

Osteoarchaeological foetal and infant studies of past populations in Sweden

Abstract

"Where are the children?" - A question often raised when looking into past populations and specifically their burial grounds. The high mortality rate among children before vaccines and modern medicine is a well-known fact, and many scholars emphasize the improbability of the low number of young children (not least infants) that are present on burial grounds. Suggested explanations for their (corporeal) absence are not scarce, such as taphonomic processes, different funerary practices, infanticide, excavating archaeologist's disinterest in child burials, etc. Nonetheless, many scholars tend to simply settle with the youngest children being "vanished data", instead of thoroughly exploring these different explanations for their absence and also conducting focused analyses on the skeletal remains that have been found and collected. However, the past couple of decades have shown a budding interest in the field of child studies in the past, highlighting children as individuals as well as an active part of past societies. This is yet to be further implemented in Swedish archaeology and osteology where such studies are still lacking, especially focused foetal and infant studies. My project, therefore, aims to shed light on the youngest children of past populations in Sweden and to explore the question of "where the children have gone". This will be done by studying aspects of health, age at death, burial practices, taphonomy, and also social theories concerning personhood and caregiving.