past ................................................................. 1
Eileen M. Murphy

Invited Paper
SSCIP: The First 10 Years .................................................................................... 10
Sally Crawford

Research Papers
Landscapes of Childhood: Bodies, Places and Material Culture ...................... 16
Margarita Sánchez Romero
Child Bioarchaeology: Perspectives on the Past 10 Years ............................... 38
Simon Mays, Rebecca Gowland, Sühn Halcrow and Eileen Murphy
Reflections on Interdisciplinarity in the Study of Childhood in the Past ............ 57
Jane Eoa Baxter, Shauna Vey, Erin Halstad McGuire, Suzanne Conway and
Deborah E. Blom
Homo Faber Juvenalis: A Multidisciplinary Survey of Children as Tool Makers/Users ................................................................................... 72
David F. Lancy

Book Reviews
edited by Simon Mays
The Archaeology of Childhood: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on an Archaeological
Enigma. Edited by Güner Coşkunus ................................................................. 91
Sühn E. Halcrow
By Alisa Clapp-Inyre ....................................................................................... 92
Sühn Pooley
Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global
Perspectives. Edited by Stephanie Olsen ........................................................ 94
Leticia Fernández-Fontecha Rumeu
The End of American Childhood: A history of Parenting from Life on the Frontier
to the Managed Child. By Paula S. Fass ....................................................... 96
Jane Eoa Baxter
Home Decoration. By Charles Franklin Warner ................................................ 97
Lynne McKerr
Adolescence in Modern Irish History. Edited by Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan ................................................................. 99
Virginia Crossman