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Motherhood and Infancies in the Mediterranean in Antiquity

Edited by
Margarita Sánchez Romero
and
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Paperback Edition: ISBN 978-1-78925-038-1
Digital Edition: ISBN 978-1-78925-039-8 (epub)

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Published in the United Kingdom in 2018 by
OXBOW BOOKS
The Old Music Hall, 106–108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE

and in the United States by
OXBOW BOOKS
1950 Lawrence Road, Havertown, PA 19083

Paperback Edition: ISBN 978-1-78925-038-1
Digital Edition: ISBN 978-1-78925-039-8 (epub)

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018951271

Typeset in India by Versatile PreMedia Services. www.versatilepremedia.com

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Front cover: Drawing: Andres Marin Jarque at www.pastwomen.net

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Chapter 8

Maternities in Iberian societies. From day-to-day life to sacredness

Carmen Rueda Galán, Carmen Rísquez Cuenca and Ana B. Herránz Sánchez

The maternal function and its symbolic dimension. Proposals from (Iberian) archaeology

In this study we approach the analysis of maternity or, more correctly stated, maternities, as the plural of the term combines a diversity of situations and realities. Our intention in this study is to approach maternities as social experiences, as well as cultural constructions involving diverse defining aspects such as, for example, how to deal with procreation and maternity strategies and how their symbols are used. For this reason, we believe it is better to speak of the maternal function or maternal practices, as they bring us closer to multidirectional readings of the societies of the past, in our case, the Iberian societies (4th–3rd centuries BC).

The maternal function or practices bring us face to face with the importance of reproduction in the construction of the identity of the women of the past that, in the most traditional and conservationist 'theses', are justified fundamentally by dependency relations (Hernando 2005). However, the term maternity encompasses more than that; it goes beyond the exclusively biological and physical to take us into the social reality, as it denotes a status and confers a social and political role on women, incorporated into a fiercely private dimension. However, as we will see in the case of the Iberian societies, it is also public, at least in some aspects (Rísquez and Hornos 2005; Rísquez 2015; Prados 2016).

As other authors, such as Margarita Sánchez, have also accurately pointed out, maternity as a trans-historic concept has led to it traditionally being left out of the historiographic debate in archaeological practise (Sánchez 2008, 123–124). As a natural event, a necessary part of life, it has been taken for granted and not in need of archaeological analysis as a cultural process. Al this has resulted in it being conceived as a static activity that can be dealt with ahistorically. Only very recently

Figure 8.6: Illustration of a childbirth in the Iberian period (Iron Age) (Rumor for GENDAR Project)

possible that the private sphere took precedence and that the rituality would have been carried out in the bosom of the family (Fig. 8.6). As an individual experience, framed within a collective (not public) dimension, pregnancy and the ways of managing the rituals would have been linked mainly to the home.[7] The footprint in the archaeological record is, therefore, more difficult to identify. On the other hand, we should not lose sight of the fact that, as a separation rite, the gestation period would have involved important religious and symbolic aspects, such as the concept of contamination associated with the vulnerability during a period of major physical and psychological changes. These determining factors for this condition are incompatible with the processes of ritual mobility, such as long-distance pilgrimages to visit the place of worship. Whether they are explicit prohibitions of the presence of gestating women in sacred places or due to taboos or reasons of protection, the ritual dynamics in the analysed sanctuaries mark a parenthesis in the ritualised biotic cycle itself. The chain is broken to exclude these ritualities, which remain framed in other development contexts. In the future we will need to study them in greater depth.

We have many more limitations when it comes to approaching the practices related to protection before birth, although they were probably part of the mechanisms

for the 4th–3rd centuries BC, we observe how maternity is conceived liturgically as a process and is linked to the importance of female rituality, which occupies an essential space especially linked to the rites of aggregation (Cenerini 2002, 126).

The analysis of a specific ritual system, understood and contextualised in its social structure and political territory, allows us to perceive nuances in the use and function of maternal practices and their symbols of representation. Thus, from the reading of processes, we document how the resources are heterogeneous and serve to give value to different aspects:

1. The cohesion of the community. The stages of the maternal cycle related to the propitiation of fertility and the protection of pregnancy and labour are integrated into the social identification practices, which incorporate different strata of the community. They are evaluated from a ritual point of view, being the most representative liturgical practices in these sanctuaries, as well as from a symbolic point of view, as they represent the channels for achieving the success of procreation strategies that are reinvested on a community social and religious level. At this point we particularly observe the importance of female rituality in the aggregation practices that accentuate the complementarity with the masculine sphere, as well as occupying its own unique area of development and visualisation.
2. Maternity as an image of prestige, that is incorporated based on unique and restricted models, such as the maternal-child image or the representation of infancy. These highlight the practices linked to the perpetuation of the lineage and the recognition of the legitimate children who take on an important role in the community from an early age: daughters and sons who increase the power and prestige of a lineage. The symbols of maternity, associated with infancy, are used as an image of class and a channel for claiming parental ties.
3. Maternity linked to the divine plain. The image of the nurturing divinity is incorporated as a symbol that contributes to the regulation of the cycles and complements the divine language of the transformation linked to Nature, a concept, we emphasise, that is constant in the cycle related to maternal practices.

The approach we take in this article opens the way to an investigation of the archaeological analysis of the record related to the sphere of maternity. In the future we will need to incorporate other areas that will undoubtedly enrich the proposals made in these pages, such as the funerary sphere and the domestic environment, where the imprint of women and their spaces of development will allow us to expand the map of relations linked to the maternal functions.

Acknowledgement

This paper has been prepared as part of the Resources for the investigation of the archaeology of women and gender in Spain Excellence Project, GENDAR (HUM-1904). Junta de Andalucía.

Notes

1 For other areas of contrast, cf. Cid (2014, 10).
2 Although not restricted to them, the rituals related to coming of age are documented in diverse territories and shrines, framed in equally heterogeneous religious structures. Cf. Rueda (2013); Grau and Amorós (2013); Machause *et al.* (2014); Ruiz *et al.* (2015).
3 For the male variations, cf. Álvarez-Ossorio (1941, pl. xli); Nicolini (1969, pl. xiv, 5–6); Prados (1992, 331–333, nos 359, 361, 371 and 376). For the female examples, cf. Álvarez-Ossorio (1941, i and ii); Nicolini (1969, pl. xx, 1–4); Prados (1992, 343, no. 556); Moreno Conde (2006, no. 14); Rueda (2012, no. 2).
4 Of particular note are depictions alluding to the cutting and offering of hair, as in the reliefs from the sanctuary of Lokri, in which we can see this type of representation, cf. Dillon (2003, 225).
5 Associated with the cult of *Athena Ilias*, in which the age for holding these rituals is set at around 15, cf. Torelli (1984).
6 Aspects that are also transferred to and visualised in other religious areas, such as burial sites and grave goods. In this case, we also have to highlight the presence of objects that allude to the female rites of passage in a strongly prestigious language. Thus, the Attic crater of the Bath of Helena, documented in the princely chamber of Piquía that, forming part of an assemblage of grave goods and a more complex narrative programme, alludes to the preparation of the bride in an imported, but perfectly understandable language in the heart of the Iberian religious traditions. Cf. Rueda and Olmos (2015).
7 In some cases, such as in the Hittite societies, it is formalised in what has been defined as 'family abduction', cf. Beckman (2016).
8 There is an exceptional example from Collado de los Jardines. The young woman is wearing ritual attire linked to the rites of passage and she is holding a bird, representing the offering of the moment prior to the consummation of the rite. Cf. Álvarez-Ossorio (1941, pl. i); Prados (1992, 349).
9 For the difference in types, cf. Rueda *et al.* (2016, 66–67).
10 It is an example that has its closest parallel in the terracotta piece from the La Algaida sanctuary, attributed to the 4th–2nd centuries BC, identified as a nurturing divinity in one of the formulations of the Mediterranean mother goddess. It is a model of expression specific to the central and western Mediterranean present in the Iberian world from the 4th century BC and whose first prototypes may have been reproduced from imported moulds. Cf. Rueda (2011, fig. 66); Rueda *et al.* (2016, 68–69).
11 In an overall reading of the thousands of offerings we have at our disposal, we can see how individuality is a way of differentiating class that contrasts with seriation, a resource related to clientele representation that adapts to a series of standardised codes. Cf. Rueda (2008).

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