

## Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy

Edited by Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter (*Hesperia* Suppl. 41). Pp. xxiii + 430, figs. 178, tables 8. The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Princeton 2007. \$75. ISBN 978-0-87661-541-6 (paper).

The past decade has witnessed tremendous advances in the study of children and childhood in Greek and Roman antiquity. Like its more established cousin—the study of ancient women—the study of childhood has in recent years expanded greatly in diversity of evidence and methodology to challenge our perception of social and familial organization in the ancient world. After all, the experience of childhood—or the state of having been a child—was shared by every individual in antiquity, transcending even such markers as gender, class, and free or servile status.

In this handsomely illustrated collection of papers originally presented at the “Coming of Age in Ancient Greece” conference at Dartmouth College in 2003, Cohen and Rutter offer a major contribution to this emerging field. Ranging broadly in chronology and genre, this collection soundly refutes Arliès’ once-definitive dismissal of childhood as solely a modern construction by identifying how childhood was conceptualized as a distinct and essential human life stage in societies ranging from Minoan Crete to late antiquity.

As Cohen notes in her excellent introductory essay, the study of childhood is complicated by two factors: children appear infrequently in the literary and archaeological records, and the concept of childhood itself lacked a cross-cultural, broadly accepted definition throughout the ancient world. This key definitional instability necessitates the study of childhood as a cultural and political phenomenon, one whose historical evolution must address shifting or contested definitions of childhood as well as changes in the institutions that govern and demarcate it. Consequently,

multiple methodologies are needed to pursue these questions across the diverse evidence culled from literature, epigraphy, iconography, and archaeology.

In pursuit of these goals, the editors have organized this volume thematically around social and experiential themes that link children of ancient Mediterranean societies across era and locale. Specific units focus on the role of children within families, processes of socialization and education, children’s rituals and those marking transitions across age grades, bio-archaeological evidence, and the memorializing of premature death. (A final essay addresses childlike personae in Callimachus, further broadening the volume’s scope.) Within these units, attention to the social differentiation of children by gender and, to a lesser extent, class features prominently; more than half the collected articles address the different experiences of boys and girls in social structures.

The chronological scope of this collection is likewise broad, encompassing the second millennium B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E. Throughout, the collection offers an effective complementarity between genre surveys and narrower studies. Of particular interest to archaeologists is the emphasis on material culture and iconography. Eighteen articles employ, either singly or in combination, archaeological, epigraphic, or pictorial evidence—most typically to identify either visual formulas differentiating children from adults or to identify physical and social contexts in which children appear. (Ambühl’s article on Callimachus and Pratt’s exploration of the theme of parenting in Homer represent the only entirely literary studies in this volume.)

Two articles address the Aegean Bronze Age. Chapin challenges Davis' long-standing identification of boys' ages in the Thera frescoes by focusing on physiological development, while Rehak sees attention to dress as central to expanding the database of identifiable girls in Aegean art.

Childhood in ancient Greece is the collection's most explored topic. Langdon argues that Geometric iconography employs two paradigms for representing girls and boys, associating boys with heroes and girls with marriage. From the bioarchaeological record, Lagia notes significant variance across time and place in accepting children as full members of classical poleis. Three articles address Athenian vase painting. Smith tracks the depiction of a mythical figure named Komos, portrayed alternately as a human boy or a satyr, while McNiven, examining the gendered use of gesture, finds an age-based hierarchy among preadult males, feminizing boys but associating ephebes with adult men. Cohen identifies a variance in the treatment of girls and boys in mythological abduction scenes: abducted girls become artificially transformed into young adults. Analyzing classical Athenian sculpture, Grossman notes three tropes for children depicted on funerary monuments—free children shown either singly or in family groups, even as slave children accompany their masters. Lawton, drawing on Attic votive reliefs, discovers close attention to age grades in depictions of children's social development.

From Etruscan and Italic evidence, Ammerman finds parental concerns with child mortality embodied in votive terracottas from Paestum. Becker theorizes separate burial areas for Etruscan infants, noting the absence of children under five in primary cemeteries.

Roman children emerge from public and private scenes. Uzzi identifies a key difference in the treatment of Roman and non-Roman families in official imperial art; the remaining

studies address privately commissioned funerary monuments. Huskinson notes differences in the priorities of free and freed families in the pictorial themes chosen for tomb buildings, funerary altars, and sarcophagi. D'Ambra and Sorabella identify the symbolic logic behind two popular sarcophagus motifs: circuses and lizards, respectively. From late antiquity, Marinescu, Cox, and Wachter track boys' educational stages via a series of Roman mosaics; Katz investigates Jerome's letters directing the raising of an infant Christian girl; and Alberici and Harlow survey medical, legal, and patristic texts to locate a period of "youth" for girls in late antiquity.

The articles here are mainly substantive and challenging, but, as to be anticipated for an emerging subfield, comprehensiveness is neither possible nor to be expected. As Rutter and Lawton both note, pictorial and literary or epigraphic evidence are often at odds, leaving a disconnect that requires additional scholarly inquiry. Rutter also calls for further study of such genres as Roman wall painting, numismatics, and relief ornamentation on terracotta lamps. I would add to these suggestions a call for additional work on slave children (here touched on primarily by Grossman) as well as a broader assessment of children within kinship systems. But these are less criticisms than suggestions for future directions. This volume is a substantial and thoughtful collection that will prove invaluable to scholars with interests not only in ancient childhood but also in domestic social organization, gender, ancient education, and ritual.

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