

Children's Burials in Ancient Egypt

Heba Magdy

Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University

Abstract

This research spots the light on the children burials in ancient Egypt. Thus, the researcher investigates the common reasons of the children death. The highest death rate of all was in the first few days, rather less when averaged over a month and still lower for the first year. Usually the dead children were those who were weak or sick or had congenital defects and deformities. The death can be caused also by discarding the infants. It seems that the percentage of children burials increased during the Graeco-Roman period. The researcher discusses also the different types of children burials appeared throughout the periods of ancient Egypt, either that of the infants or the children. The burial could be done in cemeteries after being placed inside pottery jars, coffins, baskets, or boxes. Others were buried under the floor of the houses. In the Graeco-Roman period, evidences proved that the children were also cremated. As for the procedures taken for taking care of the children corpses till they reach their graves; it seems that they were treated such as the adults.

Keywords: Children's burials, ancient world, Graeco-Roman period, Egypt

.....

The causes of children death in ancient Egypt

The ancient Egyptians took care of their children. The family was very keen on providing the child with his needs: food, play, education. The ancient Egyptians were encouraged to have as many children as they can. Some families were very proud to have 10 or 15 children. This is normal in the Egyptian agricultural society, where more children mean more participants in the labour markets that could help the family economically. There are many scenes that show the children helping their families in the field work. Other reasons can be related to the religious concepts in which the happiness of the netherworld depends on the child that will execute the funerary rituals for his father.¹ This habit continued in the Graeco-Roman period. Therefore, it is normal to find an increase in the death-rate among the children. This can be confirmed by the census that reached us from the Roman period from the Fayoum region, Oxyrhynchite nome and Ptolemias that refer to relatively large numbers of children in most households and significant age gaps between them. The large gaps between ages could be the result of other children who had died.²

Therefore, the parents were very keen on ensuring the survival of their offspring, and many sought magical practices to guarantee their children's safety. Amulets used to be worn by the children to destroy or ward off dangerous spirits. Spoken magic was also recited at the crucial moments. There were spells to protect the newly born from being stolen by demons in the night.³ Even the foetus was considered a living being, and protection for the unborn was an important requirement. Therefore, protection was asked from the gods to the women during their pregnancy and childbirth.⁴ This can be confirmed by the hymns mentioned in the Papyrus of Ani where we can read: "*Don't say: I'm too young for you revises me. You don't know (the time of) your death. Death comes, it dominates the child who is in the bosom of his mother, as one who made old*".⁵

The death-rate was highest of all in the first few days, rather less when averaged over a month and still lower for the first year. Statistics estimate that 20% of the newborns die during the first year of life and 30 % of them didn't survive the first five years.⁶ Usually the dead children were those who were weak or sick or had congenital defects and deformities. The researches that were done on the children skeletons, dents, and tissues indicated evidences of congenital conditions (i.e: Spina bifida occulta, Anencephaly, Osteogenesis imperfecta), Porotic hyperostosis, nonspecific infection, dental pathology, Cancer and trauma.⁷

The researcher notices also that the children above one year died more frequently in the Graeco-Roman era than in the Pharaonic period. The reason could be related to the change occurred in the state; during the Pharaonic period the economical and the medical status was secured, while in the Graeco-Roman period, the country passed through many revolutions and wars that affected the status of the country and led to poverty. As long as the children of than age were no more breast-fed, the poverty could affect the ability of the family to secure enough food for their children. This of course led to the increase in the death-rate of the children. This can be confirmed by the team that worked in examining the cemetery of Abu Sir who discovered that children of three to four years died more frequently than younger ones. Moreover, the researches that were done on the children burials at Kellis 2 (Dakhla) proved that 70 % of the children suffered from porotic hyperostosis that was caused by deficiency anaemia.⁸ Some scholars wrote

about the infanticide in ancient Egypt during the Graeco-Roman period, based on a letter of a man named Hilarion to his wife Alice, dates back to the 1st century BC (reign of Augustus):

*"Know that I am still in Alexandria.... I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I received payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered (before I come home), if it is a boy keep it, if a girl, cast it out."*⁹
*Ἐάν πολλά πολλῶν τέκης, Ἐάν ἦν ἀρσενον ἀφες, Ἐάν ἦν θήλεα ἐκβαλε.*¹⁰

The scholars interpreted this word *ἐκβαλε* as an evidence to the practice of infanticide in ancient Egypt. However, the word "*ἐκβαλε*" couldn't mean kill but expose or discard. During the discarding, the infant could be exposed to death, or could be rescued by a family that would adopt him or raised up to be a slave. Discarding the children was not practiced by the Egyptians during the Pharaonic period. However, This practice was common in Greece; Posidippus (a Greek poet) wrote about the Greece community saying: "Everyone, even a poor man, raises a son; everyone, even a rich man exposes a daughter".¹¹ The Greek community didn't prefer the female gender; therefore they used to expose their female offspring.

It seems that this practice entered Egypt by the Greeks during the Graeco-Roman period. This can be confirmed by the documents such as the contracts made for the wet-nursing of foundlings (originally the discarded infants) date back to the first Augustan period.¹² Investigating these documents revealed that all of them came from cities inhabited by the Greeks (Alexandria, Oxyrhynchus, Arsinoite nome). As for the reason of the discarding, it could be related to the bad economic status. In this case they chose the female one to be discarded.¹³ The census that reached us from the Ptolemaic and the Roman periods revealed extreme gender imbalance in the Greek families where males greatly predominate over females.¹⁴ This imbalance could be due to the exposure of females. Moreover, the end of a marriage could also be a reason. In a papyrus from Alexandria, 1st century BC, a pregnant woman whose marriage was annulled granted permission to expose her baby.¹⁵ It's notable also that all the discarding documents date back to the Ptolemaic era and the first two centuries of the Roman rule. Later on, mentioning the infant exposure disappeared. This could be due to the Roman law that prohibited the act of the exposure. However, when this practice entered the land of Egypt it was considered unethically. There is an inscription dated back to the 1st century BC mentioned a law from the city of Ptolemais (a Greek city established by Ptolemy I). The law demanded a period of purification before entering a temple after suffering personal misfortune, or after sexual intercourse, menstruation, child-birth, abortion, or child exposure.¹⁶

"Men who enter into the (sanctuary) must wait to be pure in accordance with the following: , and if she exposes (the child), fourteen.

The researcher wants to emphasize here that the native Egyptians didn't practice the discarding during the Graeco-Roman period, as this practice continued to be adopted by the foreigners. This can be emphasized by the commentaries of Diodorus Siculus who visited Egypt nearly at the same time (1st century BC). These commentaries emphasized that the Egyptians was very keen on taking care of their children and never discard them as it used to be happened in Greece. The census that revealed the gender imbalance in the Greek families (mentioned before) revealed also a gender balance in the villages predominantly inhabited by native Egyptians. In the archive of Dryton and Apollonia that contains papyri date back to 176-175 BC, and came from the city of Pathyris (Gebelein, Thebes) the researcher found that Dryton (the Greek man) married an Egyptian woman called Senmothis (Apollonia). In one of the papyri, we knew that Apollonia got five daughters from Dryton, and they were all kept and were raised which follows the Egyptian custom of no infant discarding regardless of money or gender.

The children burial in ancient Egypt:

Ironically, the oldest human grave so far discovered in Egypt is that of a child. The grave was discovered in 1994 at Taramsa Hill (near Qena in Upper Egypt, located near the modern site of the temple of Hathor at Dendara). It contained the skeleton of a child between 8 and 10 years, buried about 55,000 years ago (Middle Paleolithic age). The child found sitting against the wall of a shallow pit, its face skyward, legs pulled up, left arm on its hip and right arm behind its back (Pl. 1).¹⁷

The pre-dynastic period provided us with cemeteries intended for the children. This was found at Adaima (8 km south of Esna) precisely the eastern cemetery that contains 60 graves. The southern part of this cemetery contained only children's graves dating to the Naqada period (4th millennium BC).¹⁸ The percentage of the children graves in this cemetery is 87 %. Most of the dead children varied in age from six months to 9 years.¹⁹ However, most of the burials belonged to children from 0 to 4 years. The children were either placed in pottery jars (pl. 2) or buried in pits (Pl. 3-4). They were buried in a crouching position.²⁰ It seems that the child mortality here related to a tuberculosis epidemic.²¹ Pre-dynastic children burials (4th millennium BC) were found at Riqqa (site between Lisht and Medum at El-Fayoum) in an area called Gerzeh where 51 burials of infants and children were found among a total of 249 intact burials.²² 12 children burial among 43 tombs were found at El-Omari cemetery that date back to 5000-3800 BC.²³ The children in the pre-dynastic period were either placed inside pottery jars or inside coffins. The researcher classifies the way of burial into two main categories depending on the age of the dead child, as the researcher notices a difference in the way of burial between the infants and the children.

Infant burials

It seems that the foetuses (aged from pregnancy period till birth) and infants (aged from around birth to the first year of life) used to be buried after being placed in clay vessels, decorated or undecorated. These jars were common domestic, not originally created for a funerary purpose. They could bear engraved marks which may have indicated the name of the child's family and not the infant name. It seems that the new-born weren't named by their family as the probability of his death was high. This can be confirmed by the commentary of Aristote (4th century BC): "*the majority of deaths in infancy occur before the child is a week old, hence it is customary to name the child at that age, for a belief that it has now a better chance of survival*".²⁴ sometimes the infant was buried in round or oval baskets. These baskets could be re-used or fish baskets, simply tied at the two ends. Others were buried in boxes and chests, either re-used ones or designed specifically for the funerary context. Scarcely, we found infants buried in coffins, because this type is expensive.²⁵ It seems that the different types of burials depended on the wealth of the family.

The infant burials in pottery vases were known in Egypt since the **pre-dynastic period**, as this type of burial was common for the adults as well as children.²⁶ At that time the infants were buried within the settlements. This can be found at the V millennium settlements of el-Omari and Merimde Beni-Salame (south Cairo). In IV millennium, in Upper and Lower Egypt infants were buried in settlements sometimes in pots at Badari and Ballas, Adaima and Maadi.²⁷ At Maadi, 55 infants were found buried inside the settlement. However, the researcher wants to point out that burying inside the settlements were not limited for infants as adults were found buried there too.²⁸ Thus the researcher can assume that this practice was a common habit at that time.

The **Old Kingdom** provided us with four infants found inside Amphorae in the mastaba of Ima-Pepi at the village of Balat in the Dakhla Oasis (cemetery of Qila El-Daba) (Pl. 5). Those infants were probably members of the family of that officer. This explains the reason of finding them buried in his mastaba.²⁹ Two infants buried in amphora (b5, b17) were found at the same village of Balat, but near the area of the governor's palace (Ain Aseel). They date back to the end of the Old Kingdom or the beginning of the 1st intermediate period.³⁰

Such burials were also found at Abydos and date back to the first intermediate period – **Middle kingdom**. The burials were found in pots or shallow pits in disused rooms of houses or under the house floors (Pl. 6). The houses were equally of the elite and poorer levels of Society.³¹ Petrie found wooden boxes buried beneath the floors of many of the houses in the village that he found at Lahun (Fayoum) and dates back to the Middle kingdom. When opened, they were found to contain the skeletons of infants, sometimes two or three in a box, and aged only a few months at death. At Tell el-Dabaa (ancient Avaris, eastern Delta) jar burials of babies have been found in the settlement located next to walls and in corners".³²

The **New kingdom** provided us with a cemetery where the infant burials cover nearly 50 % (13 infant burials out of 28 burials); it is the eastern cemetery at Deir El-Madineh (Pl. 7). This region was a mass of small pits, circular, square, or rectangular cut 40-90 cm deep into the rock without any internal or external masonry. Infants, neonates, foetuses were found buried in amphorae, baskets or boxes. The holes were filled with sand, pebbles, and a few large stones to cover them and prevent hyenas and jackals from disturbing the burials.³³ For example, burial DX1 was a basket burial containing an infant body wrapped in linen, above which was placed a decorated pot containing vegetable matter. To the north of the basket was another vessel with resin inside and a cup with a black rim. Burial DX2 contained another basket with the body of an infant wrapped in linen but without grave goods. Burial DX3 was unusual as it contained two wooden boxes with two statues and grave goods. This could indicate the burial of a twin.³⁴

Some infant boxes from Deir El-Madineh were found buried under house floors within the settlement enclosure, namely under the house walls of SE VI, in the south-western corner of the village, and in the north-eastern sector of the settlement.³⁵ Other sites of approximately the same period reveal a high degree of infant mortality at the northern cemetery of Gurob (El-Fayoum), Matmar and Mostagedda (near Asyut). The researches calculate 50 % of the 276 graves at Gurob, 48 % of the 233 at Matmar, and 42 % of the 31 burials at Mostagedda contained the burials of infants.³⁶ Infant burials within pottery jars were found in the New Kingdom cemetery of Kom El-Hisn.³⁷ The same burials were found in the necropolis of Saft el-Henneh, whose graves dates back from the 18th dynasty till the Roman era.³⁸

Two female infants were found buried inside the tomb of Tutankhamun in the so-called "Treasury room" (Pl. 8). The age of the first is nearly four months. The arms were placed alongside the body. It seems that there is no process of evisceration. The age of the second infant is about seven or eight months. The body here had been eviscerated. The two infants were placed in a double wooden coffin inside an anthropoid sarcophagus. Those infants could be the children of the royal couple Tutankhamun and Ankhesenamun. The X-ray examinations occurred in 1979, revealed skeletal anomalies; scoliosis, spina bifida, and Sprengel's deformity of the scapula that could be the reason of death.³⁹

The New discovery occurred in 2014 in the Valley of the Kings by the team of the University of Basel, revealed Tomb KV40 that dates back to the reign of Tuthmosis IV. It appears that this tomb served as burial place for people of the royal family, for both children and adult. Several new-borns were found mummified.⁴⁰ Similar burials were found in tomb KV 44.⁴¹

The excavations occurred inside the tomb of Sennefer (tomb 1159) in the western cemetery of Deir El-Madinah, revealed the burying of an infant inside a box after being wrapped.⁴² The tomb of Sennedjem also at Deir El—Madineh (19th dynasty) revealed 20 bodies in addition to the tomb owner and his children. Among these bodies are three infants who were identified as members of the next generation.⁴³ It seems that the case of the infants here and that of Tutankhamun's tomb, are the only one found buried inside the tomb of their families. As long as the workmen Sennefer was thought to be a contemporary to Tutankhamun, the researcher can assume that during the reign of this king, a new custom appeared which is considering the infant as being an individual and treating his body as that of an adult who is preferred to be buried in the tomb of his parents to take advantage of the tomb scenes that would help him in crossing to the Neither world. It seems that this concept continued to appear later in the New Kingdom such as the case of the tomb of Sennedjem at Deir El-Madineh.

In 1992, an archaeological mission found an amphora in the section of the funerary complexes of the royal wives of Pepi I, precisely near the entrance of the complex of queen Inenek / Inti. The amphora contained a skeleton of an infant of nearly six months, and inscribed with three demotic inscriptions. The Amphora dates back to the **Persian period**.⁴⁴

As for **the Graeco-Roman period**, 81 Infant burials were found in the cemetery of Gabbari at Alexandria. 13 burials date back to the Hellenistic period while the rest (68 burials) date back to the Late Roman period. The infants were buried inside amphora and either buried in simple pits or inside the loculi. Sometimes two infants were found buried in the same Amphora; other times an infant and a child. In this last case the child was placed first followed by the infant. The researches made on such burials suggest contemporary burial. the infant could also be just buried in the ground. A mummified infant was found buried in one of the graves revealed in the cemetery (Pl. 9). One of the graves revealed the burial of an adult accompanied by an infant in the same grave (Pl. 10).⁴⁵ Infant burials were found in the two cemeteries of Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab) at Dakhla Oasis that date to the 1st – 4th century AD (Pl. 11). Intramural burials within the settlements of the city were also found. Among the graves of Kellis 1 only 10 % belonged to infants. Among the 137 graves of Kellis 2, 67 % belonged to infants and fetuses.⁴⁶ Some of those infants were placed next to the legs of female adults in the same graves or in their own graves.⁴⁷ Some of the graves here were covered with a mud-brick mastaba superstructure.

Excavations of the settlement at Qasr Ibrim produced several intramural infant burials, most recently under the floors of a fourth-century AD building.⁴⁸

In **the modern age**, in the village of Tebtunis (Fayoum), precisely in the area of the byzantine and the Arabic village, around 100 tombs were found date back to the 8th – 9th century AD. Most of these tombs intended for newborns and children. the newborns were wrapped in a piece of cloth and were buried directly in the sand or placed in Amphorae; while other children were lying on a stretcher made of stems of palm leaf and wrapped in a shroud or a mat. Few were placed in coffins.⁴⁹ It seems here that the inhabitants of this modern village adopted the old tradition in burying the children.

After displaying all infant burials found starting from the pre-dynastic era till the Graeco-Roman period, the researcher notices that all of the infant burials that date back the Pharaonic period were found inside cemeteries, except for the cases of the intramural pre-dynastic burials, 1st Intermediate - Middle kingdom burials at Lahun, Abydos, Avaris, the 18th dynasty burials at Deir El-Medineh, and the burials of Kellis and Qasr Ibrim from the Roman era. Here rises a question: was the intramural burial a habit adopted by the Egyptians? The researcher refuses this probability. Although the intramural burial in ancient Egypt can be traced back to the 5th – 4th millennium BC; there are infant burials in cemeteries date back to the same previous period such as that of Adaima, and Riqqa. Thus, it seems that in the same period, some buried their infants within the settlements and others buried them in graves inside the cemeteries.

It's worth mentioning that the intramural burials were first appeared in Greece during the Bronze Age. This practise represents the desire for the soul of the child to return to the mother in the form of another child. Later, this custom spread in the Near East, as it appeared in Syria during the 10th Millennium BC. Through the late 6th millennium right down to the 1st millennium BC, burial within settlement beneath house floors, usually of infants and children appears to be a rule in Mesopotamia and the Near eastern cities.⁵⁰ Evidences proved that Egypt during the pre-dynastic period witnessed migrations from the Near Eastern, Mesopotamian and Mediterranean people. The Neolithic settlements that covered Egypt proved this migration. Around 3500 BC close trade contacts existed between south Canaan and the Egyptian culture, followed by settlements of these people in each other's cultural area.⁵¹ Thus, the researcher assumes that the intramural burials that appeared in the pre-dynastic Egypt belonged to the foreigners that inhabited Egypt and not the Egyptians.

The same can be applied to the burials of Avaris, as it was the capital of the Hyksos who came from the Near Eastern cities. In this city, Asiatic workers were involved in the Household. There was also a presence of foreign residents in the pyramid workmen's town of Lahun. Legal papyri and temple lists show that Asiatics were employed at building works in the temples and in domestic service. It's also possible that a group of Minoan workmen (from Crete) may have been employed on the construction of the Lahun pyramid or engaged in producing goods for the royal funerary treasures. Other workers may have come from Cyprus and were responsible for the presence of the foreign

were found in the city. Thus, the immigrants at Lahun were either traders who decided to stay and settle, or artisans whose skills were welcomed, or those who brought to Egypt as prisoners of war.

The same thing could be applied also on the workmen village at Deir El-Madineh. Scholars proved that the prominent part of the population included foreigners from Mycenae to Persia.⁵² There were also Evidences on the existence of foreigners at Abydos; as some Cretan pottery manufacture was found there.⁵³ The researcher here assumes that the dead children buried under the house's floor in Egypt were offspring of the Greeks who lived in these settlements.

Astonishing is not finding these intramural burials in Egypt during the Ptolemaic period precisely in the cities inhabited by the Greeks such as Alexandria, Naucratis, Ptolemais, El-Fayoum; especially that this practice was very common in Greece at that time (starting from the late classical till the late Hellenistic era).⁵⁴ Probably the archaeological evidences will prove this practice one day. This habit re-appeared in the evidences that date back to the Roman era, this could be due to the spread of this habit in the whole Roman world.

Child burial

As for the child (aged from one to 14 years of age)⁵⁵, he used to be buried in graves either directly in the sand or inside coffins. Rarely do we find children placed inside pottery containers (cases found in the children burials in the cemetery of Gabbari at Alexandria); as this habit appeared in the Roman era and exceeded in the Late Roman period.⁵⁶

The number of the graves that carried the bodies of the young children is few during the Pharaonic period. For example, in the 1st – 2nd dynasty cemetery at Abydos, children account for only one grave in seven. The excavation occurred in the cemetery of Teti at Saqqara (Old Kingdom) revealed only 13 children burials out of a total 106 burials. Some of these children were found buried in the same grave of their mothers.⁵⁷ Ten child burials were recorded in the whole Middle kingdom cemeteries of Haraga (at the edge of the western desert near the entrance to the Fayoum) out of nearly 230 burials (Pl. 12).⁵⁸ Few child burials were found in the Middle Kingdom cemetery at Abydos.⁵⁹ Five Children graves were found near the governor's palace in the village of Balat – Dakhla Oasis (Ain Aseel). The burials date back to the end of the New kingdom or the beginning of the 1st intermediate period.⁶⁰ Five children (1-7 years) graves out of 18 were found at Qaret al-Toub at Bahariya Oasis, and date back to the third intermediate period.⁶¹ There is also the cemetery of Qars Allam at Bahariya Oasis (Late or Ptolemaic period) where nearly most of the tombs belonged to children who were buried accompanied with dogs, a habit that has never been witnessed in other sites.⁶² The excavation that was carried out by the Louvre museum at Saqqara revealed the existence of a Late-period cemetery just south-east of the Complex of king Djoser, in the area that surrounded the mastaba of Akhenhetep. 22 graves were found, 9 of them belonged to children. The children here were mummified and placed in anthropoid coffins.⁶³ During the late period, a chamber inside the funerary complex of Pepy-ankh, at the south of Saqqara was reused as a funerary chamber where a child (2 – 4 years) was found buried in pit (No. 1181). The child could be died because of meningitis or Scorbut.⁶⁴ There is also the cemetery of Qasr Allam at Bahariya Oasis where nearly most of the tombs belonged to children. the tombs here date back from the Late period till the Roman era.⁶⁵

It seems that the percentage of children burials increased during the Graeco-Roman period; at the secondary cemetery of Abusir (Late to Ptolemaic Periods) the proportion is 50 per cent. At the Wadi Qitna burial site in Nubia (3rd to 5th centuries AD) 43 per cent of all mounds were found to cover the remains of young children. At the cemetery of Gabbari at Alexandria, children burials covered 41% of the total 612 burials revealed (apart from the 81 infant burials mentioned before).⁶⁶ The cemetery of Kellis 2 (now Ismant El-Kharab) at Dakhla Oasis (Late Roman – early Christian period) has revealed the exceptionally well-preserved remains of 635 individuals, approximately 61% of which represent the remains of infants and children.

It's worth mentioning also that the children in the Greco-Roman Egypt were not only found buried inside their coffins in a grave, as some of them were found buried inside the Loculi. Examples can be seen in the excavations carried in the Tombs at Marina El-Alamein where children burials in Loculi were found (Pl.13).⁶⁷ The same appeared in the burials of the cemetery of El-Gabbari, west of Alexandria that dates back from the 3rd century BC till the 7th century AD; where children were found buried inside the underground loculi (Pl. 14) and vaults. Among the 251 children burials that were found in this cemetery, only 23 belonged to the Hellenistic period while the rest date back to the Roman era (precisely the late period). The Children in these tombs were either buried in coffins, in Amphorae (Pl. 15) (the maximum age for a child to be placed in an amphora is 15 months), or inside sarcophagi. They were also either buried alone or accompanied by adults in the same tomb.⁶⁸

Preparing the dead child

It seems that the children were lamented in the same way of the adults. This can be confirmed by the speech of Thohtrekh, son of Petosiris (4th century BC):

*Who hears my speech, his heart will grieve for it,
For I am a small child snatched by force,
Abridged in years as an innocent one,*

*Snatched quickly as a little one,
 Like a man carried off by sleep.
 I was a youngster of /// years,
 When taken to the city of eternity,
 To the abode of the perfect souls;
 I therefore reached the Lord of Gods,
 Without having had my share.
 I was rich in friends,
 All the men of my town,
 Not one of them could protect me!
 All the town's people, men and women,
 Lamented very greatly,
 Because they saw what happened to me,
 For they esteemed me much.
 All my friends mourned for me,
 Father and Mother implored Death;
 My brothers, they were head-on-knee,
 Since I reached this land of deprivation.⁶⁹*

No evidences revealed the attention paid to the funeral of the children except for The representation of a child's funeral found engraved on the wall of the royal tomb at Tell El-Amarna (18th dynasty) (Pl.16) , where we can see the royal couple Akhenaten and Nefertiti laments their dead daughter Maketaten who probably died at the age of 14. In this scene we can find the royal couple gathered in front of the statue of the dead daughter that stands on a dais, followed by group of men and women lament the dead daughter. In the tomb itself there are fragments of a sarcophagus with small dimensions that confirms the dead of the young princess.⁷⁰ There is also the funerary stela of a child called Merysekhmet (18th dyn.) and preserved in the British Museum (Inv. 1853,0822.4). The stela represents a child on the lap of her mother accompanied by a text dedicated to the memory of the child (Pl.17) .⁷¹

As for treating the corpse itself, Rich families had their little ones embalmed. Cases can be seen in the mummy of prince Sipaari, who died at the age of 5. His mummy was found inside a wooden anthropoid coffin discovered in the Cacehte of Deir el-Bahari. The exterior part of the coffin inscribed with the name of the prince (Pl. 18).⁷²

Astonishing is to find mummies of infants despite of their fragile body. This can be noticed in the two mummies found at Tutankhamun's Tomb where the examination emphasized the evisceration process on one of the mummies. It seems that the body of the other infant was very fragile to be eviscerated. There is also another infant mummy was examined by the Manchester Museum team (No. 3496). The mummy dates back to the 18th dynasty (New Kingdom) and was found at Gurob. The examination revealed that the infant was just less than three months of age. He is in fair state of preservation apart from the disruption of head, neck, and upper Thorax. The arms were extended with hands pronated over iliac fossae. Infant was wrapped in opaque material or bandages within reeds.

According to the examinations that occurred on the children mummies, it seems that the mummification was made in the same way of the adult. The examination occurred on three child mummies found at Hawara, preserved in the Manchester museum and date back to the Roman period (No. 9319, 2109, 1769) revealed that the children average age is from two to three years. The arms are extended and pronated over thighs. No trace of incision found on the abdomen which reveals that the viscera were not extracted in the usual way. On the third mummy there is evidence of extracting carnial contents through the left nostril.⁷³ Another examination was done on a child mummy preserved in the Pennsylvania University Museum (PUM IV) revealed an evisceration per ano but the brain had not been removed. The child's age was estimated to be eight years, and date back to the 1st century AD.⁷⁴ The mummies were then wrapped in linen, covered with a layer of plaster and decorated with polychrome motifs.

Bodies of poor children were protected only by linen wrappings or palm-frond mats. The child's body used also to be adorned with pearl, coral or shell necklaces, rings, bracelets, ankle-bands. The body was then buried in pits either in a fetal position or the semi-fetal position: on his back, legs bent and arms extended or simply the body was extended. The graves of the children found in the Kellis 2 cemetery at Dakhla Oasis, revealed that the bodies are placed on their back in the grave with the head to the west and feet to the east, and with the arms to the sides or over the pelvic region. The remains are typically wrapped in linen shrouds and are bound by linen cords. At times, a coarse gravel of red clay was placed beneath the body, a practice that appears to be more prevalent in juvenile than in adult burials.⁷⁵ Sometimes the child was placed firstly inside an amphorae, this case appeared mostly in the burial of infants. Other times, the child was placed inside a coffin. Using the coffins in children burial started to appear in the IV millennium BC and continued to be used along the ancient Egyptian history. Chests and baskets are also used in preserving the child corpse.

During the Graeco-Roman era, burying the children was done in the same way that was used in the Pharaonic period. However, we can see the Greek influence in the burial. In one of the children graves that was revealed in the

cemetery of Gabbari at Alexandria, a child of 4 years was found buried and date back to the Hellenistic period. A wall of stucco was found in the grave painted with the Gorgon head, the symbol of protection. Thus, the family here was keen on protecting the child from the evil spirits and protect the grave against robbery. The child himself was ornamented in the same way that the adult used to be ornament, as marks indicate that he used to wear a crown of a garland. Another child was found accompanied by the coins of Charon who will transfer the body across the river to the Neither world.⁷⁶ The examinations that were done on the urns from Alexandria revealed the practice of the cremation on the corpses of the children. It seems that this habit was limited in use to the Greeks.

After preparing the child corpse it was placed inside pottery jars, as happened occasionally with the foetuses and new-borns. None bears an inscription that inform about the identity of the deceased. Some of these jars contained only bloody towels or placenta. Sometimes these jars were decorated. The child corpse could also be placed in baskets either new or reused. Sometimes when the body was larger than the basket, a hole is cut to let out feet (Pl. 19). Children were found also buried inside reused boxes, rectangular with flat bottom and mounted on four legs, and with a lid hinged on one side. They were sometimes painted inside and out in white, yellow, or pink (Pl. 20). Children were also found placed inside wooden coffins which appeared in its simple shape and also in its anthropoid shape. The grave used to contain also funerary objects such as vessels that used to hold food, toys such as dolls and sometimes furniture such as stools.

Conclusion

- The death-rate of the children in ancient Egypt was high because of the number of children given birth by the same mother.
- The highest death rate of all was in the first few days, rather less when averaged over a month and still lower for the first year. Therefore, the parents were very keen on protecting their offspring with magic charms and amulets.
- Usually the dead children were those who were weak or sick or had congenital defects and deformities as confirmed through the pathological investigations that were carried on the remains of the children.
- The poverty can also be a reason of death. It's notable that during the Pharaonic period the economical and the medical status was secured, while in the Graeco-Roman period, the country passed through many revolutions and wars that affected the status of the country and led to the poverty. This affected the children that were no longer breast-fed but need food. Therefore, the percentage of the children death in Greco-Roman Egypt is more than that of the Pharaonic period.
- The death can be caused also by discarding the infants, a habit that entered the land of Egypt during the Graeco-Roman period. The reason of this practice was the bad economics of the state. This practice was limited to the Greeks and Romans lived in Egypt. However, it was considered unethically.
- The oldest grave found in Egypt was that of a child in the Taramsa hill.
- Excavations revealed cemeteries intended for the children burials, they are: the cemetery of Adaima (pre-dynastic period), eastern cemetery of Deir El-Madineh (New Kingdom), cemetery of Kellis 2 at Kharga (Roman period).
- The way of burying infants in ancient Egypt differs from that of a child.
- The infant used to be buried inside the graves after being placed inside pottery jars, coffins, baskets, or boxes.
- The funeral containers that hold the remains of the infants weren't inscribed with the name of the infant but rather his family. It seems that the new-born weren't named by their family as the probability of his death was high.
- All the infant burials were found inside the cemeteries except of intramural infant burials found at the pre-dynastic burials, 1st Intermediate - Middle kingdom burials at Lahun, Abydos, Avaris, the 18th dynasty burials at Deir El-Medineh, and the burials of Kellis and Qasr Ibrim from the Roman era. The researcher assumes that this practice was done by the foreigners inhabited these places.
- All the infants were buried inside jars in their own tombs either they were from the public or royals, except for those infants found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, the tomb of Sennefer at Deir El-Madineh, and the tomb of Sennedjem at Deir El-Madineh who were buried in the same tomb of their parents. It seems that this custom was new and appeared in the reign of Tutankhamun and continued till the 19th dynasty.
- The royal infants were mummified as long as it was possible depending on the size of the body.
- The researcher assumes that the infants who were found placed next to the legs of their mothers were probably died with his mother during the childbirth.
- It seems that the habit of burying the infants inside amphorae continued to be adopted by some modern villagers, as could be seen in the modern cemetery of Tebtunis, Fayoum.

- The children above one year were used to be buried in graves either directly in the sand or inside coffins. Rarely do we find children placed inside pottery containers; this habit appeared in the Roman era and exceeded in the Late Roman period.
- The number of the graves that carried the bodies of the young children is few during the Pharaonic period. It seems that the percentage of children burials increased during the Graeco-Roman period.
- During the Graeco-Roman era, the children were buried inside Loculi.
- No evidences revealed the attention paid to the children funeral except for the scene depicting the funeral of the daughter of Akhenaten and the stela of Merysekhmet.
- The rich people used to mummify their children and sometimes also the infants; while the public wrapped their children in linen and placed them directly in the grave.
- The children were also cremated during the Greco-Roman period in the Greek cities.
- The children grave used to be occupied by some funerary objects.

Plates



Pl. 1: Earliest child skeleton, Taramsa
Middle Paleolithic age, After: Van Peer P. et ali, 2010.



PL. 2: Child buried in pottery jar, Adaima Naqada period, After: É. CRUBÉZY, 2005

Pl. 3: Child buried in pit, Adaima Naqada period, After: É. CRUBÉZY, 2005.



Pl. 4: Child buried in a coffin, Adaima Naqada period, After: É. CRUBÉZY, 2005.



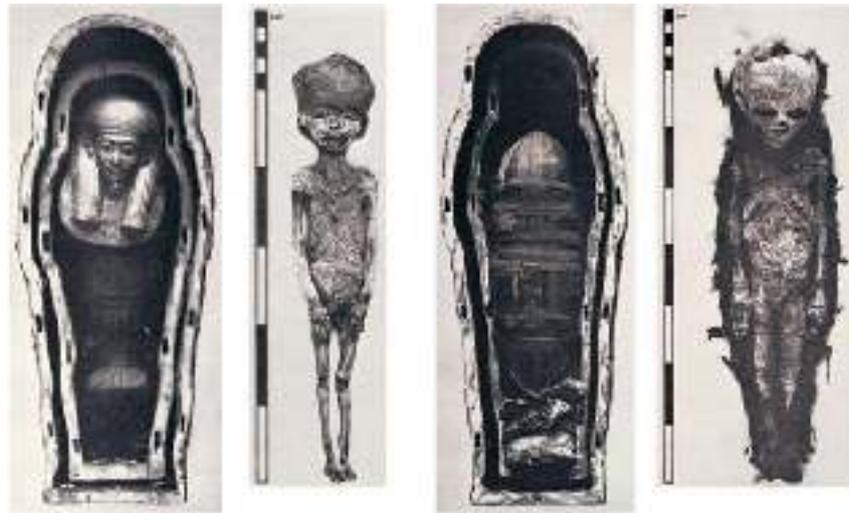
Pl. 5
Infant burial ,the mastaba of Ima-Pepi
Old Kingdom
After: Minault-Gout A., 1992.



Pl. 6
intramural infant burial
Abydos, 1st intermediate – Middle Kingdom
After: Adams M., 1992



**Pl. 7: Deir el-Madineh infant cemetery
New Kingdom
After: Bruyere B., 1937**



**Pl. 8: Two Infant mummies, tomb of Tutankhamun, New Kingdom
After: Leek F., "The human remains from the tomb of Tutankhamun", Oxford, 1972, Pl. XXIII, XXIV)**



**Pl. 9: Mummified infant buried in Sector 1 in the cemetery of Gabbari, Alexandria
After: Nenna M-D., 2012.**

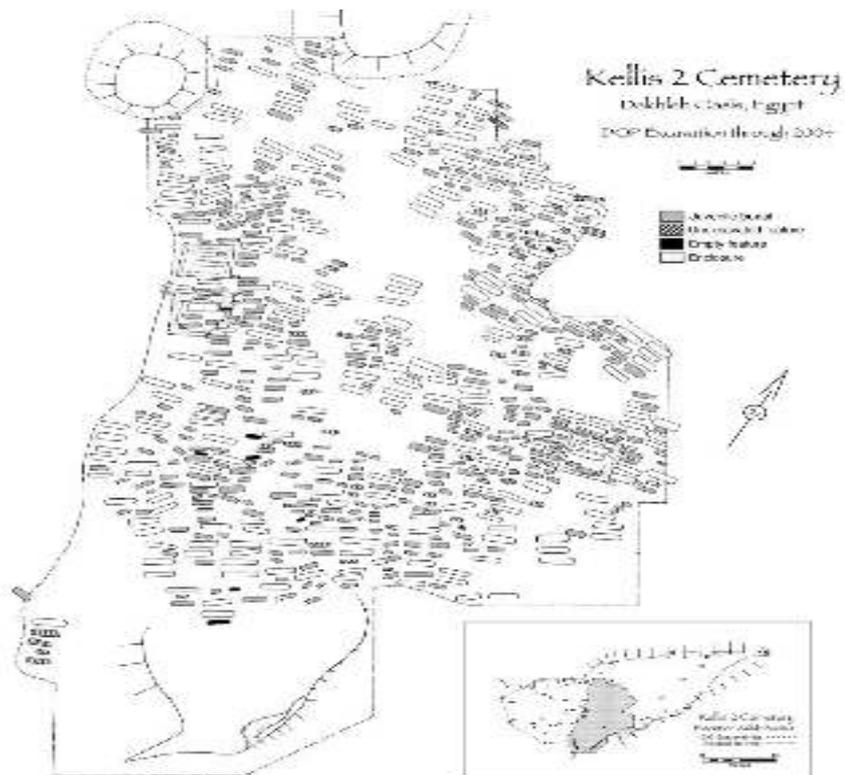
adult

child



Pl. 10: Double burial of an adult and a child, grave in Sector III, cemetery of Gabbari, Alexandria, Graeco-Roman era

After: Nenna M-D., 2012.



Pl. 11

- 4.6 % Foetuses
- 30% infants
- 12 % children

After: Wheeler S. Et ali, 2013



Pl. 12
Child buried in a wooden coffin, Harageh
Middle Kingdom
After: Engelbach, 1923, Pl VI

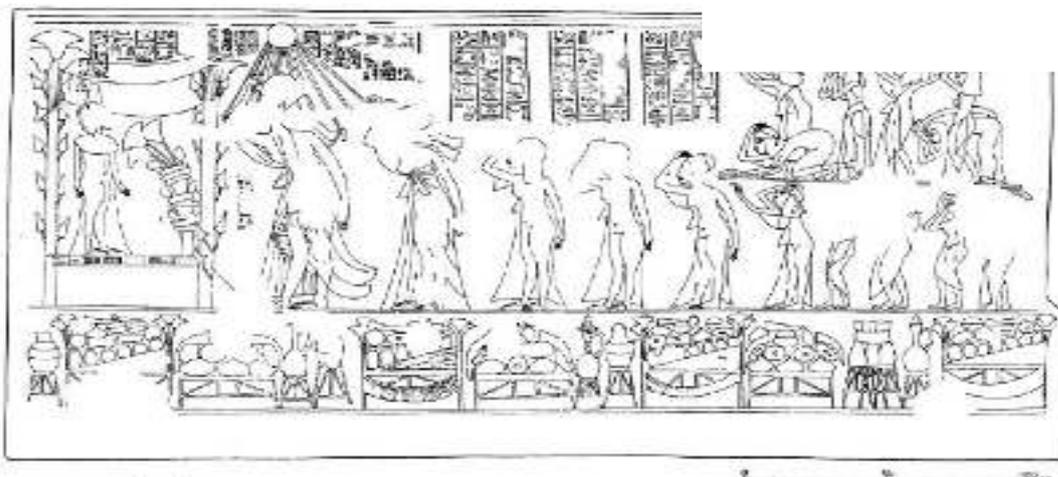


Pl. 13
Child burial in Loculus, Marina
Graeco-Roman era
After: Daszewski W.A, 2005



Pl. 14
wall with four loculi intended for children
Gabbari cemetery, Alexandria
After: Nenna M-D., 2012.

Pl. 15
child inside an Amphora, Gabbari
cemetery
5th century AD
After: Nenna M-D., 2012



Pl. 16: Mourning of Akenaton's daughter
New Kingdom
After: Gabolde M., 1998



Pl. 17
Child funerary stela, 18th dyn.
British Museum
After: Robins G., 1994-1995.



Pl. 18: Coffin of prince Sipaari, 18th dyn.,
After: Eliot-Smith G., 1912, Pl. XIX



Pl. 19

**Examples of baskets used in burying children, cemetery of Deir el-Madineh,
After: B.Bruyere, "Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Madineh, 1933-1934, le necropole de l'Ousest, FIFAO 14,
Caire, 1937, fig.3)**



Pl. 20

**Box used in burying child, cemetery of Deir
el-Madineh,
After: B.Bruyere, 1937, fig.4**

¹ عبد العزيز صالح، "التربية و التعليم فى مصر القديمة"، المكتبة العربية، ١٩٦٦، ص ١١ - ٢٠.

² Bagnal R. & Frier B, "The Demography of Roman Egypt", Cambridge, 1994.

-
- ³ Meskell L., *“Private life in New Kingdom Egypt”*, England, 2002, P. 76.
- ⁴ Robins G., *“Women and Children in Peril: Pregnancy, Birth and Infant Mortality in Ancient Egypt”*, KMT 5/4, 1994-1995, PP. 24-35.
- ⁵ Papyrus of Ani, I, XIV 3.
- ⁶ Robins G., 1994-1995, PP. 24-35.
- ⁷ Wheeler S., *“Nutritional and disease Stress of Juveniles from the Dakleh Oasis, Egypt”*, in: International Journal of Osteoarchaeology, 2012, PP. 219-234 ; Brahin J.L, Children’s health problems. some guidelines for their occurrence in ancient Egypt, In: *Masca* 1982 ; see also the pathological analyzes on the children buried in the cemetery of Gabbari, Alexandria Nenna M-D., *“Les enfants dans la necropole Greco-romaine du Pont de Gabbari a Alexandrie”*, In: L’Enfants et la mort dans l’Antiquite II, Centre d’Etudes Alexandrines 26, 2012, PP. 79 - 132
- ⁸ Wheeler S., 2012, PP. 219-234.
- ⁹ Scott E., *“The archaeology of infancy and infant death”*, Oxford, 1999, P. 71.
- ¹⁰ P.Oxy. IV, 744
- ¹¹ Hermaphroditus, Frag. 11.
- ¹² BGU IV 1058, 1106, 1107, 1108, 1110 & P.Rein 103, 104 & P.Oxy. I 37, 38, 39 & PSI, III 203 & P.Amst. I. 41.
- ¹³ Pomeroy S., *“Copronyms and the exposure of infants in Egypt”*, In: Studies in the Roman Law, 1986, P. 147 ff.
- ¹⁴ Clarysse W. & Thompson D., *“Counting the people in Hellenistic Egypt”*, Cambridge, 2006.
- ¹⁵ BGU IV 1104 ; Grubbs J., *“Women and the Law in the Roman Empire”*, London, 2002, PP. 267-268.
- ¹⁶ Plumann G., *“Ptolemais in Oberagypten”*, Leipzig, 1910, PP. 54-48.
- ¹⁷ Van Peer P et ali, *“Chert quarrying, Lithic technology and a modern human burial at the Palaeolithic Site of Taramsa 1 Upper Egypt”*, Leuven University press, 2010, PP. 216 – 217.
- ¹⁸ Breand G., *“The corpus of pre-firing potmarks from Adaima (Upper Egypt), in: British Museum studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 13, 2009, P. 52
- ¹⁹ Coquegniot H. Et ali, *“La necropole nagadienne d’Adaima: Distribution par age des sujets du seceur est”*, in: BIFAO 98, 1998, PP. 127-137.
- ²⁰ Mathieu B., *“Travaux de l’Institut francais d’archeologie orientale en 2000-20001”*, BIFAO 101, 2001, PP. 467-472.
- ²¹ CRUBÉZY E. Et ali, *« The Predynastic Cemetery at Adaima (Upper Egypt). General Presentation and Implications for the Populations of Predynastic Egypt »*, in B. MIDANT-REYNES, Y. TRISTANT, Egypt at its Origins 2. Proceedings of the International Conference “Origin of the State. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt”, Toulouse (France), 5th-8th September 2005, OLA 172, Leuven, Paris, Dudley, 2008, p. 289-310.
- ²² Richards J., *“Society and death in ancient Egypt”*, Cambridge, 2005, P. 101.
- ²³ Debono F. & Mortensen B., *“El Omari: A Neolithic settlement and other sites in the vicinity of Wadi Hof, Helwan”*, In: ArchVer 82, Mayence, 1990, PP. 67-77.
- ²⁴ Aristotle, *“History of animals”*, 588a, 8-10.
- ²⁵ Meskell L., 1999, PP. 170-171.
- ²⁶ Burying the adults in pottery jars disappeared in the 4th dynasty; however, this practice continued for the infants. (See: Trisant Y., *“Les enterrements d’enfants dans l’Egypte predynastique et Pharaonique”*, In: Nenna, L’enfant et la mort dans l’Antiquite II. Types de tombes et traitement du corps des enfants dans l’antiquite, Etude Alexandrines 26, Alexandrie, 2012, P. 30.
- ²⁷ P.J.P McGeorge, *“Intramural infant burials in the Aegean Bronze Age”*, in: Dans le mort dans le ville, Istanbul 14-15 November 2011, P.9.
- ²⁸ Tristant Y., *“L’habitat predynastique de la Vallee du Nil. Vivre sur les rives du Nil aux Ve et IVe millenaires”*, In: BAS-IS 1287, Oxford, 2004, PP. 122-124.
- ²⁹ Minault-Gout A & Deleuze P., *“la mastaba d’Ima-Pepi”*, in: BIFAO 33, 1992, P. 64.
- ³⁰ Gobeil C., *“Inhumations d’enfants en Zone d’habitat a Balat”*, BIFAO 109, 2009, PP. 161-175.
- ³¹ Adams M., *“Community and society organization in early historic Egypt: introductory report on 1991-92 field conducted at the Abydos settlement site”*, 1992 ; Wegner J., *“the town of Wah-Sut at south Abydos”*, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archeologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo 57, 2001, PP. 281-308.
- ³² Van Der Brink, *“Tombs and burial customs at Tell el-Dabaa”*, in: Beitrage zur Agyptologie, 4, 1982, PP. 19-20, 28-29.
- ³³ Bruyere B., *“Fouilles de Deir el-Medineh 1934-1935”*, in: BIFAO XV/2, 1937, PP. 11-15.
- ³⁴ Meskell L., 1999, P. 163.
- ³⁵ Meskell L., 1999, P. 171.
- ³⁶ Robins G., *“women and children in peril: Pregnancy, birth, and infant mortality in ancient Egypt”*, KMT 5 (4), 1994-5, P. 28.
- ³⁷ Hamada A, *“Excavations at Kom el-Hisn. Fourth season 1947”*, In: ASAE 50, 1950, PP. 367-379.
- ³⁸ Peterie W., *“Hyksos and Israelite cities”*, Londres, 1906.

-
- ³⁹ Dunand F., *"Mummies and Death in Egypt"*, U.S.A, 2006, P. 193.
- ⁴⁰ www.aegyptologie.unibas.ch
- ⁴¹ Campbell R.A., *"forgotten sepulchres: the uninscribed tombs in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor, Egypt"*, Master Thesis, University of Montana, 2012, P. 143.
- ⁴² Meskell L., 2002, P. 82.
- ⁴³ Meskell L., 1999, P. 204.
- ⁴⁴ Janot F., *"Inhumations dans les ruines au complexe funeraire du roi Pepi I"*, in: BIFAO 97, 1997, PP. 169-170.
- ⁴⁵ Nenna M-D., *"Les enfants dans la necropole Greco-romaine du Pont de Gabbari a Alexandrie"*, In: L'Enfants et la mort dans l'Antiquite II, Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines 26, 2012, PP. 79 - 132
- ⁴⁶ Marlow C.A., *"Miscarriages and infant burials in the Dakhla cemeteries: Archeological examination of status"*, In: the Oasis Papers 1: the proceedings of the first conference of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, Britain, 2001, PP. 105-110.
- ⁴⁷ Wheeler S. Et ali, *"Childhood in Roman Egypt: Bioarchaeology of the Kellis 2 Cemetery Dakhleh Oasis"*, England, 2013, P. 113.
- ⁴⁸ Meskell L., *"Archaeologies of Social life: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt"*, Oxford, 1999, P. 159.
- ⁴⁹ Pantalacci L. & Denoix S., *"Travaux de l'Institut francais d'archeologie Orientale 2005 – 2006"*, BIFAO 106, 2006, P. 364.
- ⁵⁰ P.J.P. McGeorge, *"Intramural infant burials in the Aegean Bronze Age"*, in: Dans le mort dans le ville, Istanbul 14-15 November 2011, PP. 1-12.
- ⁵¹ O'Neal, Michael J. *"migration and population movements in ancient Egypt."* In: *Encyclopaedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World*, New York, 2008.
- ⁵² Meskell L., 1999, PP. 148-154.
- ⁵³ David R., *"The pyramid builders of Ancient Egypt"*,
- ⁵⁴ Lagia A., *"notions of Childhood in the classical Polis"*, In: constructions of childhood in ancient Greece and Italy, Athens, 2007, PP. 298-306.
- ⁵⁵ This averaged age of children was specified according to certain facts in the ancient Egyptians' life. The age at first marriage of Egyptian females was between the ages of 16 and 20 years, although perhaps as many as 30% married earlier. In addition, young males were eligible for land ownership and taxation starting at the age of 14 years. (Bagnall RS., *"Egypt in Late Antiquity"*, Princeton, 1993).
- ⁵⁶ Nenna M-D., 2012, P. 131.
- ⁵⁷ Kanawati N., *"The Teti cemetery at Saqqara. Volume VII. The tomb of Shepsipuptah, Mereri, Hefi and others"*, The Australian centre for Egyptology reports 17, Warminster, 2001.
- ⁵⁸ Engelbach R., *"Harageh"*, British School of Archaeology Vol. 28, 1923 ; Richards J., *"Society and death in ancient Egypt"*, 2005, P. 97.
- ⁵⁹ Richards J., 2005, P. 170.
- ⁶⁰ Gobeil C., 2009, PP. 161-175.
- ⁶¹ Pantalacci L., Pantalacci L. & Denoix S., *"Travaux de l'Institut francais d'archeologie Orientale 2008 – 2009"*, BIFAO 109, 2009, P. 602.
- ⁶² Adam Fr. & Colin Fr., *"Inhumation d'enfants et de chiens a Qasr Allam, Bahariya, Egypte"*, In: L'Enfants et la mort dans l'Antiquite II, Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines 26, 2012, PP. 315-329.
- ⁶³ Janet F. Et ali, *"La mission archeologique du muse du Louvre a Saqqara: une necropole d'epoque tardive dans le secteur du mastaba d'Akhetetep"*, BIFAO 101, 2001, PP. 249-291.
- ⁶⁴ Pantalacci L., 2009, P. 546.
- ⁶⁵ Pantalacci L., 2009, P. 603.
- ⁶⁶ Nenna M-D., 2012, PP. 79-132
- ⁶⁷ Daszewski W.A., *"Marina El-Alamein, excavation report 2005"*, In: PAM XVII, PP. 75-97.
- ⁶⁸ Nenna M-D., 2012, PP. 79-132
- ⁶⁹ Lichtheim M., *"Ancient Egyptian Literature"*, Vol. III, P. 53.
- ⁷⁰ Gabolde M., *"Akhenaton a Toutankhamon"*, Paris, 1998, PP. 132-133.
- ⁷¹ Robins G., 1994-1995, P. 28
- ⁷² Eliot-Smith G., *"Catalogue generale du muse du caire (Nr. 61051-61100): the royal mummie"*, Caire, 1912, PP. 22-23.
- ⁷³ David A.R., *"The Manchester Museum Mummy project"*, England, 1979.
- ⁷⁴ Cockburn A. Et ali, *"Mummies, Disease and Ancient cultures"*, Cambridge University Press, 1998 PP. 112-116.
- ⁷⁵ Wheeler S., 2013, P. 114.
- ⁷⁶ Nenna, 2012, P. 102.

دفنات الأطفال في مصر القديمة

هذا البحث يلقي الضوء على دفنات الأطفال في مصر القديمة. لذلك قام الباحث بدراسة اسباب وفاة الأطفال في مصر القديمة و التي تبين منها ان معدل الوفيات بين الأطفال يزداد في الأيام الأولى من عمر الطفل و يقل عند العام الأول. و بالتالي فان الوفيات بين الأطفال كان سببها الضعف او المرض او الاصابة بأحد الإعاقات الجسدية. وفي بعض العصور كان التخلص من الأطفال بتركهم في الشوارع سببا في الوفاة. تناول الباحث ايضا الطرق المتنوعة التي كان يتم بها الدفن ممثلة في الدفن داخل الجبانات بعد وضع الجثمان في اواني فخارية أو في أكفان أو في صناديق ، او دفن الأطفال تحت ارضيات المنازل أو تلك الطريقة التي ظهرت في العصر اليوناني-الروماني وهي حرق الجثمان. كما تناول الباحث طرق العناية بجثمان الأطفال و التي كانت تتبع نفس الطريقة المستخدمة عند البالغين.