*Care, socialization and play in Ancient Attica: a developmental childhood archeological approach*, by Maria Sommer and Dion Sommer, is an archeological study based on a collection of material relating to childhood in ancient Attica, dating back to 480-300 B.C. It reconstructs in front of our eyes a deeply human world of care and play in ancient Attica and empirically depicts how the growing field of childhood archeology with its historical contextualization can contribute important knowledge to developmental psychology.

Equally, it depicts how the later can add understanding to material records and iconographies without dismissing their cultural context. The three concepts of care, socialization and play are indeed central to the book's archeological evidence-based approach, but they appropriate their relevance as thinking frames through a consistent inductive approach. Namely, the 72 illustrations are indispensable part of this book not only because they coherently 'document' relevant and some never-before-seen Attic terracotta dolls, marble grave steles, various reliefs and images on choes, or because they support, for that matter, the reader's imagination. On the contrary, these are the artifacts from which the authors build, from the bottom up, their interpretative inductive approach, called *developmental childhood archeology*.

Given the complexity of the idea of 'care' or 'play' itself, the authors are justified in their layered argumentation throughout the four parts of the book. Iconography is therefore one part of their inductive argument. Attention is appropriately given to real play objects, literary examples, linguistic evidence (e.g. the correct claim that the very concept of play is semantically interspersed with that of a child, playing, and/or toys) and relevant classical philosophical writings (e.g. Aristotle's *Politics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, the seventh book from *History of Animals*; Plato's dialogue *The Laws,* the Hippocratic corpuses, etc.). As various central concepts are defined and given clear-cut contextualization, the book exhibits a didactically friendly reading free of vague or pretentious theory construction. It presents clear and simple language, but one that in its simplicity does not lack an engaging narrative. It is refreshing to see self-reflective writing (present sporadically also in the authors' endnotes), sensitivity in delimiting the reductionist notion of 'childhood' *vs.* the politically aware 'childhood*s*', and scientific caution in drawing conclusions. This serves well the methodological red thread of the book, and only rarely stops short in full development of argument. Namely, it is of great value how throughout the study we are offered various

perspectives on the issue under investigation (for instance, the meaning of play) and how relentlessly the authors posit important dilemmas for the reader (dilemmas such as, how could love and care for wanted children coexist with infanticide in the ancient household; or, what emotions filled a young playing Attic child more than 2,500 years ago).

Taking it from 'we cannot say for sure', while striding in hermeneutical reconstruction based on what is known, exhibits, in my view, the authors' intellectual integrity. Yet, as the book offers various and often nuanced perspectives already in the first chapter of the book, developing their own position in contradistinction to others becomes and is increasingly important from the onset. For instance, if emotional states during play, according to recent research, are positive, pleasurable and rewarding, and if there is iconographic *ambiguity* as to the emotions in play scenes, bringing this (seemingly contradictory) empirical evidence, both iconographic and neurobiological, to a complete syllogistic conclusion already in the first section would *reinforce*, less modestly, the authors' already-given claim that play has an intrinsic value in itself for the child. This position holds value regardless whether children experience anger, confusion etc., during play, as we know from ordinary and/or psychotherapeutic contact with children (and irrespective of adults' meaning making of it retroactively). Naturally, the drawing of argument is always already a matter of style to a point, and here it seems to exhibit primarily the authors' respectful awareness of the plurality of positions.

The authors engage in crucial debates throughout the book. They first position themselves along the line which has already debunked the long-prevailing view that there is no conception of childhood before the 17$^{th}$ century. Later they evidence the informal and engaged adult-child relationship by emphasizing the importance of alloparenting, multiple care, cooperative breeding, and the crucial thesis that *building close bonds and affection grows out of practice*. They do this without neglecting the fact of infanticide in the ancient *oikos*. Making sense of the later is done by using important excellent insights from social psychology (e.g. the dehumanization strategy as legitimizing indifference, theorized by Philip Zimbardo). As a result, they exhibit, rather implicitly and perhaps inadvertently, the position of Dilthey that social facts are something to be understood rather than explained. The third part of the book is dedicated to detailed documentation of toys and play, where they also engage in short juxtaposition with the Freudian and Piagetian approach on play. Here we witness a vigorously engaged position on their part as to why we are justified in

concluding that children did play in ancient Attica, instead of interpreting certain images as merely presenting *ritual* scenes.

The thesis that children actively participate and construct knowledge in their gradual socialization via interaction-based models has been the common denominator of both Piaget and Vigotsky, and one that resonates in this book, though the authors take explicit recourse primarily to recent research in developmental and evolutionary psychology. Also, the book's functionalist approach to culture and the authors' understanding of care, play and childhood is in no way reducible or meaningfully juxtaposed to some 'functionalist' approach of, say, Plato, who saw role- and phantasy play as having *preparatory* functions where future adult roles are basically and primarily rehearsed.

A potentially integrative *addendum* to Sommers' developmental childhood archeology approach and their concluding remarks might be further pondered along the following lines: a) the extent to which the emphasis of the term *self-socialization* adequately captures the fact that children are active meaning-makers *without displacing* or deemphasizing the *inherent* importance of the *other* in that very socialization (or even the impact the child has on the *other*). It is important however that the authors' intent to make more visible the full participation and engagement of children in the socialization process sits well with their overall paradigm; b) given that the introduced paradigm of developmental childhood archeology intends to "reveal and explain the underlying cultural meaning systems" of human activity, it might be of heuristic benefit to situate this approach in relation to seminal works in semiology, in particular because the goal of the paradigm is to describe and interpret traces of human activity; and c) if the intention is to identify and explain potential functions of those human activities (both manifest and latent functions, as written), in what way is this proposition related to the authors' relativistic approach in terms of culture *vs.* nature dichotomy (or what authors call a "that depends" approach)?

Finally, this study is an important and beautifully evidenced reading for the cohorts of both childhood archeologists and developmental psychologists. Bridging the human world of care and play in ancient Attica, accompanied perhaps by Hermes in the nonlinear trajectories of human imagination, is pleasure in itself. For we know not only how to play and play for the pleasure of relating to something other than oneself but, trespassing function, we happen to co-create ourselves in a world that we share. In the meantime we leave traces of human

activity and, as adults, welcome the ‘what can *it* do’ child’s attitude, the ‘what it *is*’ pure wonder, and beyond sentiment, take joy in the pre-Socratic powerful simile that even time [gr. *aion*] is a child playing a game (Heraclit, fragment 57).