

BOOK REVIEW

Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity. By LAUREN CALDWELL. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. vi + 197. Hardcover, \$95.00. ISBN 978-1-107-04100-4.

Roman *Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity* by Lauren Caldwell provides the first full-length treatment of the pivotal transition in an elite Roman girl's life: that from virgin to bride. Drawing on a masterful array of sources both literary and material, Caldwell seeks to spur discussion on what the driving forces behind early marriage and childbearing among the Roman elite really were. Caldwell finds an answer to her inquiries by first questioning the traditional notion that early marriage was practiced in order to maximize fertility. In place of such quantitative explanations, Caldwell explores the "social dimensions" of Roman demography and analyzes the way in which cultural norms actually had more of a bearing on reproductive practices than previously thought (7).

In Chapter One, Caldwell begins by arguing that the inculcation of Roman girls in proper feminine virtue was a concern of the entire society and could occur on two fronts: formal education and socialization through exempla. Drawing on a variety of texts, Caldwell shows that not only was formal education in literature and philosophy possible for elite girls, but also desirable because it exposed them to examples of proper feminine behavior. However, Caldwell also presents evidence of male anxieties over the possibility that girls could be over-educated and stray from the gender normative roles. In order to address the potential for a girl performing too much of a male role and trading *pudor* for *andreia*, Caldwell argues that the Romans turned to informal educational media such as exempla. Drawing from Livy's story of Cloelia, Caldwell shows how such tales could act to reinforce proper feminine use of masculine virtues for the purpose of protecting virginity and modesty.

In Chapter Two, Caldwell uses Roman *controversiae* to examine the intersection between law and custom regarding the protection of virginity and the appropriate consequences when a maiden's virginity was lost. In particular, Caldwell points out a struggle to "balance traditional notions about the family's role in

preserving social order with the increasingly prominent institution of the law, which began to overtake that role” (46). In particular, Caldwell shows that the question most often discussed by Roman authors was: who would dole out consequences: the *paterfamilias* or the state?

In Chapter Three, Caldwell moves from rhetoric and education to medical advice. Drawing from Rufus’s *Regimen for Young Girls* and Soranus’ *Gynecology*, Caldwell considers the relationship between medical advice regarding the health of young girls and the social pressures of early marriage. In the face of cultural norms that prescribed the marriage of a girl at the age of twelve and the nearly immediate consummation of the new marriage, both Rufus and Soranus observe that pregnancy at too early of an age negatively affects a girl’s health, and Rufus recommends that the interval between puberty and marriage be lengthened by four years. Both of these authors thus seem to contradict social norms and practices.

In Chapter Four, Caldwell takes up the question of the extent to which elite Romans heeded the cautionary advice of physicians such as Rufus and Soranus by examining juristic writings on the subject of marriage and virginity. In particular, Caldwell argues that the “light regulation of marriage by the law—minimum age, consent to marriage, and ceremony—was designed to leave families, primarily fathers, much freedom to propel girls into marriage at the time and in the way they saw fit” (13). Because of the liberty granted them by law, *paterfamilias* were free to enter their daughters into marriage under the nominal legal limit of twelve, as evidenced by the legal status of *quasi uxor* in which an underage girl is led into the home of her husband. Such instances, Caldwell argues, lead one to believe that, despite the medical advice of physicians, social pressures among the Roman elite were significant enough to cause the law to yield.

In Chapter Five, Caldwell focuses her attention on the transitional moment that leads to all of the discussions handled in the previous four chapters: the act of marriage and a girl’s transition from virgin to bride. Drawing mainly on depictions of the marriage ritual of *deductio* in Catullus 61 and 62, Caldwell argues that the marriage ritual “introduced the bride and groom to the community’s expectation for their behavior” (13). For girls, this meant the release of their highly valued virginity in return for the promise of their closely controlled sexuality, which was only to be used for fertility. Underpinning all of this is the new bride’s lack of agency, as Caldwell shows that her resistance to the marriage and her ultimate powerlessness in the process is emphasized in the literature.

Overall, *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity* offers an excellent and sustained discussion of the socio-cultural ramifications of the Roman practice of early marriage. Caldwell makes use of an impressive number and variety of sources both literary and material, but does not forget to include adequate introduction to all of them, especially the lesser known juristic and medical texts. This, perhaps, is the most outstanding feature of this book. The clarity with which Caldwell writes and lays out her arguments make this book useful and interesting not only to scholars of Roman gender and sexuality but also to undergraduates getting into the topic for the first time. A truly remarkable book that deserves to be widely-read.

BARTOLO NATOLI

Randolph-Macon College, bartolonatoli@rmc.edu