

Christian Laes, *Children in the Roman empire: Outsiders Within*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xv, 334. \$105.00. ISBN 9780521897464.

Reviews were enthusiastic for the earlier version of this book, published in Dutch as *Kindereen bij de Romeinen: Zes Eeuwen Dagelijks Leven* (Davidsfonds, 2006). One reviewer hoped for “a speedy translation into English” (Verstraete *BMCR* 2006.08.28), though in the end five years would have to elapse. It was worth the wait for this expanded and updated version in an English translation by the author. L. is fully engaged with contemporary debates on the study of the Roman family. Ariès’ “discovery” of childhood and DeMause’s psychohistory are banished in favor of the greater methodological sophistication exemplified by Bradley, Dixon, and Rawson. The book’s collection of epigraphic and papyrological evidence enables it to present more completely than earlier studies what is possible to know about the lives of non-elite Roman children, who are otherwise almost invisible in the literary sources.

L.’s study appears amid a renewed interest in the ancient lifecycle in general and ancient childhood in particular, as represented by books such as Michele George’s *The Roman Family in the Empire* (Oxford, 2005), Cohen and Rutter’s *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy* (Princeton, 2007), Huebner and Ratzan’s *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), and Dasen and Späth’s *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture* (Oxford, 2011). The subtitle “outsiders within,” a phrase coined by Holt Parker (1998), refers to the paradoxical social location of the elite Roman boy. Like slaves and most Roman women, Roman children (initially) did not speak for themselves and possessed little agency. But elite Roman boys eventually grew up to become insiders, and thus were objects of parental expectation—unlike the members of these other two categories, who remained perpetually on the outside. (W.M. Bloomer’s recently appearing *The School of Rome: Latin Studies and the Origins of Liberal Education* (Berkeley, 2011) provides a detailed and sophisticated study of the anxieties surrounding this socialization process.) A slogan reiterated frequently throughout the book instructs that childhood is a “social rather than a psychological category”. Perceptions of children are driven not by their chronological ages but by the social demands that they can fulfill. Thus young children are attested as serving nominally as town councillors, for example, in order to begin fulfilling their wealthy parents’ need for appropriately socialized successors. The poor, meanwhile, need working hands, and so involve their children in manual labor or care for younger siblings as soon as physically possible.

L. surveys an extensive range of topics. Chapter 2, on demography and ecology, locates a thoroughly unsentimentalized Roman child in the bleak demographic regime made familiar from the studies of Hopkins, Saller, Parkin, and Scheidel. Roman family life is best characterized by high levels of infant mortality, low life expectancy, and poor health outcomes. By the time Roman children reached maturity, they would have lost many of their relatives. Privacy was largely absent inside the house; urban life featured poor sanitation, malnutrition, outbreaks of famine and disease, and frequent episodes of violence. Contemporary Western scholars must not be misled by the example of their

own healthy, lengthy, and largely private lives. As Hopkins taught, the best comparanda are to be sought in the least-developed areas of the contemporary world.

Chapter 3 on early childhood examines ancient perceptions of the stages of life, caregivers, and the reality of high infant and childhood mortality. L. correctly rejects as extreme the traditional hypotheses of indifference to children's survival, even as he demonstrates that the Romans neither divided early childhood into the modern series of brief stages (infant, toddler, preschooler, etc.) nor were particularly sentimental about their children's development. This chapter includes, however, one of the book's occasional instances of diffuseness: the twenty-page section detailing the different ancient schemata for the stages of life could have been considerably compressed. Chapters 4 and 5 send the Roman child to school and to work. L. examines the roles of the *paedagogus*, *ludimagister*, and *grammaticus*, as well as the ambiguous social positioning of corporal punishment, visited upon the sons of the elite yet elsewhere viewed as fit only for slaves. The study of children at work offers particularly fine opportunities to discover the nonelite Roman child. Far from the elite household, children are found at work on *latifundia*, in mines, as apprentices to weavers, and as camp followers of relatives serving in garrisons. A series of comparisons to the realities of children's labor in the contemporary developing world helps to contextualize the calculations made by Roman parents, fosterers, and owners as they set children to work.

Chapter 6 examines paedophilia and pederasty, topics not typically discussed at length in Roman family books. Increased sensitivity to Roman literary conventions and communicative situations might have resulted in somewhat different framing of the evidence on these issues. The chapter begins with an effort to characterize the relationship between the wealthy Atedius Melior and his young freedman Glaucias, as presented in Statius *Silvae* 2.1. Was this relationship abusive? Negative evidence cannot help to determine the issue: the observation that there are “no references whatsoever to sexual abuse, let alone penetration” (230) in the poem, while indisputable, does not add to our knowledge about the actual practices of Statius's contemporaries. The genre (epicedium) and occasion (consolation) preclude making such references—even before we take into account this poet's general circumspection in referring to sexual matters. Statius's poem may indeed appear to “lay the initiative with Glaucias” (226), but that is part of its encomiastic fiction. The ultimate initiative for the composition of *Silvae* 2.1 came from the patron Melior, not from his dead freedman. The subsequent discussion of Statius's encomium of Domitian's eunuch Earinus (*Silvae* 3.4) risks misleading the reader unfamiliar with the poem and its communicative situation. L. sandwiches Newlands' sensible interpretation (Earinus as symbol of Domitian's absolute mastery and notional divinity) between the unacceptably extreme readings of Garthwaite (unhappy poet, forced to pander to Domitian, avenging himself with veiled criticism) and Vout (Earinus as symbol for the poet's anxieties about prostituting himself). Such discomfort with the conventions of panegyric and patronage, though hardly unique among readers of Roman imperial literature, blocks us from seeing Earinus, an outsider within the imperial court, as clearly as we otherwise might. The chapter also offers some observations on the

impact of Christianity on Roman paedophilia, but, as L. observes, such a topic clearly requires a separate booklength study.

Children in the Roman Empire deserves a wide readership. It provides a valuable synthesis for Roman social historians, and may also be appropriate for advanced undergraduates or beginning graduate students. L. writes in a clear and engaging style, explains jargon carefully, and introduces each new topic with a review of relevant social history. The chapter on child labor, which draws on the author's extensive previous studies of nonliterary evidence, is one of the book's major contributions. L. observes that the task of writing a comprehensive social history of Roman childhood requires a scholar to be a "jack-of-all-trades" (289), including (according to L.'s list) anthropologist, philosopher, psychologist, and teacher. This fine book demonstrates his mastery both of these trades and many others.

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