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CHILDREN IN THE ROMAN WORLD: CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES. A REVIEW ARTICLE

VILLE VUOLANTO

This article analyses the contemporary flowering of scholarship on ancient, especially Roman, childhood and children. I will concentrate here mostly on social and cultural historical perspectives, as it is especially in this field (rather than, for example, in studies concentrating on ideological representations of childhood) that there is a change taking place in research orientation, both thematically and theoretically. The studies selected here for indepth attention represent three different ways of approaching the field of ancient family research. Christian Laes' book is an example of a book-length study aiming at giving new perspectives on Roman childhood in a synthetizing manner; the volume edited by Sabine Hübner and David Ratzan represents an attempt to open up a field hitherto unexplored in the context of ancient childhood; and the work by Cornelia Horn and John Martens draws together the work done in New Testament and Early Christian Studies, while also pointing to new directions.¹

* As the field of the childhood studies in the Roman world is quite small, I notify here that I have done research co-operation in the past with Cornelia Horn, Sabine Hübner and Christian Laes. Most notably I am now co-authoring an article with Christian Laes to a book co-edited by Sabine Huebner. I hope this would not affect the impartiality of my judgement below. Moreover, I need to thank April Pudsey for her comments and fruitful advice during the preparation of this article, and Brian McNeil for correcting my English.

¹ Cornelia B. Horn – John W. Martens, "*Let the Little Children Come to Me*". *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*. The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2009. ISBN 978-0-8132-1674-4. XV, 438 pp. USD 44.95; Sabine R. Hübner – David M. Ratzan (eds.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2009. ISBN 978-0-521-49050-4 (hb). XVI, 333 pp. GBP 55, USD 99; Christian Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire. Outsiders Within*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2011. ISBN 978-0-521-89746-4. XV, 334 pp. GBP 65, USD 105.

During the last decade, a new phase in the study of the history of childhood in the Roman world has been developing quickly. The field has been able to leave behind the thematic framework set by the discussions on Philippe Ariès and his immediate followers. Their heritage was twofold: firstly, methodologically, to point out that childhood is a culturally conditioned and thus historically changing concept, and secondly, thematically, to seek for development and progress in the field of the history of childhood. These trends led to the dominance of two main questions for scholarship: How did the parent-child relations change in the past, and: Did people in antiquity and the middle ages perceive childhood as a separate phase of life? Among classical scholars, and, more particularly, scholars of the Roman world, these themes led to a concentration on cultural views of childhood. Childhood was approached as an institution, seen as one and shared in a certain cultural milieu. In consequence, the (elite) ideals with regard to childhood, how children fit in to the 'adult' society and public life, and attitudes towards children were at the centre of the research interests. For the most part, scholarship was not directly preoccupied with children themselves, as agents in their own right and as producers of their own culture.²

For Roman social history in particular, the influence of historical demography and women's studies, intersecting with studies of Roman family in the late 1980s onwards, was profound. Children – especially via the theme of *patria potestas* – became one of the focal points in highlighting Roman (patriarchal) family relations and studying family life. At the same time, the studies of Roman education and, especially, of families in Roman law, both fields that had paid attention to children in Roman world even before the modern interest in childhood studies, began to be integrated with more culturally and socially oriented research on children.³ Beryl Rawson's *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (2003)

² P. Ariès, *L'Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris 1960; L. deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood", in L. deMause (ed.): *The History of Childhood*, New York 1974, 1–74; L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, London 1977. For the reactions to Ariès, deMause and Stone among historians of classical antiquity, see M. Harlow – R. Laurence – V. Vuolanto, "Past, Present and Future in the Study of Roman Childhood", in S. Crawford – G. Shepherd (eds.), *Children, Childhood and Society*, Oxford 2007, esp. 5–6.

³ See esp. B. Rawson (ed.), *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, Ithaca (N.Y.) 1986; B. Rawson (ed.), *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, Oxford 1991; S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, London 1988; S. Dixon, *The Roman Family*. Baltimore – London 1992; K. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family. Studies in Roman Social History*, Oxford 1991. R. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*, Cambridge 1994; J. Gardner, *Family and familia in Roman law and life*, Oxford 1998. For a synthesis of traditional

marks a high point for this phase of scholarship. This is a masterly synthesis of earlier research, but it seeks also new directions in stressing the need to widen up the material basis for the studies, the importance of taking into account the children's own viewpoint, and the necessity of cross-disciplinary perspectives.⁴

All this has led to a gradual opening up of Roman childhood studies to wider questions and to more theoretical thinking. At an earlier period, children were studied in particular in the context of the family, with research concentrating on emotional and hierarchical aspects of parent-child relationships. However, in the twenty-first century children have become a focus of studies in their own right on an unprecedented scale. New questions have been asked, leading to a recent flowering of publications on ancient and early medieval childhood. Themes like children's play, slave children, nursing and child labour have aroused increasing interest, while an 'old' topic like education has received renewed attention. Similarly, the range of source material expanded to include material culture, archaeology, iconography, papyri, letters and sermons of ecclesiastical writers, and hagiographical sources. All this variety is well displayed in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (2013).⁵ What has proved to be very important for the study of children is the growing awareness of the variation in the lives of children – a variation due to social and legal status, gender, and regional differences. Similarly, instead of looking for one specific ideal or an attitude towards children, one has to be aware of potentially conflicting ideals and attitudes on various levels of discourse and social life.

legal studies on family and children, see C. Fayer, *La familia romana: aspetti giuridici ed antiquari*, 3 vols., Roma 1995 and 2005. See also the special issue of *Iuris Antiqui Historia* 4 (2012), on children and youth in (mainly) Roman legislation.

⁴ B. Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, Oxford 2003; see also her "The Future of Childhood Studies in Classics and Ancient History", in K. Mustakallio *et al.* (eds.), *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Rome 2005, 1–11.

⁵ J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin with R. Bell (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford 2013. The expansion of the field may also be seen in the newest version of V. Vuolanto *et al.*, *Children in the Ancient World and the Early Middle Ages: A Bibliography for Scholars and Students* (January 2014), online at <http://www.hf.uio.no/ifikk/english/research/projects/childhood/bibliography.pdf>, which now includes nearly 1,800 titles.

Growing up Fatherless and the different childhoods

The volume edited by Sabine Hübner and David Ratzan, one of the books on which we concentrate here, is a good example of the new kind of interest in studying ancient society in general, and ancient children in particular. Already the name of the volume, *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity*, marks a notable departure from older studies: it does not handle childhood as one indivisible entity, but picks up a particular group of children with particular characteristics, while conveying an expectation that the central actors in this book would be children themselves. The book has a chronological span from Homeric times to Late Antiquity, and it includes both social-historical and more literary studies. It is not necessary here to summarize the articles one by one; instead, I will pick up some particular points from those chapters dealing with the Roman world, and from the book as a whole.

The collection starts, much in line with the recent trends in research, with a short but very useful demographic overview by Walter Scheidel, which manages to show how common was the phenomenon of fatherlessness in the ancient world: not only high infant and childhood mortality, but also parental mortality made the presence of death in the lives of children pervasive.⁶ Scheidel's remarks of the relevance of birth order for the children's experience and even for future prospects, would serve as a fruitful starting point for future studies. Sabine Hübner's article on stepfathers is a central piece in the collection, stressing the importance – and the ubiquity – of stepfathers and of step-relatives more generally. Here, as in many other articles of the collection dealing with the Roman world (by Ann-Cathrin Harders, Neil Bernstein, and Rafaella Cribiore), a central point is that losing the biological father, while causing practical and emotional distress, did not need to hinder the careers of the elite boys: stepfathers widened the networks for elite children, and older (male) relatives took care of the education and support of their younger orphaned relatives. Moreover, the death of the fathers, or their absence from the lives of their children for other reasons, could also open up opportunities, as Judith Hallett shows in her piece on Cornelia and Sulpicia – a

⁶ See also Laes 2011 (above n. 1), 23–32; T. Parkin, "The Demography of Infancy and Early Childhood in the Ancient World," in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin with R. Bell (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford 2013, 40–61; A. Pudsey, "Children in Roman Egypt", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin with R. Bell (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford 2013, 484–509.

point with parallels in the lives of late Roman male intellectuals, both Christian and non-Christian.⁷

When I opened the volume, I was immediately intrigued to see that the themes of child abandonment or guardianship were not given their own chapters. This is not a criticism as such: as the editors state in the introduction, they aim at encouraging new and innovative scholarship rather than at presenting a systematic treatment of the issue of fatherlessness. Indeed, child abandonment (together with a discussion of infanticide and abortion) has already received considerable attention in the earlier scholarship: the theme neatly encapsulates the dominant issues of the previous phase of research history, on family relations and paternal power, within a theme which in present-day contexts is highly emotive. Judith Evans Grubbs has been most active in publishing on this problematic, widening the interest of research from the parents to society more generally, and in particular to children themselves as foundlings. Most recently, Christian Laes has linked this theme with the discussion of the relationship between the biological and the social birth of children in antiquity.⁸

Guardianship (including *tutela*, *cura* and unofficial modes of protecting children and their property), with its wide social and economic effects on children, families and Roman society at large, is an important but quite unexplored theme. As Richard Saller has pointed out, perhaps as many as one-sixth of property was in the hands of fatherless children under fourteen, and up to one-third was likely owned by young people under twenty-five years of age. The theme appears in the volume in many contexts, and this, luckily enough, has led the editors to add a substantial 'prolegomenon of the Ancient guardianship' in their introduc-

⁷ V. Vuolanto, "Autobiography and the Construction of Elite Childhood and Youth in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Antioch", in C. Laes – K. Mustakallio – V. Vuolanto (eds.), *Children and Family in Late Antiquity. Life, Death and Interaction*, Leuven 2014, 309–12; 314–5, 320.

⁸ J. Evans Grubbs, "Hidden in Plain Sight: *Expositi* in the Community", in V. Dasen and T. Späth (eds.), *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*, Oxford 2010, 293–310; J. Evans Grubbs, "The Dynamics of Infant Abandonment: Motives, Attitudes and (Unintended) Consequences", in K. Mustakallio – C. Laes (eds.), *The Dark Side of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2011, 21–36; J. Evans Grubbs, "Infant Exposure and Infanticide", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin with R. Bell (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford 2013, 83–107; C. Laes, "Infants Between Biological and Social Birth in Antiquity: A Phenomenon of the *Longue Durée*", *Historia* 63 (2014) 364–83. For further studies and historiographical analysis of the research, see V. Vuolanto, "Infant Abandonment and the Christianization of Medieval Europe", in K. Mustakallio – C. Laes (eds.), *The Dark Side of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2011, 3–19.

tion (p. 13–18).⁹ But, in any case, the socio-cultural aspects of this theme would deserve a fully developed book-length discussion in the future.

A further topic to take up here is the discussion of the particular interest in orphanhood in Judeo-Christian contexts. Here, orphans have a pointed symbolic value as a group of people who need special protection. Although this rhetoric was not absent in the non-Christian discourse either, care of the orphans was highlighted as a major moral obligation for Jews and Christians, as Marcus Sigmund shows in the context of the Bible, and Geoffrey Nathan in Late Antiquity. Nathan, while concentrating on stepfathers, stresses the continuities rather than the new aspects of the Christian ethos, as Jens-Uwe Krause has also done in his now classical study of widows and orphans in the Roman world.¹⁰ What seems to be new is the interest in the lower classes and 'the poor', and the theme of poverty and orphanhood certainly would deserve further study from the social-historical viewpoint.¹¹

Taken as a whole, the book is an important contribution to the study of ancient childhood, explicitly dealing with some issues to which little attention has been paid up to now: relatives and networks of minors beyond the family nucleus; lower-class children outside of the elite circles; and marginalized children and childhoods. It has to be pointed out that the book, thanks to its exploration of the situations where fathers are missing, is also one of the most central studies on Roman fatherhood, another neglected topic in recent social historically oriented

⁹ See also the short but informative analysis of the place of guardians in the family dynamics in connection of discussion on step-fathers in Huebner's own chapter (67–9). On the social and legal aspects of guardianship, see Saller (above n. 3), 181–203 (esp. 189–90 and 203 on the demographical background); J.-U. Krause, *Rechtliche und Soziale Stellung von Waisen. Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*, vol. 3, Stuttgart 1995, 85–112; D. P. Kehoe, *Investment, Profit, and Tenancy. The Jurists and the Roman Agrarian Economy*, Ann Arbor 1997, 22–76; V. Vuolanto, "Women and the property of fatherless children in the Roman Empire", in P. Setälä *et al.*, *Women, power and property in Roman Empire*, Rome 2002, 203–43.

¹⁰ J.-U. Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im frühen Christentum. Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*, vol. 4. Stuttgart 1995, 11–51, with Krause (above n. 8), 85–103 on pre-Christian Rome. See also Vuolanto (above n. 9), esp. 204–6 on the importance of the moral obligations of guardians towards orphaned children in the Roman tradition.

¹¹ See also C. Kotsifou, "Papyrological Perspectives on Orphans in the World of Late Ancient Christianity", in C. Horn – R. Phenix (eds.), *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, Tübingen 2009, 339–74 and T. McGinn, "Widows, Orphans and Social History", *JRA* 12 (1999) 617–32 (review of Krause [above, nn. 9 and 10]).

research.¹² Also, the study of metaphors connected with childhood, one of the main themes of the volume, deserves much more attention than it has previously been given to in classical scholarship.

"Let the Children Come": Interdisciplinarity, children and the rise of Christianity

In contrast to ancient historians, there is a strong tradition among scholars of early Christianity and the New Testament of research into the metaphorical use of family and child-related terminology.¹³ They have also been much interested in the possible influence which the rise of Christianity may have had on attitudes towards children and on their actual lives, with an on-going debate about this issue.¹⁴ However, Late Antiquity (or, the 'Patristic period'), as a cross-over period

¹² On the variety of quite different, even contradictory views on Roman fathers, see E. Southon, "Fatherhood in Late Antique Gaul", in M. Harlow – L. Larsson Lovén (eds.), *Families in the Roman and Late Antique World*, London – New York 2012, 238–53; N. Bernstein, "Each Man's Father Served as His Teacher: Constructing Relatedness in Pliny's Letters", *Classical Antiquity* 27 (2008), 203–30; M. Vesley, "Father-son Relations in Roman Declamation", *Ancient History Bulletin* 17 (2003), 159–80; E. Cantarella, "Fathers and Sons in Rome", *Classical World* 96 (2003), 281–98; Y. Thomas, "Fathers as Citizens of Rome, Rome as a City of Fathers (Second Century BC – Second Century AD)", in A. Burguière, *A History of the Family, Volume I: Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*, Cambridge 1996, 228–69 (in French 1986); Saller (above n. 3), esp. 102–60; E. Eyben, "Fathers and Sons", in B. Rawson (ed.), *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, Oxford 1991, 114–43; J. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*, Princeton (NJ) 1984.

¹³ See, e.g., H. Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as a Social Reality and Metaphor*, London – New York 1997; D. K. Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy*. Princeton (NJ) 1999; J. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, Minneapolis 2001; R. Aasgaard, "My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" *Christian Siblingship in Paul*, London 2004; C. Gerber, *Paulus und seine "Kinder": Studien zur Beziehungsmetaphorik der paulinischen Briefe*, Berlin 2005; B. Strawn, "'Israel, My Child': The Ethics of a Biblical Metaphor", in M. Bunge (ed.) *The Child in the Bible*, Grand Rapids 2008, 103–40.

¹⁴ See already P. Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde: Kinder im Neuen Testament*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1992; D. Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, Oxford 1994; W. Strange, *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament, and the Early Church*, Carlisle 1996; P. Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment*, Tübingen 2003; J. Murphy, *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence*

for Classical and early Christian scholars, has attracted surprisingly little attention (compared to the relatively ample source material available). It is now dealt with in (sub)chapters of volumes with wider themes, or, more recently, in individual articles in compilation works. The first monograph of the issue appeared only in 2005, when Odd Magne Bakke published his controversial book on the positive effect of Christianity not only on attitudes towards children but also on their actual living conditions in Late Antiquity. After that date, there has appeared a number of edited volumes dealing with childhood in Late Antiquity.¹⁵

The volume by Cornelia Horn and John Martens appeared in 2009 at the peak of this new interest on Late Antique childhood, and it aimed at integrating the scholarship of the early Christian studies and (late) Roman family history into a new synthesis. They begin by analysing ideals and ideas of children in the New Testament, with a extensive discussion of believers as children of God, thus offering a good starting point for tracing the subsequent developments of attitudes towards children in the Christian tradition. The integration of a comparison between the early Christian and Jewish ideals in the volume is a most welcome addition. But there is much more to this book, as it widens the scope of New Testament and Early Christian scholarship on childhood to the Late Antique and Patristic periods. In this part of the book, the new trends in studying the history of childhood are most clearly to the fore, especially in discussions of the participation of children in religious life, and in their laudable and unique discussion of the everyday life of households, and especially of the many forms and social functions children's play (with games, music and toys) had in contemporary children's culture. Not surprisingly, they pay considerable attention to religious practices as central socializing forces in the lives of children in the Roman world – it is more

of Children in the Synoptic Gospels, Ann Arbor (MI) 2013. For an in-depth analysis of the research history, see R. Aasgaard, "Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues", *Familia* 33 (2006) esp. 30–6.

¹⁵ O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2005. There have appeared relevant articles esp. in Wood (above n. 14) and in M. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought*, Grand Rapids 2004. G. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition*, London – New York 2000, has a chapter on childhood. Recent collections of papers: C. Horn – R. Phenix (ed.), *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, Tübingen 2009; A. Papaconstantinou – A.-M. Talbot (eds.), *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, Washington D.C. 2007; L. Brubaker – S. Tougher, *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, Birmingham 2013; C. Laes – K. Mustakallio – V. Vuolanto (eds.), *Children and Family in Late Antiquity. Life, Death and Interaction*, Leuven 2014 and V. Vuolanto, *Children and Asceticism in Late Antiquity. Continuity, Family Dynamics and the Rise of Christianity*, Aldershot 2015.

surprising to note how seldom this theme or viewpoint has been taken up in earlier scholarship on Roman children.¹⁶

Let us return to the question of the difference Christianity made. Bakke made the point that with Christianity, children ultimately "became people", as the title of his book suggests. This rather exaggerated view of the influence of Christianity is quite common. For example, a review of the volume by Horn and Martens went so far as to claim that "Children connected with Christian homes did not face exposure, violent death, abuse, or sexual exploitation like those in the rest of the ancient world".¹⁷ However, this statement does not do justice to the actual argumentation by Horn and Martens, as they admit that the non-Christian children around them had a "very similar kind of lives" and experiences of living. They do however claim that the Early Christians "managed to transform practices and challenge whole cultures with respect to their treatment of children". While "Christianity did not discover children or childhood", what began to change was the general attitude toward children: they became "valuable in themselves", and this ultimately lent itself "to bringing about a change in practices" such as child abandonment or sexual violence. Moreover, Horn and Martens claim that children had more emphatic roles in Christian society and, more particularly, in religious praxis.

Persuasive as their arguments are for the Christian ideology and everyday life in Christian contexts, based on careful analysis of their wide knowledge of early Christian sources, I found their comparison unconvincing with regard to the change in children's everyday circumstances. The main reason for this is my scepticism about the claim that children would have been less human or less valuable in non-Christian contexts – the methodology for measuring this is quite unclear. While we can see changes in actual practices connected with the sexual

¹⁶ On the importance of religious practices in studying childhood experience, see S. Katajala-Peltomaa – V. Vuolanto, "Children and Agency: Religion as Socialisation in Late Antiquity and the Late Medieval West", *Childhood in the Past* 4:1 (2011) 79–99. For studies, see I. C. Mantle, "The roles of children in Roman religion", *Greece & Rome* 49:1 (2002) 85–106; F. Prescendi, "Children and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge", in V. Dasen – T. Späth (eds.), *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*, Oxford – New York 2010, 73–93; V. Vuolanto, "Faith and Religion", in M. Harlow – R. Laurence (eds.), *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity*, Oxford 2010, 133–51, 203–6.

¹⁷ See Bakke (above n. 15); T. M. Brenneman, Review of Horn – Martens (above n. 1), *Church History* 80 (2011), 645. For a similar view of the change caused by the rise of Christianity, see M. King, "Children in Judaism and Christianity", in P. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, London – New York 2013, 39–60.

abuse of children, and perhaps also in the parental involvement in the moral formation of the elite children (a point which needs more comparative research), what we now know about the importance of religious participation, the practice of abandonment, or violence at homes or in schooling, does not reveal any clear changes.¹⁸ Moreover, the new options Christianity offered for the small minority of children, namely 'choosing' the life of Christian monks and nuns, were alternatives not for the children but rather for the families, as it seems that children did not have much to say in choosing between marrying and celibate life.¹⁹ The basic problem seems to be, quite simply, that for the non-Christian material, the authors are not doing original research, but are dependent on earlier studies, thus lacking in these comparisons the nuanced way in which they have analysed 'their own' sources on early Christian childhood.

Some research on Roman children has claimed that a possible shift in traditional attitudes towards children happened already before the rise of Christianity, during the early Roman Empire. But even for this change the evidence is rather ambivalent, and, as other studies have pointed out, rather than seeing any diachronic change in attitudes and practices, we should be increasingly open to the inevitable variation in the perceptions of children and their living conditions due to differences in status, gender and regional differences. And, as Christian Laes has pointed out, the changes were in any case slow and gradual, and changes in ideals, discourses, mentalities and social practices took place in different ways and at different speeds.²⁰ Changes in the nature of the source material may also

¹⁸ Sexual abuse: J. Martens, "'Do Not Sexually Abuse Children': The Language of Early Christian Sexual Ethics", in C. Horn – R. Phenix (eds.), *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, Tübingen 2009, 227–54; Laes (above n. 1), 268–75; See also Bakke (above, n. 15). For a change in the parental involvement in the moral formation and education of (elite) children, see also Bakke (above n. 15), esp. 163 and Nathan (above n. 15), 159. For a sceptical view on this, see, however, V. Vuolanto, "Elite Children, Socialization and Agency in the Late Roman world", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin, with R. Bell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford – New York 2013, 582–6, 596. For religious participation, see studies mentioned above n. 15; Abandonment: see Vuolanto (above n. 8); Violence: see Laes (above, n. 1), 137–47 and Aasgaard (above n. 14), 36, pointing out that domestic discipline with regard to the physical punishment of children may even have intensified with the coming of Christianity.

¹⁹ V. Vuolanto, "Choosing Asceticism: Children and Parents, Vows and Conflicts", in C. Horn – R. Phenix (eds.), *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, Tübingen 2009, 255–91.

²⁰ Laes (above n. 1), 285–8; see also J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin, "Introduction", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin, with R. Bell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford – New York 2013, 8–9 with further bibliography. On the

be a factor here, as late antique writers – and thus mainly Christians – were more interested in the family life than were authors of the earlier period.

This is by no means meant to undermine the ground-breaking work Horn and Martens have done, and, after all, the comparison of non-Christian and Christian childhoods is a minor topic in the book. Nevertheless, I think the problem deserves a comment. It seems that we encounter a basic phenomenon here. It is extremely difficult to achieve a balanced view of both Christian and non-Christian contexts and sources in the contemporary academic world, which prizes the clear-cut expertise that produces new peer-reviewed publications as quickly as possible: academic institutional boundaries and problems of expertise leave little place for systematic, source-based comparisons across the traditional time periods and academic fields. We also find in some studies rather careless comparisons based on the juxtaposition of information drawn from different genres, sometimes blurring the analytical differences between normative, idealizing and descriptive notions of childhood in the sources.²¹

In general, early Christian studies and Roman scholarship have seldom intersected. Horn and Martens are to be congratulated for their willingness to bridge that gap, and to bring in new questions. Their book deserves to achieve the same kind of place in studies of Early Christian childhood that Beryl Rawson's book (cf. note 4) has achieved in Roman Studies. Still, studies of ancient childhood show a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration, both within scholarship on antiquity, and even more conspicuously between ancient scholars and modern social scientists and cultural scholars. Material culture and visual representations of children and childhood in antiquity have often been treated as separate fields, both from each other and from modern childhood studies. Archaeological material has been used to study childhood mortality and diseases, while some work has been undertaken on toys and dolls and items such as feeding bottles, but this work has in general not been integrated with other aspects of research.²² Moreover,

methodological problems and the 'urge' of scholars doing historical research to see change, see also M. Golden, "Change or Continuity? Children and Childhood in Hellenistic Historiography", and S. Dixon, "Continuity and change in Roman social history: retrieving 'family feeling(s)' from Roman law and literature", both in M. Golden – P. Toohey (eds.), *Inventing Ancient Culture: Historicism, Periodization and the Ancient World*, London – New York 1997, esp. 88–9 (Dixon) and 190–1 (Golden).

²¹ See e.g. King (above n. 17); Vuolanto (above n. 8) is an analysis of such problems on research on child abandonment.

²² See, however: B. Pitarakis, "The material culture of childhood in Byzantium", in A. Papaconstantinou – A.-M. Talbot (eds.), *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in*

issues such as the living environment of children, or relations between children and grandparents, or between siblings, to give some examples, have rarely been addressed. Quite surprisingly, in view of the fact that gender has been a central category for social-historical studies for several decades by now, the life of girls in the Roman world has aroused only minimal interest.²³

In studying the socialisation of children, a major approach in modern childhood studies until the 1990s, scholars of the ancient world have been primarily interested in formal education, with children seen more as passive recipients than as personally active. In particular, socialisation in everyday life, in the daily interaction of family members, has received little attention. There have been only a few studies of family strategies and children's roles in family dynamics in the ancient and early medieval periods.²⁴ Indeed, the whole issue of the agency of

Byzantium, Washington D.C. 2007, 167–251; K. Huntley, "Identifying Children's Graffiti in Roman Campania: A Developmental Psychological Approach", in J. Baird – C. Taylor (eds.), *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, New York 2010, 69–88; F. Dolansky, "Playing with Gender: Girls, Dolls, and Adult Ideals in the Roman World", *Classical Antiquity* 31 (2012) 256–92; M. Harlow, "Toys, Dolls and the Material Culture of Childhood", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin, with R. Bell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford – New York 2013, 322–40, and the work done by Véronique Dasen, esp. with V. Dasen (ed.), *Naissance et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité. Actes du colloque de Fribourg, 28 novembre-1er décembre 2001*, Fribourg 2004.

²³ On girls, see now S. Moraw – A. Kieburg (eds.), *Mädchen im Altertum / Girls in Antiquity*, Münster 2014, with its "Introduction" by Susanne Moraw (esp. page 1); Dolansky (above, n. 22). See also the studies mentioned above in n. 12: the father-son relation has not aroused much interest, but the father-daughter relationship has been studied even less.

²⁴ For studies on family dynamics and childhood socialization in every day life, see the following: K. Bradley, "The Nurse and the Child at Rome. Duty, Affect and Socialisation", *Thamyris* 1 (1994) 137–56; Rawson 2003 (above n. 4), 153–7 and 269–80; M. Harlow – R. Laurence, *Growing up and Growing old in Ancient Rome. A Life Course Approach*, London – New York 2012, 34–53; Prescendi (above n. 15); A.-C. Harders, "Roman Patchwork Families: Surrogate Parenting, Socialization, and the Shaping of Tradition", in V. Dasen and T. Späth (eds.), *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*, Oxford 2010, 49–72; Horn – Martens (above n. 1), 268–72, 291–300; J. McWilliam, "The Socialization of Roman Children", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin, with R. Bell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford – New York 2013, 264–85; Vuolanto 2013 (above n. 18); Despite the title, T. Morgan, "Ethos: The socialization of children in education and beyond", in B. Rawson (ed.), *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Oxford 2011, 504–20, concentrates on schooling. See further Katajala-Peltomaa – Vuolanto (above n. 15), esp. 82–5 for research on socialisation of ancient and medieval children. For a more general view on strengths and problems of approaching the history of children from the viewpoint of socialization, see G. Lillehammer, "Introduction to Socialisation. Recent Research on

children and the experience of childhood has been a marginal viewpoint, and the attempt has seldom been made to explicitly take the children's perspective and ask what children actually did in their everyday life, how they experienced their physical and social environments, and what children's culture was like.²⁵

Outsiders Within? Childhood experience and agency

Christian Laes' book aims at tracking both elite perceptions of childhood and children's experiences from the second century BCE to the fourth century CE in the context of the Roman world. The field is wide, but Laes has decided to concentrate on certain themes, without aiming at covering in a similar depth all aspects of Roman childhood. He bases his study on a wide array of sources, especially literary and epigraphical sources.²⁶ This is a clear strength of the book, and the argument is always easy to follow. Even if his way of doing research is certainly quite traditional – text and argument are directed by an impressive range of sources rather than by theories – he is profoundly familiar with the research history and different methodologies. Therefore, his interpretations of sources are reliable and to the point, and the relevance of his arguments is easy to contextualize.

Laes starts by introducing the demographic regime: a young population with a high risk of death, and the living environment of the childhood experience, ending with an interesting discussion of "the psychosocial reality of family life in ancient Rome"; after he has established this basis, his discussion roughly follows the course of life: first from birth to the age of seven, and then from seven to fifteen. These chapters are followed by innovative discussions of important but often neglected topics of child work and sexuality. This structure is somewhat confusing, as the author does not give any clear justification of why these par-

Childhood and Children in the Past", in G. Lillehammer (ed.), *Socialisation. Recent Research on Childhood and Children in the Past*, Stavanger 2010, 10–15.

²⁵ On agency and children's culture, see especially Rawson 2003 (above n. 4), 269–80; R. Aasgaard, "Uncovering Children's Culture in Late Antiquity: The Testimony of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas", in C. Horn – R. Phenix (eds.), *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, Tübingen 2009, 1–27; Huntley (above n. 22); Dolansky (above n. 22); Vuolanto (above n. 24); A. Pudsey, "Children's Cultures in Roman Egypt", in L. Grig (ed.), *Popular Culture in the Roman World*, Cambridge, forthcoming.

²⁶ This is a clear point of departure from Rawson's book (above n. 4), which concentrates on Roman Italy from the early first century BCE to the late second century CE, and bases its arguments especially on legal and iconographical material together with the literary sources.

ticular aspects of childhood experience have been worthy of attention, rather than others, such as the significance of leisure in the lives of children (that is, playing and toys), or of urban entertainment like *ludi* or baths – and there is no discussion of the children in the context of religious practices, or private and public festivals.

Nevertheless, this structure is also indicative of the rapid change in scholarship that took place during the almost ten-year-phase in which this book was in the making: childhood history concentrating on infancy, schooling and paedophilia/pederasty represent here the traditional topics, while demography, labour, slaves and sexuality more generally represent new perspectives. This, of course, does not mean that the 'older' topics should have been given less space. On the contrary: the chapter on paedophilia and pederasty offers the most up-to date, balanced and culturally sensitive discussion of these phenomena.

But were children marginalized or "outsiders within", as Laes claims? The answer to this depends on how we define the concepts and measure the results of source analysis.²⁷ True, children in the Roman world were often seen as inferior (likened to slaves), on a low position in the hierarchy and on the margins of the civilized society, needing to be socialized.²⁸ However, if we choose other criteria for measurement, children were "never marginal beings", as Keith Bradley claims: the Roman lawgivers, philosophers, letter writers, later ecclesiastical notables, and ordinary commemorators on tombstones wrote, commented, rejoiced and mourned over the lives and deaths of children on an unprecedented scale, reflecting their central place in the lives of adult Roman people. Moreover, as Laes himself states in his conclusions, children were central to the expectations and hopes of their parents and their wider kin, and their worlds were in many ways less separate from the adult spheres of life (in work, education and sexuality) than today.²⁹ Here, as invariably in research, the way one defines and nuances the concepts is of central relevance to the conclusions.

Laes' book is also to be congratulated for its concern for including girls and, more significantly, children below the elite in discussions of Roman childhood, and for connecting the analysis to the study of children's emotions and childhood experience. He also points out the culturally dependent notions of childhood and definitions of a child – the notion of age plays a role here, but status- and gender-

²⁷ See also Aasgaard (above n. 14), 31.

²⁸ Laes (above n. 1), 282–4.

²⁹ K. Bradley, "Images of Childhood in Classical Antiquity", in P. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, London – New York 2013, 34; Laes (above n. 1), 284–5 with e.g. Rawson 2003 (above n. 4) and Vuolanto (above n. 15), 31–40, 192–202.

based experiences and individual physical development were more important. Laes is a pathfinder in integrating lower class children and special groups into the research of Roman childhood, as can be seen in his studies on *delicia* children, child work and disabled children in antiquity.³⁰

Concluding remarks

In recent studies of modern childhood, the main perspective has shifted from childhood socialization to agency-based theories; the claim is made that children have an active role in their growing and learning processes, transforming and renewing the cultural heritage they were born into. Thus, childhood, children's social relationships and children's culture are worthy of study in their own right, not because children will become adults some day.³¹ All these volumes under review have, from their own standpoints, picked up this idea, and developed it in new directions. Laes' book concentrates on some neglected themes from children's lives and experiences; Hübner and Ratzan's volume separates the study of children from its traditional concentration on the mother-father-child triad; and Horn and Marten's monograph is strong in its discussion of children's activities (such as play and religious participation), and they discuss repeatedly the links between ideology, attitudes and social reality.

Hopefully, these volumes will be only the beginning of a new generation of studies of ancient families and children, which will take seriously the need to be aware of, and explicitly engage with, differences in status, gender, age, birth order and health of the children, with variations in religious beliefs and practices, regional and ethnic circumstances, and with changing family structures. We need

³⁰ C. Laes, "Desperately Different? *Delicia* Children in the Roman Household", in D. Balch – C. Osiek, *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge 2003, 298–324; C. Laes, "Child Slaves at Work in Roman Antiquity", *Ancient Society* 38 (2008) 235–83; C. Laes, "Learning from Silence: Disabled Children in Roman Antiquity", *Arctos* 42 (2008) 85–122; C. Laes, "Raising a Disabled Child", in J. Evans Grubbs – T. Parkin, with R. Bell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, Oxford – New York 2013, 125–46.

³¹ A. James – A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* 1997, 7–32. See also P. Ryan, "How New is the 'New' Social Study of Childhood?: The Myth of a Paradigm Shift", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38:4 (2008) 555–6; A. James, *Constructing Childhood. Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, Houndmills 2004, 23–7, 37–40.

new work that carefully takes into account the variation both in childhood experience and in perceptions of childhood, and more directly engages with modern childhood studies. To study ancient children – not merely adult views about childhood – we should view childhood too as a performative phase of life: childhood and 'the child' should be approached as socially constructed and culturally conditioned notions. Children become children in certain cultural contexts by their own repeated acts which depend on social conventions. Therefore, a potentially fruitful further research theme, scarcely touched upon in earlier studies (even in the books under review here), would be the actual living experiences of ancient children, that is, their social and material living environment (e.g. housing and family structure), the space in which they spent their time (e.g. streets and fields), activities in which they spent their energy (e.g. play and work), and people with whom they socialized (e.g. neighbours and relatives).³²

The study of childhood experiences and agency of children would be highly relevant to understanding the Roman world as a whole. After all, Roman society was a society of young people: one-third of the population was younger than fifteen years of age. Where are they, how did they interact with the rest of society, what was their own culture like? By emphasising the viewpoints of childhood experience and children's agency – that is, asking questions such as what children do, under which circumstances, and with whom – the focus of research would shift from the history of childhood towards the history of children, that is, to children's own worlds.

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³² For this kind of approach, see, e.g. A. Pudsey, "Housing and Community: Structures in Kinship and Housing in Roman Tebtynis", in J. Baird – A. Pudsey (eds.), *Between Words and Walls. Material and Textual Approaches to Housing in the Greco-Roman Worlds* (under review). See also the project 'Tiny voices from the Past: New Perspectives on Childhood in Early Europe' (University of Oslo / Norwegian Research Council), which organized a workshop in May 2014 on *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman World*, concentrating on childhood experiences, environments and agency; there is also a volume in preparation (Project internet pages: <http://www.hf.uio.no/ifikk/english/research/projects/childhood/>; a 'report' from the workshop here: <http://pauidesblog.wordpress.com/2014/08/14/children-and-everyday-life-in-the-roman-world-in-oslo/>).