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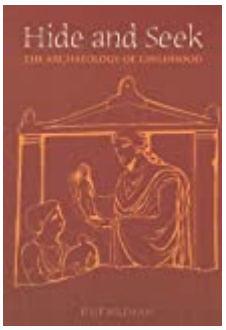

Julie Wileman. *Hide and Seek: The Archaeology of Childhood.* Stroud: Tempus, 2005. x + 192 pp. $45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7524-3462-9.

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Seeking and Finding Children in the Past

The archaeology of childhood has grown over the past decade and a half as a vibrant field of specialized interest within archaeology as a whole. Theoretical developments and methodological innovations are integral features of this continually evolving body of literature, and conversations about childhood are taking place among an ever diversifying pool of scholars in the discipline.

Julie Wileman enters into these conversations seeking to redress the lack of children in archaeological interpretations, and to debunk the all too common notion that children's imprints on the archaeological record are either minor, hard to interpret, or too difficult to disentangle from those of adults. The stated goal of *Hide and Seek* is "to examine the evidence for children in the past, and to try to encourage others to bear in mind â¦ that every society had children, that children would have been present at almost every site, and that the roles of those children in their societies would have been significant in a number of ways" (p. 7). The theme of archaeologists needing to redress the previous omission of children from archaeological interpretations is one of the most prevalent among works on the subject, and as such *Hide and Seek* represents a significant contribution to the field.

Hide and Seek is best characterized as a descriptive work that reports evidence relating to children in ancient societies around the globe, with occasional references to more contemporary, anthropological studies of childhood that have implications for our understandings of children in the past. The anecdotal accounts of children in the past that comprise *Hide and Seek* are well researched and engagingly presented, and derive from published archaeological, ethnographic, and historical studies of childhood. The book is organized around a series of thematic chapters, which engage readily identified Western conceptions of childhood, including care and nurture, education and training, death, burial, and commemoration, children in rituals, children as victims, and definitions of childhood. This thematic presentation, as well as the style of writing, make this book readily accessible to popular audiences.

The predominant cases drawn upon in this text relate to ancient states with relatively well-understood systems of writing and symbolic expression, including Egyptian,

Aztec, Maya, and Inca civilizations. Even more frequent are presentations of childhood in medieval, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon Europe. The tendency to favor cultural groups that loom large in popular consciousness or bear an ancestral relationship to contemporary Britain means that the evidence collected for this work does not represent a systematic treatment of childhood across cultures. These principle cases are balanced somewhat, however, by a comprehensive synthesis of the more accessible archaeological research on children to date, which offers a broader coverage of world areas and time periods, including prehistory.

Hide and Seek can be seen as highly successful in meeting the author's stated goals for the work, and as a collection of evidence relating to children in the past it provides a powerful case for archaeologists to consider children as important actors in past social groups. The highly descriptive nature of the work, however, limits its contributions to scholarly dialogues about childhood in archaeology, and the work does not engage critical issues of method and theory that typify the majority of the literature on this topic. As such, this work is of limited use for scholars interested in the archaeology of childhood as the case studies presented will already be familiar, and there is no new theoretical or methodological development involving these published cases.

Perhaps of greatest concern is that *Hide and Seek* itself falls victim to another, significant critique of many archaeological and anthropological discussions of childhood. This widely leveled critique notes that archaeologists tend to rely heavily on their own contemporary, Western understandings of childhood, which in turn limit their ability to recognize specific and unique constructions of childhood that existed only in the past. The choice of case studies that are easily analogous to contemporary ideas of childhood, and the decision to use titles and headings that reinforce culturally normative ideas of childhood, including the title "Hide and Seek" and chapter headings such as "Little Darlings" and "Suffer the Children," tends to naturalize the experience of contemporary childhood, rather than pointing to the diverse ways that childhood may have been culturally constructed in the past. More theoretical discussions on the archaeology of childhood have actively engaged the importance of de-naturalizing our own experiences of childhood, and have emphasized the need to seek emic constructions of childhood through the material record. The very nature of *Hide and Seek* works against this important trend in the overall literature.

In sum, Julie Wileman offers a readily accessible synthesis of published evidence for children in the past. The descriptive nature of the work and the comfortable writing style make this work particularly well suited for a popular audience, or individuals seeking illustrative material about children in the past. These strengths as a descriptive work limit its contributions to scholarly dialogues on the archaeology of childhood, and *Hide and Seek* does not offer readers a well-developed introduction to current theoretical and methodological conversations in the discipline.

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