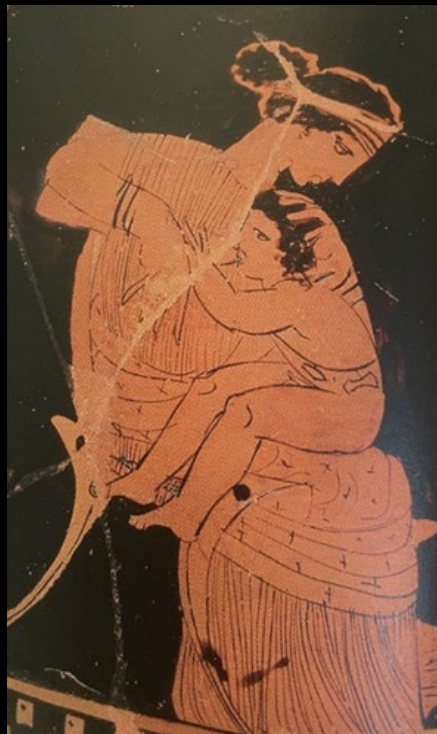




Challenging Care: Infant Mortality and Kourotrophic Practices in Classical and Hellenistic Athens

Lecture by **Clio Chrysostomidis** (MA Student, Department of Archaeology, Conservation, and History University of Oslo)



Breastfeeding Mother. Red Figure Vase; ca. 440 BCE (Sommer and Sommer 2015:66, Fig.8)

The lecture will take place on **Tuesday, 16 September 2025, at 7:00 p.m. (EEST)** at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, Tsami Karatasou 5, 11742 (the lecture will also be streamed online via Zoom)

Registration is required for both in-person and virtual attendance.

To attend **in-person**, please register at norwinst@uib.no

To attend **via Zoom**, please register via the following link:

<https://uib.zoom.us/meeting/register/WmR-N9BPRX6TVa22X4u3Vg>



Abstract

There have been several suggestions regarding the causes and numbers of the assumed high infant mortality rate in Classical and Hellenistic Athens, despite the lack of burials and material evidence to support such claims. While the question of how *high* the infant mortality rate “truly” was is not easily answered, I find it more interesting to ask *why* these infants are missing from the archaeological record.

Even though the paleodemographic method has proved useful in many studies, I argue that the insufficient number of infant burials, as well as the importance of cultural context, makes this method unproductive for studies of Classical and Hellenistic Athens. First, we must ask: why are the recorded infant burials so scarce, and what can we interpret from the burials we do have? And secondly, why did these infants die? While infanticide is one of the most commonly suggested causes of death, disease has been shown through bioarchaeological studies to be a more common cause. As infanticide is enacted by the caregivers of the child, studying the sociological reasons behind it can provide a deeper understanding of the caregivers and their circumstances. In the same manner, exploring disease and its transmission can give insight into the infants’ environment and care.

This lecture will explore how the archaeological material can provide insight into the infant mortality rate and child-rearing practices of Classical and Hellenistic Athens. The archaeological material will be interpreted through ancient literary sources as well as sociological and ethnographic perspectives.

Biographical Information

Clio Chrysostomidis is a master’s student in the Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History at the University of Oslo. Her research focuses on Mediterranean archaeology, bioarchaeology, and ancient diet and disease. She completed her archaeological studies at the University of Oslo and has interned and taken courses in bioarchaeology and aDNA at the Malcolm H. Wiener Laboratory of the American School of Classical Studies. In 2024, Chrysostomidis was awarded the Østby Archaeology Stipend 2025 from the Norwegian Institute at Athens on the basis of her master’s thesis.