

BOOK REVIEW

The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World. Edited by JUDITH EVANS GRUBBS AND TIM PARKIN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xxiii + 690. Hardcover, \$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-978154-6.

Writing a handbook is never an easy task, since such a book seeks simultaneously to provide an overview of the subject and research to date that is something of an introduction to the field and also to make a worthy contribution to that field and stimulate further research. With a topic as vast as “childhood and education”, either of which individually would provide more than enough material for a handbook, and with the huge geographical and temporal range (it includes material from (600 BCE–600 CE) covered by the term “classical world”, this job is made even harder.

Yet the authors of this collection have managed admirably to produce a volume that to a large extent, meets these requirements, producing a work that is cohesive and well-structured, although the emphasis is definitely far more on childhood than on education. This may be seen at a glance from the titles of the six sections into which the book is divided, only one of which refers to education: “Gestation, Birth, Disease, and Death”, “Children and Childhood in Ancient Greece”, “Children and Childhood in Ancient Rome”, “Education and Educational Philosophy in the Classical world”, “Children in the Eastern Mediterranean”, and “Late Antiquity and Early Christianity”. Nevertheless, despite this uneven weighting, the book provides a comprehensive treatment of the child in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, including Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. Space prevents a detailed analysis here of each chapter, but I list here some personal highlights. All the papers are worth reading, however, and other readers will find their own favourites according to their interests.

The breadth of the book allows for some perspectives that have not generally been studied, but which add fascinating insights. Hagith Sivan’s “Pictorial *Paideia*: Children in the Synagogue”, 532–555, is an illuminating discussion of how physical depictions in six ancient synagogues portrayed children and reinforced messages of obedience. Similarly, Sabine R. Huebner’s consideration of adoption as opposed to fosterage in the ancient eastern Mediterranean focuses on the Greek east, an area in which this subject has generally been less studied.

The chapters on late antiquity and Christianity provide a welcome addition not always found in such works, while the Hellenistic period also features, albeit rather less well-represented in that it is the central subject of only three of the thirty papers (Maria A. Liston and Susan I. Rotroff, 'Babies in the well: archaeological evidence for newborn disposal in Hellenistic Greece' 62–82; Eric Casey, "Educating the Youth: The Athenian Ephebeia in the Early Hellenistic Era" 418–443; Maryline Parca, "Children in Ptolemaic Egypt: What the Papyri say" 465–483).

Some chapters stand out as having particular resonance for contemporary research; Christian Laes' "Raising a Disabled Child", 125–144, is a fascinating consideration of how the ancient world viewed a number of different disabilities, both physical and mental, and how attitudes towards these were conditioned by social class and practical needs. Two papers focus on gender, Lesley A. Beaumont's "Shifting Gender: Age and Social Status as Modifiers of Childhood Gender in Ancient Athens" 195–206, and Matthew P.J. Dillon's "Engendering the Scroll: Girls and Women's Literacy in Classical Greece", 396–417. The former considers the shifting gender profile of both boys and girls in fifth century Athens in terms of the early sexualisation that was part of the gender process, while the latter analyses the evidence from vase paintings and literature to conclude that upper class girls and women read and wrote in classical Athens at least, while Spartan women, often believed to have been educated, did not.

In the modern world where traditional family structure has given way to new formats in recent decades, also instructive is April Pudsey's chapter on "Children in Roman Egypt", 484–509, which analyzes papyrological source to demonstrate a family structure that was extremely wide, often including large numbers of brothers, sisters and cousins of different ages, as well as aunts, uncles and grandparents, any or all of whom might be involved in childcare.

Overall the book is well-produced, and includes a large number of (black-and-white) illustrations that are in some cases (i.e. Sivan's chapter) invaluable in understanding the arguments being made. There were some typographical errors, which is disappointing in a volume of this quality and price range, but none that would cause confusion, and the work will be an invaluable and welcome addition to both undergraduates and scholars interested in the history of childhood in the ancient world.

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