

See the invisible. An archaeologist's notes about the child and childhood in the Middle Ages

Anna B. Kowalska^a

In the classic, widely cited work on the history of childhood, P. Ariès concludes that the Middle Ages *did not recognise either childhood or adolescence because the family life based on intimacy and feelings came up only in the later centuries*. The transition from the world of children to the world of adults did not require any special initiation setting the boundary between the two worlds: the child became smoothly and seamlessly a 'little adult' who was quickly introduced into the regime of work for the family and the household (Ariès 2010).

Childhood, and especially the children's presence in the mediaeval society became a subject of archaeological research a long time ago. The attention of the researchers was mainly attracted by the tangible differentiators of childhood, i.e., toys, which include miniature tools, weapons, dishes, figurines and boats. The increased interest in children observed in the recent decades has even led to the formation of a separate discipline called 'the archaeology of childhood', which through multidisciplinary approach (involving historical research, the history of art, sociology, pedagogy, ethnography, etc.) provides a deeper insight into the 'invisible' childhood of the mediaeval times.

The presence of children, established with the use of proper archaeological research methods, is assessed, first of all through the prism of artefacts considered to be toys or game accessories and products manufactured specifically for children. It is, however, unquestionably confirmed by children's burials and finds of garments of small size. Other artefacts, including products considered as toys in accordance with their contemporary understanding, can only help in the interpretation of ambiguous archaeological finds. Namely, some of the miniatures modelled on the articles from 'the adult world' may be either connected with children or have a magical or ritual-cult meaning

^a Centre for Mediaeval Archaeology of the Baltic Region, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, 12/12A Kuśnierska St., 70-536 Szczecin, Poland, and National Museum in Szczecin; a.b.kowalska@iaeapan.szczecin.pl

(zoo- and anthropomorphic figurines, miniature weapons). Small clay and wooden vessels may be toys or may have some special designation.

Basing on the relatively numerous toys and children's utensils discovered during excavations, archaeology may actively join the discussion on the perceptions of childhood in the Middle Ages, especially among 'ordinary', richer and poorer, townspeople representing different social groups. Were, from the point of view of archaeology, the people living in the Middle Ages really unaware of childhood?

The review of products clearly related to children should begin with the items made specifically for them, such as garments. The list of fragments of small size textile clothes known from the archaeological excavations in the mediaeval urban centres is rather short. There are, for example, fragments of children's, most probably boy's, shirts discovered in Viborg (Fentz 1998: 249ff.), woollen caps found in Lübeck (Mührenberg 2003: 40) and a cap-hood uncovered in Great Novgorod (Petrov 2012: Fig. 1). It has to be noted that the fragmentary state of preservation of the fabrics discovered in the cultural layers does not allow to draw broader conclusions as to the age of the users of many textile products. Much more information is provided by the analysis of leather products, especially footwear which is usually better preserved in the soil than textiles¹.

Footwear has, especially in recent years, become an important part of research on demography and social topography of mediaeval towns. The research on the demographic structure in the towns based on the sizes of the soles and uppers initiated in the 1960s was summed up a long time ago by W. Groenman-van Waateringe and L.M. Velt (1975). However, the question of the criteria of assigning the shoe sizes to the user's sex still remains open for discussion. Without getting into details regarding the ambiguous assessment of the size: 'children', 'women' and 'men', changes in the frequency of small shoes have to be noticed, whether there is no doubt if they were made for children, and sometimes even those not walking yet, at the age of about one year.

In the largest collections of leather finds from the early mediaeval Haithabu and Oslo the percentage of baby products reached respectively 28% and 25% (Groenman-van Waateringe 1984: Tab. 5, 6). In early mediaeval Szczecin participation of small footwear remained at a similar level. On the basis of early mediaeval sources from Szczecin it was further found that the development of children's footwear followed different principles than that of adults' shoes, or more precisely, that there were no specific rules (see de Neergaard 1985). The not too large sizes have been distinguished as one type of the uppers construction which represented the most common forms of

¹ Some researchers also mention pieces of leather belts decorated with metal applications and belts preserved with small buckles made of non-ferrous metals as components of children's clothing (Möller 2012: 209–210). Also the tiny cooper buckle inlaid with glass beads which was discovered in Ribe is determined as 'child's' (Søvsø 2012: 529–531).

high- and semi-high footwear² with various types of soles, especially the poorly profiled ones (Kowalska 2010a). It seems that for a relatively long time children's footwear was made at home to satisfy the needs of one's own family, although there are reasons to believe that with the spreading of more advanced manufacturing techniques based on the stitches 'hidden in the thickness of leather', more professional leather footwear for children began to appear. This thesis is supported by the find of a shoemaker's last adapted for making small size footwear found in the house from the second half of the 11th century, together with a production waist and other finished leather products (Kowalska 2010a: 65). Typically, such remains are considered to be the traces the activities of a shoemaker's workshop (Wiklak 1960: 17; 1969: 481; Wojtasik 1960: 186; 1963: 169ff.).

Research on large late mediaeval collections showed that the proportion of children's shoes clearly increased with the passage of time. In Kołobrzeg one fifth of all the finds of footwear from the 13th century are products for children, and in the second half of the 14th century the number of children's footwear was twice as big, representing approximately 40% of all the discovered footwear (Wywrot-Wyszkowska 2008: 124). I have noted similar proportions also within the set of soles and uppers from the north-eastern, so-called, Slavic, late mediaeval district of Szczecin (Kowalska 2013: 135–171; see also Schnack 1992: 152; Groenman-van Waateringe 1988: Tab. 6.5.1). It should also be remembered that, unlike in the early stages of the Middle Ages, late-mediaeval children's footwear was basically modelled on the items designed for the adults, yet it differed in some important details. First of all, children's shoes were easy to put on and what is especially important, easy to fasten. Quite often children's footwear was supplied with the so-called rolled toggle passing through long, vertical slots in a similar way as buttons through the holes. On the basis of the products known from many mediaeval towns it can be stated that the measures fostering the child's self-reliance were widely used in shoemaking (see Bitter 2012: Fig. 4; Høst-Madsen 2012: 570; Luoto and Hiekkanen 2012: Fig. 6; Ose 2012: Fig. 4; Øye and Mygland 2012: Fig. 10; Reisnert 2012: Fig. 10). Very often footwear had no fastening and were simply slipped on the foot, although shoelaces were also used, requiring, however, some skill to tie them up.

Children's footwear excavated from the late mediaeval layers, unlike the adults' items, usually shows no signs of total usage and also much fewer traces of casual repairs. Quick outgrowing resulted in the need to provide the child with successive new pairs of footwear. The percentage of repairs decreases in proportion to the size: the bigger, the more often repaired (see also Evans 2012: 43). The smaller specimens, evidently children's, are much more often found complete: the upper with the sole. The less

² Similarly, in the late mediaeval Kołobrzeg and other cities low children's footwear is represented by only three pieces, while small specimens of high footwear accounted for 70% of all the finds (Wywrot-Wyszkowska 2008: 125).

common findings include beautifully decorated children's shoes (e.g. Mäesalu 2012: 426–427; Nawrońska 2012: Fig. 6; Rodhe 2012: 468), as well as specimens for adults. Undoubtedly, this is linked with the wealth and status of the child's parents.

Unambiguous traces of furniture and equipment specially designed for children, other than pieces of clothing, are found during excavations even more rarely. For example, a fragment of a wooden chair-seat with the special protection that prevents a child from falling was discovered in Lund. Sitting safely in such a chair, a child could participate in the home life, observing the work of the members of the household, being constantly monitored by the people who were looking after them. Interestingly, it is dated to quite an early time, i.e., the 11th century (Staff 2012). Certainly being among the other members of the family contributed to the socialization of the child and their adaptation to the future household duties.

A piece of a 'special purpose' chair with a circular hole cut in the seat had a quite different designation (Mührenberg 2012: 232–233). As it seems, it was placed under the seat (or a layer of straw or hay) and used for potty training. This is an obvious manifestation of the child's acclimation to independence and at the same time of maintaining hygiene and cleanliness in the house. The iconographic representations allow to conclude that the child could already walk without a diaper and fulfilled their physiological needs without using the potty (see Ameisenowa 1961: Fig. 41).

The archaeological findings are not sufficient to reconstruct the way babies were looked after. There are iconographic representations of tightly swaddled babies as well as wearing diapers (see Drażkowska 2007; Arndt 2012: 102). In less affluent families, especially in the rural areas, infants lied in the hay which functioned as a diaper absorbing secretions. From the late Middle Ages also wicker and wooden cradles are known, while special dishes for nursing mothers to draw their breast milk and even child's pacifiers (Möller 2012: Abb. 4) and wooden chews (Bitter 2012: Fig. 3) have been discovered in the layers from the modern period. However, these are extremely rare finds, yet it may be also possible that sometimes the artefacts in question were not interpreted correctly.

The excavations have also yielded some small wooden wheels and axles which, judging on the basis of iconography, may be parts of baby-walkers. These were simple wooden structures resembling contemporary walkers or mobility aids for the elderly or the disabled. However, this is only one of possible interpretations based on the analysis of the iconographic sources. Sometimes these little wheels are considered as parts of baby carriages-toys (Rulewicz 1958: 316–17, 1983: 278; Bitter 2012: Fig. 10; Russow 2012: Fig. 8; Blaževičius 2013: Fig. 3). They may also have been parts of looms or even lids of clay or wooden containers (Rulewicz 1958: 316–317; 1983: 278). The elongated, cylindrical in shape artefacts, circular in cross-section and with a diameter of 1,2 cm, may have been small wooden axles associated with the wheels. This is just one of the possible interpretations based on the analysis of iconographic sources.

A child moving with the help of a walker on wheels, or children playing with a wooden pram: in both cases small wheels are very similar to those discovered at the excavations.

Toys or the items used in play are much more visible in the archaeological materials than clothing and the necessary child equipment. However, some artefacts of this kind are very difficult to interpret. As the majority of the mediaeval products were highly versatile in their use, e.g., they could have fulfilled ritual, cult, or votive functions, or were simply used in the household, they require special care in their interpretation. During several centuries of the Middle Ages, miniature vessels, figurines of horses, small boats, dolls and miniature weapons made of different raw materials were produced. Some of them can be definitely identified as toys, the functions of the other ones are determined differently depending on the context in which they were found, their chronology, and often the perceptions of the authors presenting the archaeological sources.

According to the contemporary criteria, apart from their typical entertaining function, toys could have been used for socialization and education. They should also have been adequately matched to the age, sex, psychomotor and motor development. Let us focus on selected artefacts which fulfilled the criteria of socializing and typically entertaining toys, but were mainly used for amusement rather than children's education. At this point, I am intentionally leaving out the whole range of issues related to the adaptation to the purposes of entertainment of every object that was within reach, which in the field of archaeology can be only hypothesised about, albeit with a high degree of probability.

It seems that the primary function of toys from the early phases of the Middle Ages is well illustrated by the miniature tools, weapons, cutlery and table vessels. It should be noted that miniatures modelled on real items are often very faithful to their originals. The toys are usually discovered in the space associated with the house and its neighbourhood, i.e., in the places where family life and production activity were focused, fulfilling, as it seems, mainly the socialising role which consisted in the acquisition by a child through observation and imitation of the system of values, norms and patterns of behaviour being in force in the community, as well as the skills enabling it to enter the world of social institutions. This is extremely important in the development of the young man learning culture and memorizing it in order to maintain it and pass it on to future generations. In particular, the importance of play and socializing toys has been recorded within relatively closed, multi-generational communities. From an early age children were prepared to work in the household through observation, participation in domestic work, agricultural and farm duties, and play adjusted to the age and gender. They learned and memorized the consecutive order of the activities in the farm and the household, and therefore developed their technical and motor skills. Dynamic and movement games were essential for improving the necessary

physical fitness (see Pyla 2010: 267ff.). All this continued as if ‘on the verge’ of domestic life, in the immediate vicinity of a group of people working for their shared household. In time, skills and experience acquired in this way were more and more often used in less complex activities supporting adult actions, leading directly to self-reliance shaped by the observation of the patterns of the family and production life, maintaining the traditional divisions between male and female duties.

Among the miniature objects which were evidently associated with everyday life and could have played socialization functions there are miniature vessels, commonly identified by the researchers with playing house games. In the Middle Ages these items underwent the same evolution as the vessels which were used in the kitchen and dining room. For example, entirely hand-made simple bowls, produced, as it seems, from the raw waste materials for the child/or by the child and used to imitate the basic cooking tasks, are known from the layers dated to the 10th–12th century. Apart from them, there are also vessels made in professional pottery workshops. A vessel of this type was discovered, for example, in Szczecin, in a layer dated to the 12th century (Kowalska 2011: 70–71) whereas a fragment of a similar small vessel was found in a layer dated to the 14th century. Furthermore, in the early mediaeval levels of settlement in the same town, there have been found fragments of wooden vessels turned on a lathe and a stave of a small diameter, which, being part of the basic household equipment, may have had multiple applications. The oldest small hollow dish of this type (considerably damaged) comes from the layer of the first half of the 10th century (Kowalska 2011: Fig. 3).

The function of the small in size, grey, stoneware, glazed and metal vessels dated to the late phase of the Middle Ages is difficult to determine. Some researchers believe that they were an integral part of the equipment of dolls’ houses (Marcinkowski 2010: 63; Bitter 2012, 88; Paner 2012: 328) while others completely exclude the toy functions, recognizing them as vessels used to hold some special substance (see Rębkowski and Romanowicz 2012: 357). There is no doubt, however, that the miniature vessels from the 17th and 18th centuries, often produced in foreign workshops, were typical toys and belonged to entire sets of vessels imitating original versions of table- and kitchenware (Marcinkowski 2010: 62–63; Bitter 2012: Fig. 12–13). An example of that are the findings in Alkmaar in the Netherlands which also demonstrated the relationship between quality miniature vessels and the wealth of the households within which they were found. Over time, these initially luxury goods became increasingly common, even in the houses of less wealthy burghers (Bitter 2012: Fig. 14–17; see also Finck 2012: Abb. 8).

Excavations have also yielded small wood, antler, or metal spoons, adapted in their shape and size to the children’s mouths (Kowalska 2011: 69–70). Small spoons, some in the form of blades, i.e. with flat bowls, could be considered as children’s toys or kitchen utensils used to feed children (Kowalska 2011: Fig. 2). It is impossible, of course, to resolve this issue with certainty, unlike in the case of the miniature copies of work tools, the entire equivalents of which were used in the households and

workshops, such as the 12th century wooden knives known, i.a., from Szczecin (Rulewicz 1958: 329–330) and Irish Waterford (Hurley 2012: Fig. 7), or the knife decorated with ‘children’s’ heads of bears found in Lübeck (Mührenberg 2012: Abb. 18). All of these items had a close relationship with the house and its immediate surroundings.

The peer games requiring dexterity, strength, and, what is the most important, played without the presence of adults, had a slightly different role. In games of this nature, triggering the desire of domination and competition, there naturally emerged the persons with leadership qualities. One could say that team games with the use of such accessories as miniature weapons, balls, spheres, clubs, rings, etc., contributed to the development of social bonds, team cooperation skills, and helped the individual to find their role in the mediaeval society. Different types of team games are attributed to girls and to boys. This basic division may also suggest that boys and girls were prepared to meet the naturally specified and socially conditioned parental, family, and professional functions (Kabacińska 2010: 127). There is also, of course, a group of toys, game accessories, and team games shared by both sexes, which were meant to develop not only the physical skills but also the interaction in the group and the ability to think logically. Yet another group of artefacts, such as masks, costumes, and special headgear, shared by boys and girls, adults and children, are attributes of ludic play (Kabacińska 2010: 125).

Bigger and smaller leather balls used for motor games are associated quite unambiguously with amusement. Such games were known in the Middle Ages in western and eastern Europe (Reeves 1998: 91ff.) at least since the end of the 10th century (Thornton 1990: 707ff.; see also Schnack 1998: Fig. 53; Mould *et al.* 2003: 3406). Various early dated leather balls were found in Novgorod the Great. It was even possible to distinguish two types of them due to the differences in their size as some of them were 2–7 cm and other ones 15–20 cm in diameter. Both types were used for play and the larger ones, probably, in team games (Izjumova 1967: Fig. 84; Brisbane 1992: Fig. V.6). No rules governing the production of these items have been discovered, but they were always stitched from a few pieces of leather and filled with wool or moss (see Volkens 2003: Fig. 416). In fact, the elements of the balls can be easily mistaken for small pouches or even patches. The simplest balls could have been made from a piece of leather tied with a thong or cord, filled with strips of leather or other soft materials. A good illustration of that is the discovery from mediaeval Kołobrzeg (Polak *et al.* 2010: 117, Fig. 7:2). However, this is not a ‘classic’ ball, but only a temporarily made toy, probably of waste material (maybe a small dolls’ head?).

Basing on the archaeological findings we can say that toys such as miniature weapons used in motor games were modelled, like in playing house, on the ‘big’ items found in everyday life. The most popular ones include the well-known since the early Middle Ages tiny swords resembling their original iron counterparts, which usually do not have a clear distinction between the hilt and the blade in the form of a cross-guard,

yet, their pommels are clearly marked out (see Kowalska 2011; Ose 2012: Fig. 5; Øye and Mygland 2012: Fig. 5; Piekalski and Wachowski 2012: Fig. 11:1–4; Petrov 2012: Fig. 4; Russov 2012: Fig. 8:1–2; Staff 2012: Fig. 3; Thier 2012: Fig. 2). A good example of a faithful imitation is a bone lance with the length of 8,5 cm found in Göttingen, dating back to the turn of the 13th and 14th century (Arndt 2012: Fig. 10) and wooden crossbows discovered in Hamburg (Först 2012: Abb. 10) Lübeck (Mührenberg 2012: Fig. 8) and Elbląg (Nawrońska 2012: Fig. 13:1–2; see also Blaževičius 2013: Fig. 2). The group of children's 'weapons' should also comprise wooden figurines of horses on long poles, on which children sat astride holding in one hand a gladiolus, and a special handle in the other. In the opinion of Jan Ryś this play has a very old tradition dating back to Plutarch and Horace (Ryś 2010: 142–143) and was immortalized on the painting *The Children Playing* by Pieter Brueghel, and mentioned by Wincenty Kadłubek in his *Polish Chronicle* (Kürbis 2003: 243).

Some more attention has to be devoted to wooden and metal figurines of horses. The literature especially emphasises their relationship with the cult and ritual-ceremonial sphere of life (Ślupecki 1998). The cult or ritual significance is also attributed to the miniature images of other animals. The findings from the 10th to the 12th century are rarely related to toys and games for children. However, similar figurines from the 13th century do not raise doubts as to their function. Some scholars see in them pawns for board games or toys for children from better-off families (Rębkowski 1998: 281; Gläser 2000: 142; Antowska-Gorączniak 2005: 206). The late mediaeval ceramic horse figurines, especially those of horses with riders (see Gläser ed. 2012), which seem to be typical children's toys, raise the least doubts. It is not difficult in this case to see the change from the ritual or cult function to the toy and thus the continuity of tradition modified under the influence of cultural changes.

There is also a certain duality of interpretation in the case of small boats made of the bark and wood. Typically they are being identified with children's toys, yet some researchers point to their possible votive purpose (see Kajkowski and Szczepanik 2013: 224–226; and also Oleszkiewicz 2010). The Pomeranian toys that resemble sailing boats were often made from used net floats made of bark. They have no features characteristic of Slavic boatbuilding, such as stave plating, but they have such important details as the holes for the masts in the middle. The boats sometimes have miniature paddles (Kowalska 2011: 69). A proper determination of the functions of these artefacts depends primarily on the context of their discovery.

The greatest controversy has been raised by the finds of anthropomorphic wooden figurines considered by the researchers as miniature pagan idols or toys for girls: dolls. The early mediaeval wooden figurines with marked faces may be associated with the exercise of pagan worship (see Wilgocki 1995; Gieysztor 2006: 270ff.; Bujak 1983). According to the ethnographers it survived in the Slavic tradition long after the introduction of Christianity, in the home worship (Szyjewski 2003: 142–143), and worship

of gods of a lower order was no less important in the culture of everyday life than the worship of the gods above (see Kowalska 2010b). The gradual change of function from the cult-ritual to children/girls' toy meant for playing house followed under the influence of religious and moral transformation and resulted in the change of function from a doll to that of a toy. In a period of several centuries of the Middle Ages, simple dolls gained more details such as clearly marked faces and limbs and also items of clothing were introduced. Therefore, fewer doubts as to their function are inspired by the figurines/dolls from the late Middle Ages which look more like modern toys (see Mührenberg 2012: 220; Mulsow 2012: 263–264).

According to some researchers, the evolution of the dolls' function in the Middle Ages is associated with the development of mobile theatres in which puppets were used to promote religious content (Mührenberg 2012: 230). In the late Middle Ages we can observe also a repeatability of forms, as exemplified by two figures: from Szczecin (Kowalska 2012: Fig. 4) and from Lübeck (an archaeological exhibition in Lübeck), both dated to the second half of the 13th–the 14th century. In this case, they are toys rather than objects of worship. Over time the dolls more and more resembled the human form, both in terms of shape and clothing. There were also whole sets of toys: dolls accompanied by certain accessories such as the tableware mentioned above. It seems that the basic function of the toys did not change, and the play took place not only at the margins of a child's everyday life, but became a pleasure reserved for the wealthy burghers' kids. Ethnographic research shows that the dolls combined the ludic/play with the magical and iconic functions. Without ceasing to be toys they became talismans, amulets serving also as a gift of gratitude.

Equally unclear seems to be the function of leather zoomorphic figurines which might evidence the existence of some domestic cult consisting of sacrificing offerings in the form of children's toys: imitations of animals, to domestic gods, or placing them in the 'twilight zone', i.e., behind the stove, and in the attic. The former function suggests placing these objects between the beams of the walls (e.g., in Opole), the latter, inside the house, along with other items of leather (Szczecin, Wolin). With regard to leather objects, a tiny leather sole, or a scrap resembling a sole (Kowalska 2011: 9) is particularly interesting. Could it be an effect of a child's lesson taken in an adult, 'professional' craft? Children eagerly and willingly use scraps of various materials used by adults in house- and professional work and thus learn by imitation.

At this point, leather slings should also be mentioned. They differ in size and the way of manufacturing (Kowalska 2011: Fig. 10). Slings of small size can be probably safely associated with hunting for birds and small animals, which were not lacking in the immediate area. They may have been successfully used by younger people. As it seems, hunting was not only aimed at replenishing the daily diet. The hides of small furry animals were a precious commodity sold at the local and distant markets (Leciejewicz 1981: 164ff.; Łosiński 2000a: 124; 2000b; Filipowiak 1998). If these assumptions

are correct, hunting with a sling was one of the ways to maintain the household, in which children and adolescents could participate.

The remarks on the ‘invisible childhood’ cannot omit such characteristic and quite common, classic children’s toys as wooden tops set in motion by a cord and issuing buzzing noises pleasing to children’s ears. In the case of whip-tops, the toys which have always been known, one can observe a specific evolution: from simple handmade objects, through bigger items turned on the potter’s wheel, to metal toys which were set in motion by a lever. The last-mentioned ones are of course modern specimens, probably known to everyone. Children playing with wooden whip-tops were shown by Hieronymus Bosch in *The War of the carnival with fast*, exactly presented as a specific movement of the hand making the toy turn.

It is less easy, at least in Polish archaeology, to assess the function of the specific buzz bones occurring commonly in the mediaeval towns. In the opinion of most scholars, they served as buttons to fasten thick fabrics. This is clearly confirmed by a piece of fabric with such a bone from Opole, dated to the 12th century (Gediga 1983: Fig. 16). As ethnographic research shows, however, the buzz bones fastened on a string and set in motion by means of simultaneous (alternating) stretching and releasing of the two sides of the string produce a characteristic humming sound. Did they serve as toys? A similar sound effect may be induced by any object with a hole, thus driven into motion. This group of toys also comprises simple musical instruments such as rattles, impacted idiophonic tools such as drums, cane or grass whistles, rubbed instruments such as whistles, flutes, xylophones and the metal Jew’s harps (Sachs 2005: 15–49).

One should also mention the accessories for board games and simple games played in the open space such as: pawns, rings, ceramic balls (marbles), astragals and smooth, egg-shaped small objects of clay and stone. In this case, however, we cannot be sure whether they are associated with children and children’s games or are elements of the strategic games attributed to adults. Chess, a game based on a careful strategy that requires mental effort, is considered to have been enjoyed by the richer representatives of the mediaeval society (Bubczyk 2005: 55ff.; 2009: 111ff.). The smoothed, oval and egg-shaped small objects of clay and stone could also have been pawns. Sometimes small spherical pebbles are considered as projectiles for slings: one function does not exclude the other. The most popular were astragals: bones filled with lead for appropriate balancing (or without it) used for the games known from the Antiquity. They are found almost universally in most of the late mediaeval towns. Games played by children with the use of astragals or other pawns are depicted by Hieronymus Bosch. Open space games, however, had a slightly different, more ludic character, meeting the human, not just children’s, need for fun and entertainment.

The brief remarks presented above make one realize the need for the further, preferably interdisciplinary studies of childhood and the child in the Middle Ages. The findings from the earliest phases of the Middle Ages in which the toys seem to have

been objects of luxury, are the least interesting. The toys become more and more numerous along with the general growth of prosperity and become the predominant items in socialization in its modern understanding, reflecting the reality in miniature. So the child was probably perceived as a 'little adult' present but not especially noticeable. Philippe Ariès in 'The History of childhood' notes that in the mediaeval society *people had no sense of the specificity of childhood... as soon as the child could do without mother's, nurse's or nanny's, care, they entered the adult world and was not distinguished in it by anything special.* Ariès based his comments and insights on the sources relating to the 'higher' social strata in which the child usually occupied a privileged position. Archaeological sources conclusively show that the care for the smallest members of society was independent of the financial situation, which is best evidenced by large deposits of positive emotions associated with the manufacture of toys and utility items for children, particularly evident in their craftsmanship and finishing.

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