

## Looking for Non-Elite Girls in the Roman Empire

Recent studies of Roman girlhood have offered a fresh look at the evidence for this often-overlooked demographic group. These studies of girlhood concentrate on the evidence for girls from aristocratic families, for whom the evidence is most plentiful. In this paper, I offer suggestions for further research in this area, outlining the current state of the scholarship in this area of Roman social history and potential new lines of inquiry that may allow a better understanding of girls up and down the social ladder.

For example, among recent studies, a survey of funerary monuments has drawn attention to the habit among some Roman imperial families of commemorating daughters who died before marriage not only for their own special attributes as individuals but also for their resemblance to the virgin goddess Diana (D'Ambra). As for those girls who did make the transition to marriage, a recent book has demonstrated the importance of Roman wedding ritual for this social transition, as aristocratic families in particular were eager to broadcast to a public audience the favorable marriage matches of their daughters (Hirsch 2006). Still another study has investigated how Roman imperial medical, legal and literary authors took varying, and sometime divergent, views on the issues surrounding girlhood, including the marriage and childbearing of teenage girls (Caldwell 2014).

These studies acknowledge that the transition to marriage and childbearing for girls from families with fewer financial and social resources would, in all likelihood, have been considerably different from that of elite girls. The marriage age of girls from less wealthy families, for example, was often later (Shaw 1987). Studies that restrict their scope to elite families, then, provide an incomplete picture of the lived experience of girls in the Roman world.

Uncovering the evidence for non-elite families and their daughters is notoriously challenging. However, taking into account some of the kinds of textual materials that can illuminate this distinctive population group—such as papyri (Rowlandson 1998) and sub-literary texts such as proverbs that circulated widely in Roman society (Morgan 2007)—is, as this paper will show, an advisable next step in the research process for those studying girlhood in the Roman world.

### Bibliography

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