

Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan, eds., *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-521-49050-4. Pp. xvi + 333. \$107.

In the ancient world growing up without a father was common. Today the absence of fathers is more typically a consequence of divorce or separation. In ancient times it was a consequence primarily of the late age of marriage for men and high mortality rates. In their introductory overview Sabine Hübner and David Ratzan stress that “ancient fatherlessness was rooted in paternal death” (9). Supplementing the effects of death were legal restrictions about legitimate children. Daniel Ogden discusses the tendency in classical Greek society to classify bastards, children born outside marriage, as children without fathers. Myrto Malouta discusses the men (and some women) in second- and third-century Roman Egypt who could not claim legal paternity and hence were not allowed to identify themselves with a patronymic. As a result of the combination of mortality and legal constraints, a high percentage of children in the ancient world grew up without their fathers.

The chapters in this volume are uniformly excellent. Some propose general models or establish general templates. Walter Scheidel discusses the implications of a computer simulation of a Roman kinship universe. This simulation was based on assumptions about probable life expectancy and about the mean ages of first marriage for men and women. Since mortality levels were high and the mean age of first marriage for non-elite men was late, perhaps at age thirty, up to one-third of children would have lost their fathers by age fifteen, and over half by age twenty-five. Mark Golden discusses the same outcomes, but replaces the abstract simulation with anecdotes collected from a variety of classical texts. Using literary texts offers the possibility of imagining the emotional aspects of the “absent father syndrome.” It also highlights the deployment of surrogates, such as tutors and guardians, uncles and older brothers, or stepfathers. In Roman society, which was familiar with deputized magistrates such as proconsuls, such replacement fathers might be classified as “proparents” (59). Marcus Sigismund likewise collects passages from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and other Christian texts. Both Jews and Christians eventually developed welfare systems that included care for fatherless children. Both also provided a theological rationale for such welfare. “Just as the Old Testament understands God as the protector of the orphans, so the New Testament sees Christ as coming for all those who have been abandoned” (98–99). In contrast, in his discussion of Christian ideals and the obligations of stepfathers Geoffrey Nathan argues that “the role of Christianity rested only incidentally upon these responsibilities” (291).

The companion result of many young fatherless children was many widows. Sabine Hübner emphasizes that remarriage was not an easy option. A poor widow often needed the financial support of a new husband for her children from a previous marriage, while a wealthy widow had to protect her children’s patrimony from the claims of a stepfather: “living in such a patchwork family was difficult for all involved” (80).

In literature another companion result was the theme of searching for a substitute father. One subtext of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was abandoned sons. According to Louise Pratt, Diomedes was “a psychologically plausible example of a fatherless son” (150). With no recollection of his father, he did not feel any Oedipal impulse to surpass his father. But the price he paid was a stunted emotional life, with no empathy or depth of human understanding. Georg Wöhrle emphasizes the precarious situation of children without fathers. Telemachus of course was the classic paradigm of a fatherless son, uncertain of his future. The most wrenching articulation of this uncertainty came from Andromache, fearing for herself and their son as her husband Hector prepared to face his certain destiny at Troy. Fatherless daughters might have similar regrets. As examples of a daughter’s perspective on the difficulties of growing up without a father, Judith Hallett discusses Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and the poet Sulpicia.

Some of the chapters attempt to reconstruct the feelings of Roman notables. According to Sabine Müller, in his autobiographical commentaries Sulla attributed no significance to his father or to an important patron like Marius. He instead wanted to represent himself as “a completely self-made man, protected by divine power” (203). Augustus acted as a surrogate father for his nephew, grandchildren, and step-sons, including the children of his rival Marcus Antonius, his sister Octavia, his daughter Julia, and his wife Livia. His concern was not entirely altruistic, however. According to Ann-Cathrin Harders, Augustus “actually perverted the values connected with the avuncular role by completely subordinating them to his personal interests” (240). Pliny the Younger had benefitted from the support of older mentors, including his uncle Pliny the Elder. As a result, Neil Bernstein emphasizes that he in turn “attempts to serve as a patron, political supporter, and instructive model to people in the younger generation” (251). Because of economic disruption, fatherless sons might find it difficult to obtain an education. According to Raffaella Cribiore, “the crucial factors that helped a young man go to and stay in school were family support, ability to pay for costly studies, lack of urgent need to earn a living, and personal motivation and talent” (271).

The chapters in this book represent a welcome attempt to supplement demographic studies of ancient families with investigations of specific situations involving historical actors and literary characters. During recent decades demographic studies have flourished. By applying the model life tables developed by modern demographers to focused collections of ancient data, these studies have constructed models of ancient families at particular moments. The next step has always been to use these models for the interpretation of specific case studies. Studies of ancient families that rely on demography, or likewise on Roman law codes, tend toward blanket pronouncements and comprehensive generalizations. They also tend to minimize personal feelings. In contrast, studies based on literary texts are more successful at highlighting deep emotions. The chapters in this book are very effective reminders of the lasting emotional distress of growing up without a father. They also make us wish for a complementary volume about growing up *with* a father in ancient society. The presence of fathers (and

sometimes grandfathers) who lingered on into old age could be just as psychologically disruptive for their children.

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