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Chapter 10

Childhood and motherhood in Ancient Greece: an iconographic look

Susana Reboreda Morillo

The purpose of this study is to analyse what the society of the Ancient Greek civilisation, especially during the Classic period, thought and transmitted about childhood, from birth to death, with special emphasis on the relationship between child and mother. The context of reference is the citizenship, the group about which we have the most information. Methodologically, we will mainly analyse iconographic sources, without forgetting literary and archaeological references. There will be two main settings: the domestic and the ritual, both coinciding with the main activities of women. From giving birth, mothers acquired the difficult responsibility of ensuring their descendants survived, at the same time as carrying out the tasks of raising and educating their offspring, which went beyond teaching basic skills (walking, talking, eating, and so on), since they were also responsible for instilling into their children the need to respect the rules of patriarchal society based on the *poliade* community.

Introduction and difficulties

We are aware that the subject under study entails certain problems that it is important to raise before beginning the exposition and analysis of the facts. In first place, the scarcity of testimonies in which children were the main figures, an indicative aspect of the scarce interest that they stirred, although we will see differences between genders and periods in time; this factor influences the challenge meaning that defining their trajectories reaches greater dimensions. We know that, in the first stages of childhood, the environment of children was the *oikos*, therefore, a feminine environment (Gherchanoc 2012); where girls remained until reaching the age of marriage, whereas boys continued their learning outside of their home. In both cases, the objective was to prepare them for their respective roles allocated by a society which followed the

example of the *polis*. Of all the sources that refer to this stage in life, the most prolific is iconography, whose analysis is not exempt of difficulties. Thus, we enter the second issue: we cannot overlook the fact that the scenes depicted do not always reflect reality and, might, in certain cases, show what 'it should be' (Molas Font 2016, 71). However, it is obvious that, from this archetype depicted in images, it is always possible to extract interesting information which serves as a bridge to bring us closer to this reality. We will see how these portrayals evolve and that can only be related to the changes taking place in society, an aspect that shows their usefulness as a source of information. We will also make use of some written testimonies and archaeological findings. This will allow us to outline an introduction to the childhood activities in relation to motherhood, in close connection with the future roles that society assigned to both genders.

The third problem we face is ambiguity, such as stated by Sourvinou-Inwood (1990, 45), we have to bear in mind that we are analysing a period with cultural differences to our own, due to which we should avoid associating it with our immediate environment, even if the relationship is sometimes evident. We must always be aware that the concept of childhood itself is eminently cultural, varying between societies, periods, and even the particular circumstances surrounding each individual. Therefore, we will avoid making generalisations which include, for example, all members of society or even the different *poleis*. We will focus on Attica because it has more portrayals in its ceramic paintings as well as reliefs and sculptures.

The structure of the present work follows chronological issues. Thus, we will begin our exposition with birth and will end with marriage which, at the time, was considered the end of childhood for girls.

Explanatory questions about childhood in Ancient Greece and its portrayal

In Ancient Greece, the word for childhood, *país*/*paides*, was cloaked in certain ambiguity because it had other associated meanings. Thus, it was also used to contrast a small boy with an adult or a small boy with an adolescent (Cohen 2007, 3–4). The complexity increases on verifying its use to refer to other groups, such as *eromenoi*, which can refer to the youth in a homoerotic relationship or to a slave. It is possible to infer that the connotation of the word implies an inferior status, in a state of dependency (Golden 2003, 14). This lack of precision extends to iconography, especially in the Archaic period, in which slaves and children were portrayed in the same way: with the scaled-down body of an adult. Only very clear contexts allow the identification of the difference between children and slaves that could be adults. As of the 6th century BC, and progressively so, artists make an effort to capture children in a more natural body; for example, emphasis is given to the head, the extremities become more appropriate to the age, and the body is drawn to make them more plump. Furthermore, their presence in the scenes becomes more recurrent and they frequently appear beside their mothers. These artistic changes are reflecting the transformation, if not of the

strict reality, then that of the archetype, which shows a greater interest, which, in the words of Beaumont (2004, 59), is 'a well-deserved respect.' The reason is associated with the abandonment of aristocratic ideals and conceding prominence to the citizenry, whose most essential elements are the citizens and, consequently, the necessary hope for the survival of the children (Beaumont 2004, 75).

It is not until the end of the 5th century BC and the beginning of the 4th century BC that different iconographic groups, which seek to show the different stages which Greek society established throughout childhood and puberty, from birth to maturity, are established. It is not easy to determine its limits, as made clear by the lack of unanimity when determining the ages included in the different groups. On the assumption that these limits were lax and flexible (Beaumont 2012, 19; 2015, 40–42), we assume the following schematic: the first would comprise birth to three years of age, the second from 3 to 7 years of age, and the third from 7 to 14/15, the age of marriage for girls. Other authors (Lawton 2007, 43–55; Grossman 2007, 310) opt for more generic schematics: babies, preadolescents, early adolescents and maidens.

Each age group is determined in iconography through social conventions which are shown in external aspects such as dress (or nudity), hairstyles, clothing and behaviour. As pointed out by Molas Font (2016, 68), it is about cultural constructs that reflect the different roles that society assigned to each phase. Logically, details are more profuse in reliefs and sculptures than in ceramic paintings, whose ages are better determined by gestures and attitudes (McNiven 2007, 85–93). Cohen (2007, 261) warns of the possible manipulation of some artists, who could, consciously, change some social realities, such as, to give an example, the large difference in age between young women, much younger than their husbands. This fact is very clear in mythical kidnappings, with the intention of hiding the transgressive sexuality of the adults.

First stage. Infants/babies: from birth until the age of three

The main role of women in Ancient Greece was, without a doubt, motherhood, not in just any circumstance, but in the bosom of marriage; the only possibility for acknowledged procreation and, therefore, heir to the paternal status. With the setup of the *poleis*, the interest was focussed on the continuity of the citizenry. In Athens, Pericles' citizenship law of 451 BC would, among other consequences, bring the imperative of marriage between citizens. Women lacked this status in a practical sense, but they would be indispensable for the transmission of the highest social distinction: only people whose parents both had the status of citizens would be citizens themselves. Thereon, the different roles are determined, men participate in politics and war, and women are wives and mothers, and keep watch over the maintenance of the *oikos.* We should not lose sight of the fact that this is a common denominator of all *poleis*, independently of the ruling political system; citizenship came to be the most essential element of the political-territorial structure, whose prized independence relied mainly on the decisions of this collective.

With this premise, it is obvious that, after the marriage celebration, young women should get pregnant, and in order to succeed, they would seek divine, as well as human, help. This help would continue being essential during the pregnancy and especially at the critical moment of the birth, which involved a real risk to the life of the mothers, as well as the newborns. To the women's youth, we add their limited knowledge of gynaecology and obstetrics, among other aspects (Reboreda Morillo forthcoming). The often-repeated words of Medea in Euripides' eponymous work show that women were very aware of this risk: 'Then people also say that while we live quietly and without danger at home, the men go off to war. Wrong! One birth alone is worse than three times in battlefield behind a shield.'[1] No doubt the reason for this statement goes beyond the intense pain that was systematically associated with giving birth, but was due to the high mortality of mothers as well as newborns. As pointed out by Nicole Loraux, the mothers' death was recognised with respect by the *polis* (Loraux 2004, 43–97; Demand 2004, 122–129), and, for this reason, it was brought to life in portrayals on steles and *lekythos*, showing the unsettled figure of a woman, with messy hair and clothes, partially sitting on a *kline*, with a leg resting on a stool and surrounded by the women who helped during birth. On occasions, a baby, who did not take away any of the mother's importance, was included in this scene (Oakley 2003, 185–186); in fact, no particular data is provided, about its gender nor its destiny, playing a secondary, inactive role (Hirsch-Dyczek 1983, 39–40). Actually, the baby's presence seems to have the task of highlighting the heartbreaking impossibility of them continuing their lives together (Grossman 2007, 312). The gender not being determined may be due to lack of either interest or social identity (Molas Font 2016, 72).

In general, the contexts in which they appear tend to be of a ritual nature, as part of a grave, in the case of steles or *lekythos*, or in tribute to a divinity or a hero. In any case, the purpose is to show the loss more painfully, thanks to the presence of dependent beings that are left unprotected without a father or a mother. Babies are usually portrayed swaddled or sometimes, as in Paestum, with a pointed hat (McNiven 2007, 142), or naked, and, almost always, in the arms of a woman, who is assumed to be the mother or wet nurse.

In spite of the fact that there is evidence that mothers took on the duty of breastfeeding (Reboreda Morillo 2017), in Athens, unlike in Etruria, in the south of Italy, and Sicily, no images of mothers breastfeeding their babies are found on either ceramics or in reliefs, leading to the conclusion that the subject was taboo. Beaumont (2015, 52–53) states that the sight of women's breasts had a very strong sexual connotation for men, which clashed with the concept of the ideal of the maternal figure.

The second scene where this age group is depicted is incorporated in the celebration of a rite, which can be associated with different circumstances. If, unlike previous examples, childbirth was successful, then after the paternal acknowledgement, which took place in the privacy of the home (*amphidromia*) and has never been depicted (Neils 2003, 144), came the public ceremonies (*dekate*). The most important part was probably

thanking the deities involved in the successful birth, at the same time as requesting that the baby be kept alive. In Thessaly, a marble relief dating from around 300 BC,[2] which is very illustrative for learning the rituals included in this exclusively feminine ceremony, has been documented (Morizot 2004, 159–170). A woman identified as the wet nurse is carrying the baby in her arms and is presenting it to Artemis. A male slave is leading an ox to the altar, in order for it to be sacrificed; a female slave, also identified by her lesser stature, is carrying offerings of food. The mother, who is at the back of the procession, and who is identified by the veil she is wearing, holds another offering in her hand, a *pyxis*.

We have seen how this ceremony referred to the success of the birth and to the continuation of life, the following concern shared by all mothers. Although it is difficult to estimate the percentage of child mortality, it is thought that only half would reach adulthood (Oakley 2003, 163). Therefore, during this first stage, several votive offerings were made: swaddled terracotta babies with amulets around the neck, which were used against bad luck, disease or the evil eye, such as those found in Paestum (Ammerman 2007, 142–148). These amulets around the neck are customary in the portrayal of small children. Figurines of women carrying a child in their arms, known as *kourotrophos*, were also offered; this offering was already in use in Archaic times (Beaumont 2003, 61).

Another public ceremony with a more civic nature is the *Apotouria*, celebrated annually and in which the father presented the boy to the bosom of the *phatry*, and very likely the girl as well, when they turned one (Neils 2003, 144–145). On this occasion, the children were also presented before the guardian deity of the *polis*. A fragmented relief found in the Acropolis of Athens, which shows a father with his son before Athena,[3] has been associated with this ceremony (Lawton 2007, 46).

Another quite common depiction, which portrays an inactive baby in the arms of an adult woman, is a relief that was used as an offering, reproducing the practice of a family tribute (Fig. 10.1). In general, the group goes in procession towards the deity, who is almost always enthroned, carrying offerings and/or animals to be sacrificed (Lawton 2007, 43–45). These scenes reflect real worship acts, although it is not confirmed on the ceramics (Hirsch-Dyczek 1983, 41). The baby's role is also secondary in this case; the family unity showing respect to the deity is highlighted, as well as their participation in the worship since the earliest ages (Dillon 2002, 31–36). The same situation is repeated in portrayals that recreate family visits to the tombs of a loved one, as can be noted in several *lekythos* attributed to the painter from Berlin (Oakley 2003, 163).

There are certain aspects in which this age group coincides with the following one, due to the common denominator of the bond with the *oikos*, such as the fact that few differences are noted, as we will see, between the activities of boys and girls, although the girls are always dressed and the boys naked, no doubt a symbolic nakedness (Molas Font 2016, 73). The scenes showing children in such a domestic environment are very scarce, the exception being a few glasses with red figures from the end of the 5th century BC (Beaumont 2015, 106–114), where the disjunctive of

Figure 10.1: Attica. Votive relief found in the sanctuary of Artemis of Brauron. Archaeological Museum of Brauron (340 BC) (photo: author. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Ephorate of Antiquities of East Attica. Inv. 1151, reproduced by permission

naked boys and dressed girls is maintained. On occasions, the accompanying women are carrying out activities related to weaving.

Second stage. Pre-puberty: from 3–7 years of age

Other than in very specific contexts, we will see that it is very complicated to determine the age of those depicted in the iconography. They belong to this group, not so much because of their physical appearance, which is generally imprecise, but more in relation to their gestures, attributes and objects. Beaumont (2015, 24–36) highlights the following features: size, height and body shape, hair length, facial and body hair, clothes, gestures, attributes and compositional connection with other figures. These peculiarities, although not always concurrent, can be compared with reliefs with epigraphic information, such as the stele of the Ikaria Acropolis,[4] in which a woman is portrayed with five children, according to the inscription, three children and two siblings, understood to be between 1 and 16 years old. The smallest is being carried (first group), the middle one crawls in search of the mother and the third youngster, naked, is standing before her (both in the second group). The two siblings, the oldest in the group, are wearing tunics. The difference between them is shown in their manifestation of pain, more intense in the youngest, who holds his hand to his head (third group) and, more rigid in the oldest (fourth group), who extends his right hand towards her as if saying goodbye (Oakley 2003, 180). We will analyse these gestures in more detail, in relation to the funeral rite.

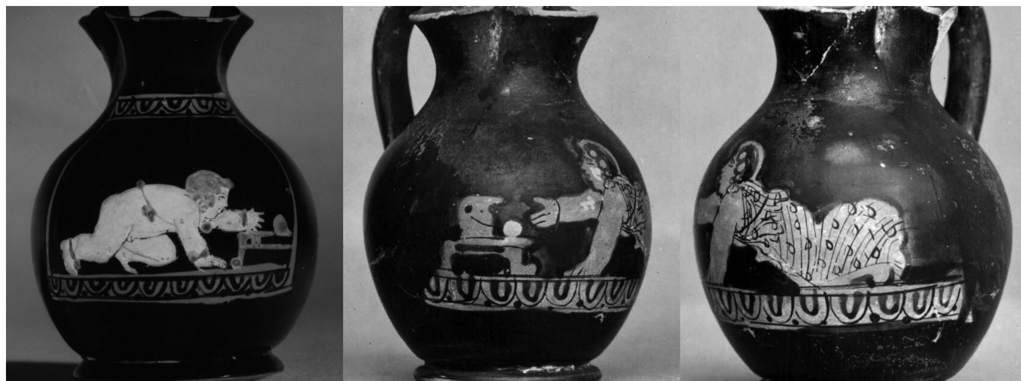

Figure 10.2: London. Attic Choes: boy and girl crawling (425–420 BC)(image: British Museum. Attica red-figure chous boy. Inv. 1842, 0728, 1123 and Inv. 1933, 0613, 5, reproduced by permission)

Three years of age is taken as the beginning of a new stage which is considered less vulnerable, because the possibilities of reaching adulthood increased notably. The Athenian society celebrated this transition with a rite of passage in one of the most significant festivities of the *polis*: the *Anthesteria* in honour of Dionysus. Specifically, the second day was known as *Choes*, 'the feast of wine jugs', so called because there was a drinking competition among adults (Neils 2003, 145 and Beaumont 2004, 75), and 3-year-old children tasted wine for the first time, a ritual that celebrated their survival. The objects that symbolised this event were the *choes* themselves, small glasses decorated with different activities related to childhood, which serve to show us an approximation of what their lives were like. Thus, they show games of skill or imitation, comic scenes and daily events accompanied by pets (Moreno Conde 2015, 37) that allow us to learn some of the children's entertainments. The most common pets are dogs and, among the games they played, the most recurrent are the wheeled stick and the carts. Occasionally, older youngsters are also depicted (Beaumont 2015, 69–84). Although portrayals of boys are more frequent than of girls, there are not too many differences between the genders, except for the nakedness of the boys, in contrast with the clothed bodies of the girls (Fig. 10.2), of whom only one case of nakedness has been confirmed (Beaumont 2015, fig. 2.3 a). In other words, games, pets, and gestures seem interchangeable between both. These coincidences are also documented in funeral objects (Oakley 2003, 178) and in funerary steles. The most common objects in burials were terracotta figures of animals, miniature glasses, toy furniture, balls, dolls, and knucklebones; all could be used as offerings at the time in which they began a new stage, marriage for girls, and a new educational phase for boys, which would introduce them to the male universe (Beaumont 2015, 128–34).

Most *choes* have been located among children's funeral objects, sometimes as property of the deceased, but other times as an object that they would have owned if they had lived, but death prevented them from taking part in this festivity. It is a situation comparable to that of young women who died before getting married and

were buried with *loutrophoroi*, containers characteristic of the wedding ritual. In both cases, it nostalgically confirms the impossibility being able to proceed towards new social situations. The death of a young woman was cloaked in special sadness due to not having achieved the main role that society assigned to women (Foley 2003, 132).

Even though the age of the *choes* can be determined because we know the associated ritual, in general, it is practically impossible to specify the age of the individuals, beyond that of belonging to a particular group. It is important to keep in mind that in ancient times it was not important to determine the exact age of an individual (Beaumont 2015, 17). The funerary steles, much influenced by the socioeconomic circumstances of the *polis* (Hirsch-Dyczek 1983, 8), constitute an excellent subject of study. Small children usually appear together with a woman, very probably their mother. Unlike the previous stage, they show a greater autonomy of movement, crawling, standing, or sitting on her knees, the latter being the oldest motif (Hirsch-Dyczek 1983, 39). The most common gesture is with their arms raised, showing their dependence, such as corresponds to this stage of coexistence, for both boys and girls, in the *oikos*, dominated by the feminine universe. In this phase, the mother carries out an important educational task, which goes beyond physical abilities such as eating, walking and speaking, in order to go into the necessary respect for the rules of the patriarchal society and, especially, for the values of the citizenry, fundamental to maintaining the continuity of the *poleis* (Reboreda Morillo 2012). When the steles include two children with the mother and one of them is a baby, it usually corresponds to death during the last birth (Oakley 2003, 185). Another group of funerary reliefs, not very common, but meaningful, are those that depict a boy or a girl alone, the former being more frequent. We can cite the famous stele that depicts two brothers[5] as being exceptional. They are often accompanied by pets and toys: birds, dogs, knucklebones, balls, and spinning tops are common to both sexes. Dolls or mirrors (objects that are maintained in the following stage) are exclusive to girls and wheeled sticks, hoops and, less often, lyres, hares and cats are for boys. With the exception of the repeated nakedness of the boys and the girls being dressed, we can see that most objects and pets are interchangeable. The scenes conjure up moments of happiness, probably with the purpose of perpetuating this image of eternal play (Oakley 2003, 191). Fondness and pain caused by the separation is also expressed, the same feelings reflected by painters of funerary urns, where the child is about to leave in Charon's boat, a common theme; however, the images never describe time spent in Hades (Oakley 2003, 173).

As in the first age group, boys and girls took part in religious rituals, no longer in the arms of an adult, but more actively. Thus, they take part in processions which were going to make an offering or a sacrifice to a deity, or accompanying women to get water for the bride's ritual bath, or taking part in the wedding party that accompanies the newlyweds to their new home.

Another recurrent religious context is the funeral rites. We start from the principal that death was a normal experience in Ancient Greece, and from this daily nature, the

Figure 10.3: Paris. Pinax (Votive plaque) from Athens. Prothesis attributed to painter of Sappho (about 500 BC). Paris, Museum of Louvre. Inv. MNB 905

scenes show the functions that society attributed to both genders in relation to the age group in which they were integrated. To illustrate this statement it is customary to refer to a terracotta funeral plaque attributed to the painter Sappho at the beginning of the 5th century BC[6] (Fig. 10.3). It depicts an *ekphora*, the moment in which the corpse, after being washed and anointed by the women, is exhibited before the loved ones so that they could say their last goodbyes. The women, near the deceased's head, openly express their pain with eloquent gestures of sorrow: they pull their hair and beat their chest and cheeks; it is an open and spontaneous display of their feelings. The group of men, placed at the feet, in a contained gesture, send an austere salute by raising their right arm in a contained gesture. The girls, placed among the women, imitate the female mourning, foreseeing their future role in the learning process. The boys' attitude usually follows the external display of pain of the women, as a consequence of their dependency laid down by the *oikos* environment. However, we believe that there is another possible interpretation, at least on occasions such as this, midway between both defined groups, both physically in the scene and also because of their particular gesture, which is customary and which varies between male austerity and the female explosion of feelings. Thus, the boys are not holding back their feelings and do express their grief, but in a more restrained way than the women, the common denominator in different funeral portrayals is the wish to reach out to whoever has passed away, generally by extending their arms towards the deceased (Oakley 2003, 166; 170–173). This same expression is the one shown on the painted glasses that describe Charon: the boy, about to leave, turns towards his parents and stretches is arms out towards them, as a kind of a painful farewell. They sometimes carry toys with them, such as a bag of knucklebones or a toy cart, remembering those happy childhood moments.

Third stage. Puberty: from 7–14 years of age

As of 7 years of age, portrayals show that boys and girls took different paths, a circumstance that corresponds with the beginning of their preparation for carrying out their respective roles that society assigned to them. For the young girls, the end of this stage, which coincided with their biological ability to be mothers, took them directly to marriage. The young boys would still have to wait until 30 years of age, after completing a training process which was considered more complex than that of the girls, in accordance with the future performance of their political and military obligations demanded by their *polis* as citizens.

Let us analyse what the iconography says about those girls, whose breasts are, unlike the previous stage, already perceived under their clothing. During this period they stayed in the *oikos* in a feminised environment, adding to the role plays, real learning practices. Both prepared them to be good wives and mothers, i.e. organising the home and the tasks of the servants, cooking, taking care of the sick, bringing children into the world, making sure they survived and educating them in the values of the *polis* (Reboreda Morillo 2016).

For this reason, the most meaningful scenes, which are very rare, are set in a domestic context. Perhaps the most illustrative is the well-known terracotta Boeotia from the beginning of the 5th century BC, which depicts an adult woman cooking with a young girl and that has been unanimously interpreted as a mother teaching her daughter to cook[7] (Foley 2003, 112; 120). No doubt the most recurrent image is the one that shows women in relation to the activity of weaving, symbol of their virtue par excellence. Although different ages are represented, it is not easy to identify the relationship between them, but it seems evident that mother and daughter weaved together, the mother being responsible for teaching, as confirmed by written records. Thus, Xenophon, in his work *Oeconomicus* (VII, 6), states that learning about wool was the most meaningful task, together with controlling appetites. In the epigraphy we have evidence that the final product went beyond the limits of the self-sufficiency of the *oikos* to become a regular joint offering, from mother and daughter, to the gods, particularly the female ones (Beaumont 2003, 117–118).

Another feminine domestic scene which combines different age groups is the one that describes the wedding preparations of a young woman in which the mother plays an important role, since she is considered responsible for fulfilling all the required rituals. This theme, in various dimensions of the event, is profusely shown on ceramics and the main figure is always the maiden (Lissarrague 1991; 1996). Just as in the previous case, it is also complicated to identify both the other women and their relationships, but written sources describe this motherly prominence as an act that will signal the end of their cohabitation, since the girl would depart to the home of her husband's family after the celebrations.

Once again, we broach the religious context. In addition to domestic training, the girls had to know and pass a series of rites dedicated to certain goddesses, whom they had to worship, many times in relation to their roles in society. In these rituals,

dancing and music occupy a prominent place, as shown in the iconography (Beaumont 2015, 149–152). Although there is no information on this subject, it is very likely that learning these skills took place at home, taught by female adult relatives. In the setting of the temples, in Athens we have evidence of three rituals, reflected in the iconography as well as written sources, although the information is limited (Dillon 2002, 57–63). Everything points to a minority position, probably led by the daughters of the wealthier families, and it is quite probable that this privilege was passed from mothers to daughters.

In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes states that, at the age of 7, two or perhaps four girls, acted as *arrephoros*, carriers of secret objects in the night festival known as *Arrhephoria* and in the another festival; *Chalkeia* (Beaumont 2015, 170–175). Furthermore, they lived in the acropolis for a while, they were considered servants of the goddess and for a year they took part in weaving *peplos,* which were given as an offering to Athena. At the age of 10, they assumed the role of *aletris*, grain grinders, the only activity of which no portrayals are known, and *kanephoros*, carriers of baskets which contained objects related to sacrifices and led the sacrificial processions (Neils 2003, 149–151; 158). Along with this tribute to Athena, the most extended ritual of the *polis* in Attica took place in Brauron, at the sanctuary of Artemis (Reboreda Morillo forthcoming), where an abundance of iconography related to childhood, particularly of girls, but also of boys (Fig. 10.4) has been found (Beaumont 2015, 174–186).

As an example, a great many sculptures are documented, of small children accompanied by birds, balls, and rabbits, the boys naked and the girls dressed; the reason for these offerings varied. In general, they called for protection, they gave thanks for having overcome a disease or for having held a prominent position in a ritual at the service of the deity (Beaumont 2015, 154–156). Other depictions are directly associated with the confinement period of Athenian girls between the ages of 10 and 14 classed as *arktoi* (bear cubs). The end of their stay closed the childhood stage, associated with a wild nature, and they were now considered to be ready for sexual maturity and its consequences (Marinatos 2002, 36–39), i.e., being good wives and effective mothers. We do not know the length of the stay; it is even possible that it varied depending on the era, although some specialists believe that it would be about one year. The tasks that they performed in this sacred place have not emerged either. In his play, *Lysistrata,* (645), Aristophanes states that acolytes, dressed in saffron-coloured suits (a substitute for bear skin), known as krokoton, and 'shed' the 'bear skin.' This activity was associated with that portrayed in the *krateriskoi* (Nielsen 2009, 81–83), small kraters specific to the tribute of that goddess and also documented, for example, in the sanctuary of Artemis Mounichia in Piraeus. They were decorated with girls of different ages in procession, dancing and running, generally dressed in a tunic and, less frequently, naked. This 'bear dance' prepared them for pregnancy and giving birth, probably due to the association of this animal with great maternal traits. The saffron colour described by Aristophanes was associated with the erotic properties that the Greeks attributed to the crocus flower. Another ritual shown is that of the

Figure 10.4: Attica. Votive sculptures: girls and boy found in the sanctuary of Artemis of Brauron. Archaeological Museum of Brauron.

hunt of a female bear, a role that was taken on by one of the girls, portrayed with a bear mask (Nielsen 2009, 88).

Before concluding the feminine references of this stage, we must mention the famous *kore* from the Archaic period which, although previous to our chronological framework, cover the dangerous liminal period of a young girl who was considered neither child nor adult, but rather a figure in transit, a transit of short duration, who has to be protected from the external masculine threats as well as her own instability (Beaumont 2000, 45). They are sculptures of young aristocrats, which served as an offering to the goddesses, at the same time as making their availability for marriage public, as well as the possible dowry that their family was willing to hand over. The end of the *parthenos* period was determined not so much by marriage, but more by their ability to bear children, which raised them to the status of *gyne*.

In this entire group, the age most portrayed is that close to marriage, proving the importance given to her fertility, which made her an essential element for the continuation of the *polis* (Molas Font 2016, 80).

We will add little with respect to the males who, upon entering the masculine universe, are usually no longer linked to their mothers' actions, moving away from

the aim of this study. A new, very different learning process starts for them, away from home, with the purpose of them learning the specific and essential skills to develop their role as citizens (Beaumont 2015, 134–146). Thus, they are shown in private schools, learning reading, writing, and music; modestly dressed in *himation* or capes or naked in the gymnasium, doing physical exercise or in scenes of conquest with adult males with whom they maintained homoerotic relationships as a part of their education and training. Once they have proved their ability to perform their role as citizens, they join the army. The most common scenes in which mothers and sons are reunited are known as 'the farewell of the warrior,' where the mother is shown in distress because of the very possible, terrible fate of her son (Beaumont 2005, 110–111). Prior to this time, in the 6th century BC, the luxurious sculptures of the *kouros*, athletic youths, naked, who represented the idealized aristocracy are of interest. Their fate, just as we saw with the *kore*, was to become an offering in a shrine. The difference is that these statues were used in the cemeteries to mark graves. In these latter contexts, as warriors or athletes they are usually portrayed on funerary steles that now no longer recall happiness through games, but through competition and war.

By way of conclusion

The initial approach of this paper was to deal with the perception of childhood in Athens during the Classical period through images and texts, but as I worked on the subject, I became aware that the richness transmitted by the iconography, as pointed out by specialists, surpassed that of the texts themselves. While aware that in many examples an ideal is depicted, this, necessarily, informs us of a reality, a factor which we can verify through both the scenes selected by the artists and the influence that social changes exert on the portrayal itself. It is true that the children were not usually naked, but no doubt their worth to society was highlighted in this nakedness, whereas the girls, except for a few exceptions, always appeared dressed, a symbol of their respectable future role as mothers and wives. The political-territorial structure of the *polis* brings with it the imperious need for citizens, even female citizens after Pericles' law, and society becomes more aware of the relevance of its children, an aspect which is shown through a portrayal which is more in line with their real forms, no longer being adults on a smaller scale. Furthermore, their presence becomes more frequent, also besides their mothers. The images through gestures, complements and contexts, show the different stages into which the Hellenes divided childhood. The smallest children, inactive, only showed their existence. From the age of 3, their participation becomes more active. Until the age of 7, when boys and girls lived together in the *oikos*, they hardly showed any differences, the same happens with their funeral objects on the graves and in the portrayal of funerary steles. From this age onwards, just as in their lives, their images are separated.

The most common context portrayed is the religious context, showing the interaction of this world with the daily nature of individuals. Thus, they are included

in votive and funeral reliefs, in offerings and as a part of the rituals, both as main figures and taking part in the worship of deities or funerary ceremonies. The second, much less usual, scene is the domestic setting, from which boys disappear as soon as they begin their training in order to be able to carry out the roles that society has assigned them, more valued than the feminine roles, and so requiring more time. Girls married as soon as they were able to bring citizens into the world. The wedding preparations are the last scenes that link them to their mothers, who are profusely depicted in paintings on ceramics, where the maidens, just as in the reality of the event, held the most meaningful place.

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Notes

1 Euripides: *Medea*, trans. George Theodovids, 2005. www.poetryintranslation.com
2 Archaeological Museum of Lamia, AE 1041.
3 Acropolis Museum, Athens, 3030.
4 Kataphygion, Ikaria, Schoolhouse.
5 New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 11.185.
6 Paris, Louvre Museum, MNB 905.
7 Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, H.10.7

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