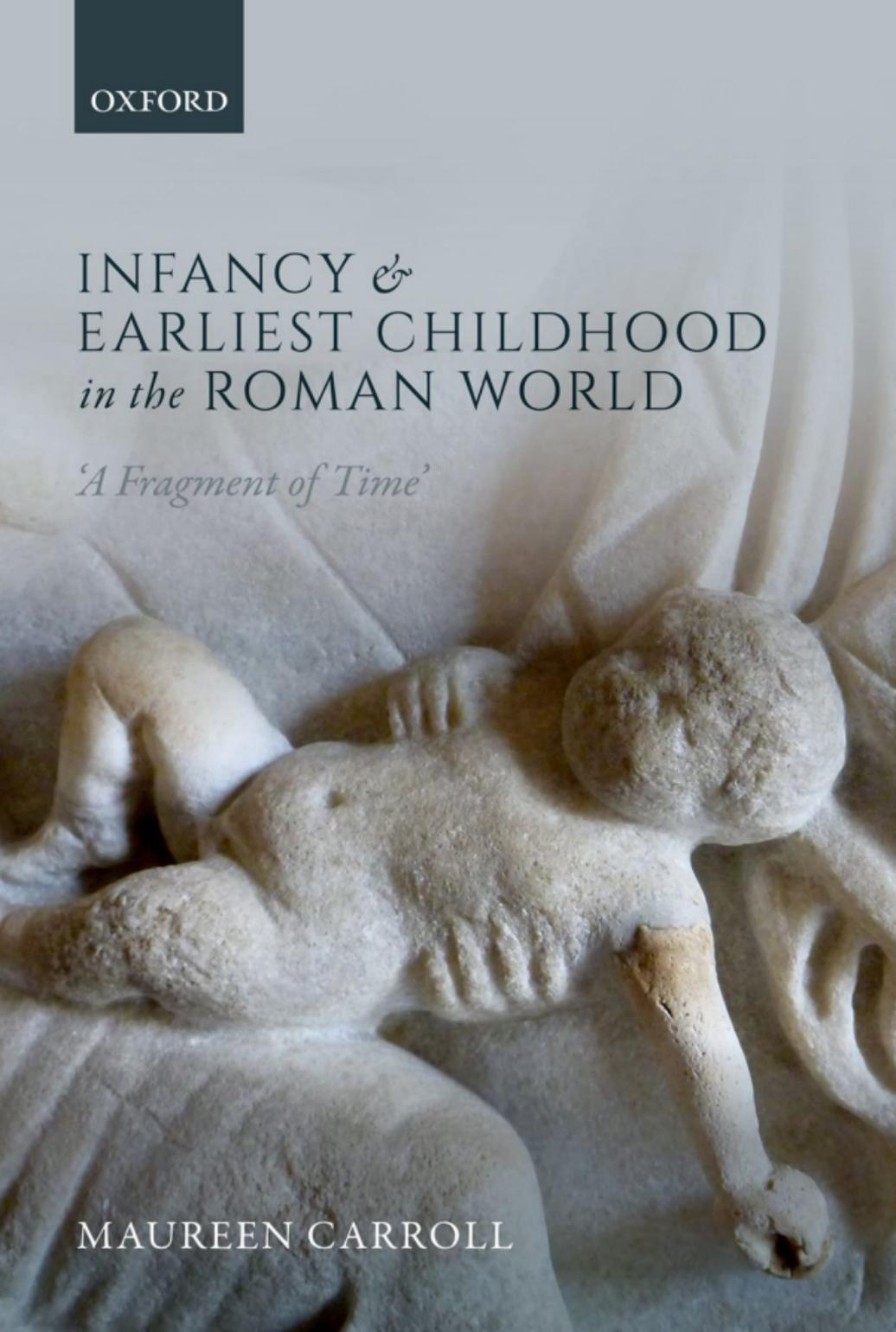


OXFORD

INFANCY &
EARLIEST CHILDHOOD
in the ROMAN WORLD

'A Fragment of Time'

MAUREEN CARROLL



INFANCY AND EARLIEST CHILDHOOD
IN THE ROMAN WORLD

Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World

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MAUREEN CARROLL

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The research for this book developed out of my earlier work on infant death and burial in Roman Italy, and it expands on that foundation to explore a range of aspects of life and death in earliest childhood across the empire and over several centuries. The book isolates the age group of the under one-year-olds to gain insight into the developing personhood and social role of children in this stage of life in the Roman world. It integrates archaeological evidence, material culture, and imagery with social and cultural history to reach a more nuanced and critical understanding of the historical and cultural influences on the relationships between infants, their families, and the societies in which they lived.

During the writing of this book I have enjoyed the support of various organizations and individuals, and it is my pleasure to acknowledge them here. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust and the Pamela Staunton Bequest for financial support which allowed me to travel, collect data, and meet the costs of procuring images for this book. I have benefited greatly from using the excellent research facilities at the British School at Rome, the Römisch-Germanische Kommission in Frankfurt, and the Institute for Classical Studies in London. I am grateful also to the University of Sheffield for two periods of study leave. I would like to thank Rebecca Gowland for reading and commenting on the bioarchaeological part of my draft manuscript. OUP's reviewers also made helpful comments on my book proposal, and the feedback of the manuscript reviewer was most encouraging.

I am grateful to various museums and institutions for facilitating my data collection, supplying photos, and granting permission to reproduce images of artefacts and monuments. These include the Allard Pearson Museum (Amsterdam); Augusta Raurica (Augst); the Museo Nazionale Romano, the Museo dell'Ara Pacis, the Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, and the Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali (Rome); The British School at Rome; the Ormož Regional Museum (Ptuj); the Landesmuseum Mainz; the Hungarian National Museum (Budapest); the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung (Berlin); the Musée Carnavalet (Paris); the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York); the Harvard Art Museums (Boston); the Dakhleh Oasis Project; The British Museum and the Science Museum (London); the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge); York Museums Trust; the Manchester Museum; the Colchester Archaeological Trust; and Pre-Construct Archaeology. Photos also were provided by the Rheinisches Bildarchiv in Cologne, the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Rome, the image library of *ubi erat lupa*, and Agence Roger Viollet, Paris.

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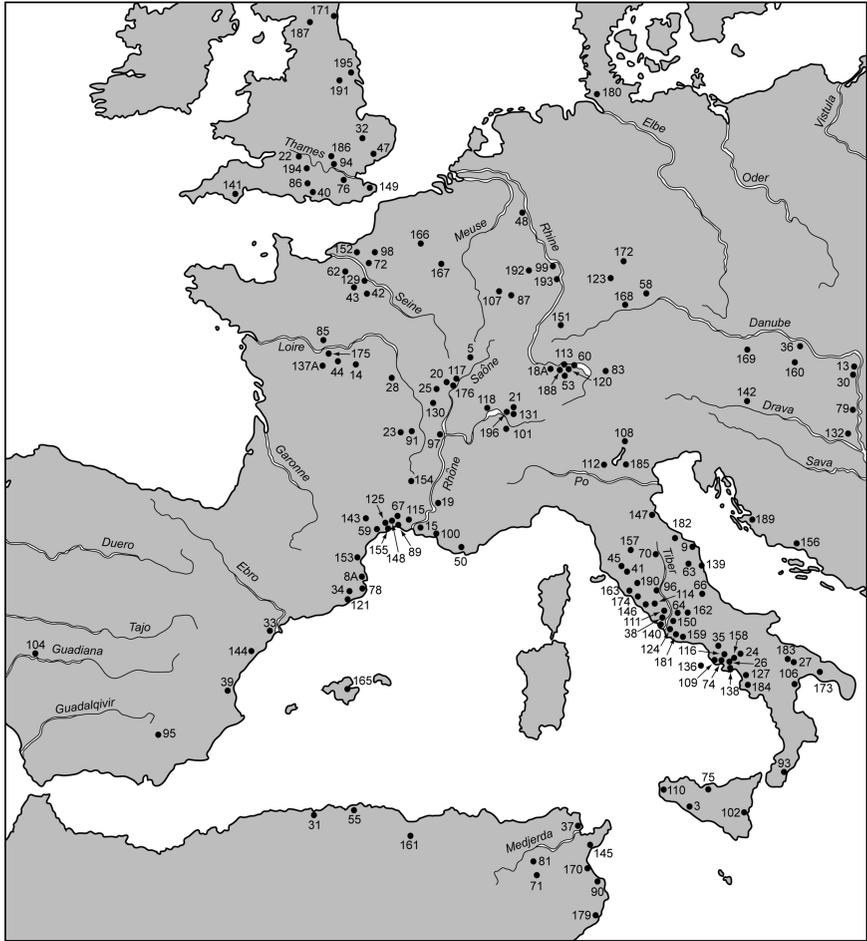
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The publisher and the author apologize for any errors or omissions in the permissions and acknowledgements for the above illustrations. If contacted they will be pleased to rectify these at the earliest opportunity.

List of Abbreviations

- AE* *L'Année Épigraphique*.
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1863–.
- Digest* Watson, A. (1985), *The Digest of Justinian*, Vols. 1–2. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- FIRA 2* Riccobono, S., Raviera, G., Ferrini, C., Furlani, J., and Arangio-Ruiz, V. (1940), *Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiustiniani*. Florence: Barbera.
- ICUR* *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*. Rome: Ex Officina Libraria Pontificia, 1922–92.
- IG* *Inscriptiones Graecae*. Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1924–.
- ILS* Dessau, H. (1892–2016), *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin: Weidmann.
- RIC* *Roman Imperial Coinage*. London: Spink, 1923–94.
- RIU* *Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns*. Amsterdam and Bonn: Habelt, 1972–2001.



Map 1. Sites in Italy and the western Roman provinces, including pre-Roman sites discussed in the text.

Drawing: Irene de Luis.

3. Agrigento	60. Eschenz	116. Nola	166. Soissons
5. Alesia	62. Évreux	117. Nuits-Saint-Georges	167. Sommesous
8A. Ampurias (Empúries)	63. Ficana	118. Nyon	168. Sontheim
9. Ancona	64. Fidene	120. Oberwinterthur	169. Sopron
13. Aquincum	66. Fossa	121. Olèrdola	170. Sousse
14. Argenton	67. Gailhan	123. Osterburken	171. South Shields
15. Arles	69. Gravisca	124. Ostia	172. Stettfeld
18A. Augst	70. Gubbio	125. Ouveillan	173. Taranto
19. Augusta Tricastinorum (Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux)	71. Haidra	127. Paestum	174. Tarquinia
20. Autun	72. Halatte	129. Paris	175. Tavant
21. Avenches	74. Herculaneum	130. Pâtural	176. Tavaux
22. Barton Court	75. Himera	131. Payerne	179. Thina
23. Beaumont	76. Holborough	132. Pecs	180. Tofting
24. Benevento	78. Illa d'en Reixac	136. Pithekoussai	181. Tusculum (Frascati)
25. Bibracte	79. Intercisa	137A. Poitiers	182. Urbino
26. Boscoreale	81. Kef (El Kef)	138. Pompeii	183. Vagnari
27. Botromagno	83. Kempten	139. Portorecanati	184. Vella
28. Bourges	85. Langeais	140. Portus	185. Verona
30. Budapest	86. Lankhills	141. Poundbury	186. Verulamium (St. Albans)
31. Caesarea Mauretaniae (Cherchell)	87. Laquenexy	142. Ptuj	187. Vindolanda
32. Cambridge	89. Lattes	143. Puech de Mus	188. Vindonissa (Windisch)
33. Camí de la Platja del Cossis	90. Leptiminus (Lemta)	144. Puig de la Nau	189. Vrana
34. Camp de les Lloses	91. Lezoux	145. Pupput	190. Vulci
35. Capua	93. Lokri Epizephyri	146. Pyrgi	191. Wattle Syke
36. Carnuntum	94. London	147. Ravenna	192. Wederath-Belgium
37. Carthage	95. Los Villares	148. Rec de Ligno à Valros	193. Worms
38. Castel Malnome	96. Lugnano	149. Reculver	194. Yewden
39. Castellet de Bernabé	97. Lyon	150. Rome	195. York
40. Chichester	98. Lyons-la-Forêt	151. Rottweil	196. Yverdon-les-Bains
41. Chiusi	99. Mainz	152. Rouen	
42. Chantambre	100. Marseille	153. Ruscino	
43. Chartres	101. Martigny	154. Salces	
44. Chauvigny	102. Megara Hyblaea	155. Sallèles d'Aude	
45. Chianciano	104. Mérida	156. Salona	
47. Colchester	106. Metaponto	157. Sanguineto	
48. Cologne	107. Metz	158. Sarno	
50. Costebelle	108. Mezzocorona	159. Satricum	
53. Dietikon	109. Misenum	160. Scarbantia	
55. Draria-el-Achour	110. Mozia	161. Sétif	
58. Ellingen	111. Narce	162. Settecamiini	
59. Ensérune	112. Nave	163. Settefinestre	
	113. Neftenbach	165. S'illot des Porros	
	114. Nepi		
	115. Nîmes		



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Abdera | 52. Demetrias-Pagasai | 103. Mende |
| 2. Adamklissi | 54. Douch | 105. Messene |
| 4. Akhmim | 56. Echinus | 119. Nysa |
| 6. Alexandria | 57. Eleusis | 122. Oropos |
| 8. Amphipolis | 61. Eretria | 126. Oxyrhynchus |
| 11. Ankara | 65. Fiğ | 128. Palmyra |
| 12. Aphrodisias | 69. Golgoi | 133. Pella |
| 13. Apollonia Pontica (Sozopol) | 73. Hawara | 136A. Perge |
| 17. Ashkelon | 77. Iasos | 137. Piraeus |
| 18. Athens | 80. Karanis | 164. Sidon |
| 29. Brauron | 82. Kellis | 177. Tebtunis |
| 46. Chora | 84. Kyllindra | 178. Thasos |
| 49. Corinth | 88. Larissa | |
| 51. Daraya | 92. Lissos | |

Map 2. Sites in the eastern Roman provinces, including pre-Roman sites discussed in the text.

Drawing: Irene de Luis.

1

Introduction

LOCATING CHILDREN IN THE ROMAN FAMILY

The Roman family has developed in the last quarter century as a distinct and dynamic research theme in ancient social history, an important impetus having been provided by the series of *Roman Family Conferences* initiated in 1981 by Beryl Rawson. Multi-authored, edited volumes emerged from these conferences in Australia, North America, and Europe dealing with various aspects of the family, generally with a focus on Rome and Italy and on historical sources.¹ Significant regional, chronological, methodological, and subject-specific advances in family studies in Classical antiquity have been made since then, to which Rawson's edited *Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, published in 2011, is testament.² More recently, the papers of a conference held in 2009 in Gothenburg, and published in 2012, not only present new and diverse topics on ancient families and households, but also aim to redefine approaches to the family in Greek and Roman antiquity in the twenty-first century.³

Whilst several of these publications have touched on aspects of children, few focus specifically on childhood, although the growing interest in children in Classical antiquity is apparent. Grete Lillehammer's call for archaeologists to see children "as human beings in their own right, albeit ones on small feet" has not gone unheeded.⁴ Rawson's *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, published in 2003, stood out in its time, and the broader topic of childhood in the Roman world was pursued in 2006 by Christian Laes in his *Kinderen bei den Römern*, later translated into English as *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within*.⁵ Several multi-authored books on children in the Greek and

¹ Rawson 1986 (republished 1992); Rawson 1991; Rawson and Weaver 1997; George 2005b.

² Rawson 2011.

³ Harlow and Larsson Lovén 2012.

⁴ Lillehammer 2000, 24. For a multi-period synthesis of the archaeology of childhood and a plea for researchers to investigate children as social actors, see Baxter 2005.

⁵ Rawson 2003a; Laes 2011a.

the Roman worlds have since appeared.⁶ The last *Roman Family Conference* volume published in 2010 was the first one in that series to have a greater emphasis on children, as is reflected in its title, *Children, Memory and Family Identity in Roman Culture*.⁷

The topic of child death and mortuary behaviour in antiquity has also been explored extensively, first in 2008 in a volume edited by a Spanish team with a rich and interesting collection of papers by international contributors, and later in 2010 and 2012 in three volumes of papers from conferences in Athens, Arles, and Alexandria, all part of the research programme *L'Enfant et la mort dans l'Antiquité*.⁸ Furthermore, The Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past, founded in 2007 for historical research into childhood of all periods, has been influential in establishing not only a journal for multi-period studies, but also in facilitating workshops, meetings and publications, such as *Children, Spaces and Identity*.⁹ The latter contains papers ranging from prehistory to the nineteenth century, primarily based on material from the Iberian peninsula.

Although research on children in Roman culture clearly is flourishing, the role and significance of the very youngest children are topics that are still very underdeveloped in archaeological and historical research. In this context, French-language scholarship has been trail-blazing with two volumes of essays accompanying a museum exhibition in Bourges and a conference in Fribourg devoted entirely to maternity, birth, and earliest childhood.¹⁰ The most recent multi-authored volume on the health and death of Roman infants in Italy and beyond, edited by myself and Emma-Jayne Graham in 2014, takes a multidisciplinary approach to a variety of topics relevant to infancy, such as religion, feeding practices, disability, infanticide, and infant burial and funerary commemoration.¹¹

ROMAN INFANCY: DEVELOPING A RESEARCH THEME

In 2011, Rawson heralded the study of birth and infancy in Classical antiquity as a “newly emerging field”.¹² Two years later, Véronique Dasen, who has done much to further research into ancient childhood, also referred to the

⁶ Cohen and Rutter 2007; Evans Grubbs, Parkin, and Bell 2013. See also Lillehammer 2010; Lally and Moore 2011; and Coşkun 2015 for a multi-period approach to the archaeology of childhood.

⁷ Dasen and Späth 2010.

⁸ Gusi et al. 2008; Guimier-Sorbets and Morizot 2010; Hermay and Dubois 2012; Nenna 2012.

⁹ Sánchez Romero et al. 2015. See Crawford and Lewis 2008 on the society and its remit.

¹⁰ Gourevitch et al. 2003; Dasen 2004.

¹¹ Carroll and Graham 2014.

¹² Rawson 2011, 5.

topic as “un nouveau champ de recherches”.¹³ My book is situated firmly in this developing field of research. Children who had only just been born or were in their first year of life were rarely mentioned in Roman literary sources, and, when they were, they could be referred to in dismissive terms. According to Cicero, for example, people who complained about dying before their time (*mors immatura*) felt that the loss of an infant in the cradle could be tolerated without protest, because such youngsters had not yet “tasted the sweets of life” or been able to conceive of a future.¹⁴ For Seneca, talking down the death of a child was the best way to deal with such loss. His consolatory advice to his contemporaries was to consider children as being merely on loan, their longevity being determined by fickle fate; they should be remembered, but not mourned.¹⁵

Such letters, dialogues, and philosophical treatises have had an adverse effect on our modern understanding of ancient parent–infant relationships, and they have even helped to generate misleading assumptions. Roman texts have prompted historians to claim that Roman parents had little emotional attachment to their offspring, or that the Romans had culturally ascribed notions of infants as non-persons, placing a “relatively low social value . . . on small children”.¹⁶ The Roman father has been portrayed as a severe figure who inspected his newborn child, lifting the infant off the ground if he decided to let it live, although this harsh version of the circumstances surrounding new life appears much more to be a myth propagated by modern scholars.¹⁷

Current understanding of infant death has led to statements such as “infants rarely received proper burial in Roman times” or “deceased infants were often not even buried properly”.¹⁸ This notion has been dispelled clearly by my own research on Roman infant death and burial in Italy.¹⁹ Other scholars have flagged up the under-representation of graves and funerary monuments for babies under one year.²⁰ The Romans are said to have viewed “children in the first month or two of life” as “not yet really human beings”, because they were sometimes buried in and around settlements, rather than in the communal cemetery.²¹ Even more negative is the claim that the Romans exhibited “an indifference to burying children, especially infants, carefully”, suggesting that they found expressions of grief for the very young inappropriate and irrelevant.²²

But the pertinent Roman texts were written by elite men in the empire’s capital whose Stoic philosophical views were an endorsement of public self-control and composure in the face of adversity and loss. Such writers paid

¹³ Dasen 2013a, 2.

¹⁴ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.39.

¹⁵ Seneca, *Moral Essays* 99; Seneca, *Consolation to Marcia* 6.21.

¹⁶ Dixon 1988, 104.

¹⁷ B. D. Shaw 2001a.

¹⁸ Sallares et al. 2004, 319; Krause 2011, 642.

¹⁹ Carroll 2011a and 2012a.

²⁰ McWilliam 2001, 79; Hänninen 2005, 54.

²¹ Wileman 2005, 77.

²² Russell 1985, 49.

comparatively little attention to newborns and babies because they were of little relevance to the agendas of the socio-political elite. It would be inadvisable to accept these texts as an accurate reflection of what Romans of both sexes and of all social classes and geographic origins felt about their children, or to believe that they convey public opinion. Moreover, the Roman Empire was vast, incorporating many ethnic groups, regional histories, and social systems, and very different practices could exist even within a shared overarching political body. Roman literature on aspects of infancy and society's perception of infants generally reflects only the attitudes of the (male) elite in Rome. It does not take into account that cultural differences might contribute to widely varying responses to infants in a geographic, historical, and social sense.

Of course, with perhaps as many as 30 per cent of babies dying within the first month of life in the Roman period, it is easy to assume that parents rarely formed close bonds with the newest members of their family. High infant mortality is cited as a reason why Roman parents might not have invested emotionally in the high-risk gamble of reproduction, the supposed indifference with which they dealt with infant death having been a protective mechanism against loss and sorrow.²³ This is to take liberties with the ancient evidence. In regions of the world where still today neonatal mortality rates are high and stillbirths remain common, few people would automatically claim that modern parents in those regions are indifferent to infant death, but they feel free to make this assertion regarding ancient parents.²⁴ High infant mortality cannot fail to have an effect on the family and society as a whole, and superficial coping mechanisms may simply mask the deep emotional trauma of infant loss. In the Roman world, as now, the death of a baby will have triggered a range of responses, and bereaved mothers and fathers may well have had an experience that they found transformative, even if we cannot always recognize them.²⁵

I neither have children of my own, nor had I ever seen a premature baby or one that might be too weak to survive after birth. For the purposes of researching this book, I wanted to understand what being premature means physically, how parents deal emotionally with conditions and circumstances that threaten the lives of their newborn infants, and to reflect on human responses to infant death. In 2013, Simon Clark, Head of School for Paediatrics in Yorkshire and Humber, allowed me to visit the neonatal unit of the Jessop Wing of the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield. Many of these

²³ Bradley 1986, 220. This is clearly still a popular notion, as witnessed by the statement by Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry in the April 2015 online edition of *The Week*: "High infant mortality rates created a cultural pressure to not develop emotional attachments to children" (<http://theweek.com/articles/551027/how-christianity-invented-children>).

²⁴ Zupan 2005, 2047; Cacciatore and Bushfield 2007, 61.

²⁵ Lovell 1997; Riches and Dawson 1997.

babies had been born at less than thirty weeks gestation, which, in Roman times, would have been incompatible with survival. Some of them, after my visit, will have survived premature birth and the associated health complications, others probably not, but most parents I witnessed were putting on a brave face and hoping for the best, even against all odds. Some just looked numb with grief. I was shocked at how viscerally distressing I found the experience of seeing such tiny bodies and so much vulnerability; no amount of cultural conditioning or cool academic reasoning prepared me for this. It seemed to me a natural reaction and a human experience to be so distraught, and I found it difficult to believe that Roman parents could have reacted less naturally to the illness and death of small, helpless beings.

It made me wonder whether we are hard-wired as humans to react physically and emotionally to new life, the distress of infants, and the loss of young life, now and in the past. And scientific studies appear to support this. A recent MRI scan study of maternal brain activation in response to infants either crying or smiling showed highly elaborate neural mechanisms mediating maternal love and complex behaviours for protectiveness.²⁶ Another scientific study suggested that caring for children awakens a parenting network in the brain, and that the neural underpinnings of maternal instinct can be developed by anyone who chooses to be a parent, putting fathers also in the picture as sensitive caregivers.²⁷ Furthermore, it has been shown that parents experience a whole range of emotional reactions to infant death, including depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, and aggression, and these can last for years after the death of the infant.²⁸ Mothers and fathers may grieve in different ways, with men possibly experiencing constraints in resolving grief because of their masculine role expectations, but, despite cultural and social variations, the loss of an infant remains one of the most painful events in parents' lives.²⁹ This pertains as much to the loss of an infant shortly after birth as it does to the experience of losing a baby through miscarriage or stillbirth.³⁰

A month after my visit to the neonatal unit, I attended the annual memorial service at a church in Sheffield for families who had lost babies at various stages. The church was full of people (parents, grandparents, siblings) who had been coming to this event for years, and it was clear that the experience of losing a baby still deeply affected them all. The pain and sorrow was tangible. Both the hospital visit and the memorial service gave me a rare insight into neonatal birth, death, and medical care, as well as the ways in which families coped with grief.

²⁶ Noriuchi et al. 2008.

²⁷ Abraham et al. 2014.

²⁸ Rogers et al. 2008; Murphy and Thomas 2013; Murphy and Shevlin 2014.

²⁹ Cordell and Thomas 1990; Riches and Dawson 1997; Thompson 1997.

³⁰ Lovell 1997; Turton et al. 2006.

The coping strategies of parents and families in the face of adversity, illness, or death, of course, will differ, depending on social context, cultural environment, and period. Nancy Scheper-Hughes's work in the 1960s and 1980s in the shantytown of Alto do Cruzeiro in Timbaúba is particularly useful in exploring coping mechanisms to deal with frequent infant death in twentieth-century Brazil.³¹ The behaviour of mothers in this context might help us also to understand and contextualize Roman social reactions, especially the restraint in grieving publicly as seemingly recommended by Roman authors. In Alto, in the face of extreme poverty and violence, and with an infant mortality rate of up to 40 per cent (higher than the estimate of the Roman period), the apparent resignation of mothers to "too much loss, too much death" masks the symptoms of depression resulting from the death of their babies: "a continual exposure to trauma obliterated rage and protest, it also minimized attachment so as to diminish sorrow".³² Scheper-Hughes notes that mother love emerges strongly if newborns survive the most perilous beginnings and begin to develop strength and vitality; these are the children worth investing in emotionally and physically, because they are thought to have a future. The mothers of Alto simply cannot allow themselves to become overly attached immediately to their newborns, because the grief at repeated loss would otherwise become overwhelming.

Perhaps in the Roman world, as in Alto, there was the recognition that not all of one's children could be expected to live—Bradley calls it "a foreseeable loss"—but that does not mean that Romans did not find early death very difficult and that grief and loss were not felt acutely.³³ The responses of Roman parents to infant death were conditioned by social expectations and circumstances that helped them cope when death occurred.³⁴ Moses Finley is certain that the intensity and duration of parental responses in the Roman past were not like our modern ones, but he knows of "no way to measure or even to identify the differences".³⁵ Paradoxically, although Roman Stoic treatises on how to react to the death of infants and very young children are sometimes interpreted as true reflections of Roman parental indifference, the fact that they were written in the first place to console bereaved parents rather highlights how people struggled emotionally to come to terms with their loss.³⁶

In fact, as I argue in this book, a nuanced reading of the archaeological remains and the written sources help clarify the relationship between the daily realities of and the literary rhetoric about earliest childhood. This approach

³¹ Scheper-Hughes 1989.

³² Scheper-Hughes 2013, 27.

³³ Bradley 1986, 220.

³⁴ George 2000, 204. A novel explanation for the so-called regulation of funerary rituals for infants was put forward by Krauß 1998, 342: with high child mortality, such regulations prevented parents being driven to financial ruin.

³⁵ Finley 1981, 159.

³⁶ See the valuable discussion on Stoic ideas of parenthood and grieving in Reydam-Schils 2005, 134–41.

allows us to recognize the investment by the family and society in general in the health, well-being, and future of the very young, even while still *in utero*. It also enables us to differentiate accurately between public and private manifestations of grief at the death of children. The displays of mourning so frowned upon by Stoic society were public, performative, and competitive in the context of the elite, whereas private expressions of genuine loss and grief felt by all social classes, including the poor, are recognizable in the choices they made regarding the treatment of their dead infants and young children and the material culture given to them in death. The study of infant burials allows us also to contextualize and put into perspective Roman legal texts recommending the length of mourning periods for various age groups. They state that a child who lived for a year should be mourned for a month, but for any infant younger than this there would be no mourning period at all, seemingly supporting the notion that Roman society assigned no value at all to its youngest children.³⁷ But the archaeological evidence makes it clear that there was a significant difference between *public* mourning (referred in legal texts) and *private* expressions of grief (recognizable in the burial assemblages).

The evidence from archaeology, funerary epigraphy, and material culture marshalled in this study dispels the long-held notion that the very youngest infants were insignificant beings without a social persona whose lives were treated with indifference. It is, of course, difficult to define what a person is and at what age personhood commences. As recently as 2013, medical ethics researchers argued controversially that “both a fetus and a newborn certainly are human beings and potential persons, but neither is a ‘person’ in the sense of ‘subject of a moral right to life’”.³⁸ On my train journey to work on 5 December 2014, I was struck by the headline in the *Metro* newspaper in which a child left disabled, due to her mother’s drinking during pregnancy, was refused compensation by the court, “because the girl was ‘not a person’ at the time”. Clearly our own perception of personhood is not fixed, although there may be differences between private and legal views.

For the ancient Roman world, there are various indications in the material record that infants within the first year of their life—and even within the first weeks and months—were invested with identities and a persona of various kinds. Here I would like to flag up just three examples of material culture, to be discussed in more depth in the relevant sections of the book, that give us

³⁷ Ulpian, *Fontes Iuris Romani Antejustiniani (FIRA)* 2.536; Paulus, *Opinions* 1.21.13; Pliny, *Natural History* 7.16.68, 72.

³⁸ Giubilini and Minerva 2013. The article elicited many responses, as to be expected, including a paper by Di Nucci (2013) who makes a case for a relevant moral difference between fetuses and newborns. One of the authors, Francesca Minerva, even received death threats after the publication of her paper: <http://www.ibtimes.com/dr-francesca-minerva-after-birth-abortion-article-defended-after-death-threats-419638>.

insight into the developing and invested personhood of children younger than one year old. Terracotta *ex votos* of swaddled babies that were commonly dedicated in central Italian sanctuaries from the fourth to the second centuries BC, for example, reflect the specific anxiety felt by parents in the first two or three months of an infant's life (Fig. 1.1). Once the baby had successfully negotiated this dangerous postnatal period and was released from its swaddling bands, its effigy as an individual in society and in the religious



Fig. 1.1 Terracotta votive infant in swaddling clothes from a sanctuary in Italy.

Photo: Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam.

community was dedicated by its relieved parents in gratitude for divine assistance.³⁹ Another illuminating artefact is the gravestone of an infant boy in Spain, L. Helvius Lupus, whose epitaph records him as being eight months old, a Roman citizen, and an official inhabitant of the Roman town of Emerita Augusta.⁴⁰ As an *Emeritensis*, therefore, this very young child already had a civic identity as a Roman citizen and a corporate identity as a registered member of this community. My third example is a miniature *gladius*, deposited in the late first or early second century AD with an infant between three and six months of age in the cemetery at Tavant in Roman Gaul (see Fig. 9.1).⁴¹ The *gladius* is only nine centimetres long, and is a miniature version of the short fighting sword included in the kit of an adult male Roman soldier. The small size of the *gladius* here is relative to the tender age of the infant, but its inclusion in the burial indicates that a masculine identity had already been fixed for this very young child.

I am not naively claiming that *all* children were *always* wanted by Roman parents; some mothers and fathers, for example, would not have been able to afford to feed a constantly expanding family and may have been reluctant to take on more responsibilities, although when a child died at a very tender age and was said to have been “most desired” (*desiderantissima*), the parent’s emotional attachment is very clear.⁴² Nor am I claiming that infants, for one reason or another, might not have been rejected, abandoned, or even outright killed, a theme which runs through some genres of Latin literature and which I discuss at some length later in the book. Neither do I want to ignore the fact that children could suffer abuse or work as child labourers, although at least the very young would not have been suitable for the latter. What I oppose is the uncritical assumption that high infant mortality necessarily conditioned Roman parents not to invest in the early life of their children or to view them, or their deaths, with indifference. Indeed, Margaret King concludes that Roman parents certainly were not unconcerned about the welfare of infant children, and that attitudes and behavioural patterns “were in general child-oriented”.⁴³

To understand what very young children experienced or how they were treated in their short lives, and precisely how risky the first weeks and months of life really were, the skeletal remains of infants are an immensely valuable resource which can be read. Infant remains not only shed light on

³⁹ Graham 2013 and 2014; see also Derks 2014.

⁴⁰ *L’Année Épigraphique (AE)* 1965, 298; Rothenberg and Blanco-Freijeiro 1981, 18, fig. 3; Edmondson et al. 2001, 139–41, cat. no. 10, pls. 10A–C.

⁴¹ Riquier and Salé, 2006, 34–6, figs. 34–6.

⁴² This is expressed in an epitaph commemorating Eutychia from Rome who was one year and an illegible number of months old: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL)* VI.17426.

⁴³ King 1996.



Fig. 1.2 The author with the skeleton of a premature infant (thirty weeks' gestation), from an historical reference collection curated by the Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield.

Photo: Petra Verlinden.

the life of children and the conditions under which they lived, but they also, in a very visible way, impress on us the vulnerability and delicate nature of infants of the tenderest age (Fig. 1.2). In the last decade, important advances have been made in the bioarchaeology of children of all ages and in different periods of antiquity, although there are still limitations to the study of

human remains.⁴⁴ For example, there is no truly reliable way to sex skeletons of individuals below the age of puberty, so that we cannot be certain if infants and very young children were male or female based only on their bones. Nevertheless, these children, as I hope to show, often appear to have been given a gendered identity during their brief lives which can be reflected in the choice of objects that accompanied them in burial. Scientific studies of children's skeletons from archaeological and forensic contexts shed light on the health, disease, and physical development of children during different periods of the life-course, in different regions and social environments. A particular area of bioarchaeological research pertaining to earliest childhood is the age at which Roman infants began to be weaned off mother's milk and how this might have affected growth and the health of individuals who lived into adulthood.⁴⁵

The skeletal data, however, are not always presented in published reports in a way that allows a nuanced understanding of infant mortality in the first year of life, especially when all children under the age of six or seven years are grouped together in age-at-death profiles for particular cemetery populations, rather than being presented as pre-term, perinatal, neonatal, and infant up to the age of one year.⁴⁶ Fortunately, however, there is an increasing body of published data that presents more precise ages for the skeletons examined, and these publications are important for mapping out the circumstances and conditions of earliest life.

In antiquity, pregnancy was measured in lunar months, with an infant being born in the tenth lunar month, i.e. at full-term or nine months in conventional modern calculations. For the purposes of this book, I have adopted Sandra Wheeler's definitions for the terms "foetal", "perinate", and "infant".⁴⁷ She defines a foetus as an individual aged under thirty-six weeks' gestation, a perinate as an individual aged around birth (thirty-nine to forty weeks' gestation), and an infant as an individual aged from around birth to one year.⁴⁸ For those infants who are no older than one month, I use the term newborn. These are biological ages, but a variety of words were used for children in a cultural sense that perhaps are not closely related to the biological ages.⁴⁹ Some of these

⁴⁴ Baker et al. 2005; M. E. Lewis 2007; Gowland and Redfern 2010; Fox 2012; Redfern and Gowland 2012.

⁴⁵ Katzenberg et al. 1996; Dupras et al. 2001; Prowse et al. 2008; Keenleyside et al. 2009; Powell et al. 2014.

⁴⁶ Scattarella et al. 2006; Catalano et al. 2012; Minozzi et al. 2012.

⁴⁷ Wheeler 2012, 219.

⁴⁸ There are other definitions: Redfern 2007, 176: pre-term, less than 37 weeks old; full-term, 37–42 weeks; infant, more than 42 weeks old and up to 3 years old. Lazer 2009: foetal applies to any time prior to birth; infant applies to the period from birth to 3 years of age. For Beaumont 2012, 38, an infant is a child up to the third year of life.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on the variability and different definitions of terms relating to childhood, see Halcrow and Tayles 2008.

words express the small size or incompleteness of an individual, such as *infans*, *impubes*, *puer*, *puella*, *parvus*, *pupus*, and *pusus*; other terms are associated with age or ancestry, such as *filius*, *gnatus*, *natus*, *nepos*, and *stirps*.⁵⁰ None of them is obviously related to an infant specifically in his or her first year of life, or to what we could call a baby; in fact, *infans*, meaning literally someone who is not speaking or is not able to speak, referred to all children up to the age of seven.⁵¹ As Mark Golden notes for Classical Athens, stages of childhood were not delineated by single words, even though artists and writers showed an awareness of infancy and other stages in the child's life-course.⁵² The same is true of the Romans. Neither does the lack of a Latin word for baby or infant in its first year mean that this phase of life was not appreciated as something special. In fact, the first year of life was marked by many milestones, from the naming day at eight or nine days, the official registration of birth by the thirtieth day, the release from swaddling bands at forty to sixty days, and the beginning of teething at six months, to the achievement of the child's first birthday. All these milestones were associated with the successful negotiation of the early life-course, the precarious nature of which would have been all too obvious to Roman families.

AIM AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS STUDY

This book aims to fill a lacuna on the subject of infancy and earliest childhood, isolating the age group of the under one-year-olds because of the very particular historical circumstances that affected this period in the life cycle and attitudes toward it. The book integrates archaeological evidence, material culture, and the iconography of infancy with social and cultural history, an approach for which this subject matter is especially well suited. The burial evidence assessed in many places in the book gives us a particular lens through which to explore such issues. The material culture is privileged in a way that brings new insights to the debate and raises new questions, breaking with the older tradition of using material culture to support ideas taken from primary texts. Far from disregarding the texts, I have included quotes from them when they are immediately relevant to the material culture presented in the book, and this pertains especially to Greek and Roman medical texts. But the written sources do not dominate, nor do they simply provide the background noise for

⁵⁰ Keparťová 1984. Parkin 2010, 97–101, discusses the ancient Greek and Latin names for children.

⁵¹ This is the equivalent of the Greek *paidion*, according to Golden 2015, 11. He points out that the Greeks had a word for the newborn—*brephos*—but later the word could mean a child up to the age of six.

⁵² Golden 2015, 11.

the material remains. Instead, I have saved the relevant and influential primary texts for Chapter 9, where they are discussed in their own right. The wider chronological and geographic framing of the Roman evidence, roughly the fourth century *BC* to the fourth century *AD* in all regions throughout the empire in which evidence has survived, makes the point that the Romans are not just about Rome, or indeed Italy, but a far wider world in which cultural influences were reflected in the way infants and young children were raised, socialized, cared for, buried, and mourned.

In order to contextualize and set the scene for the Roman evidence, and to understand regional and cultural trends that may have continued to influence how infants were treated in the Roman period, Chapter 2 surveys burial data and a range of material evidence for the youngest children in the pre-Roman Iron Age and early Roman period in and around the Mediterranean, from about the eighth century *BC*. Chapter 3 evaluates skeletal studies and Roman medical treatises to gain insight into pregnancy, birth, and differing weaning practices and regimes of care. Furthermore, it examines artefactual and religious evidence to understand how Roman parents sought divine assistance to safeguard maternal health and ensure the survival of their children. Chapter 4 explores the things with which babies were surrounded in life, and identifies a material culture of infancy, such as toys, feeding bottles, apotropaic jewellery, and swaddling clothes by evaluating artefacts of various types and materials. Chapter 5 looks into images of infants and very young children, particularly those that portray them in the social context of the Roman family and extended household. It also explores the ways in which Roman and barbarian children are contrasted and symbolically charged with meaning in public art.

The next three chapters focus primarily on Roman funerary evidence. Chapter 6 investigates data from Roman cemeteries across the empire in order to consider infant mortality and to investigate the location of infant burials, either within or outside the communal burial grounds. It also discusses intramural burial and evaluates the evidence for practices such as infanticide and infant exposure. Chapter 7 attempts to gain insight into the family's investment in and attachment to infants, as expressed in funerary ritual. It explores the various ways in which the bodies of dead infants were treated and prepared for burial and the deposition of an array of grave goods that accompanied infants. The focus of Chapter 8 is the diversity in the funerary commemoration of the youngest members of Roman society, the portrayal of infants in funerary art and inscriptions being a means by which the status, gender, ethnicity, and citizenship of the commemorators could be negotiated and expressed for contemporary society and posterity.

After discussing a wide range of different types of physical evidence, Chapter 9 brings together Roman literary sources, such as philosophical treatises, private letters, legal documents, and poems, to compare and contrast

the messages conveyed by elite male texts with the archaeological, pictorial, and artefactual evidence for infants in Roman society. The literature is, thereby, contextualized within a larger and more diverse framework, and by privileging the picture created by the material culture new insights can be gained into the context of the texts and their potential for a more nuanced understanding of social and behavioural patterns that might have influenced relationships between adults and their infants.

Infants and Children in Pre-Roman Mediterranean Societies

INFANT DEATH AND BURIAL

In his study of early Iron Age cemeteries in the Abruzzo region of Italy, Vincenzo D’Ercole claims that infants between six months and a year of age were at “a ‘critical’ age” before they had “been received into the community of adults”.¹ His claim is based on the fact that infants in this age group in the Abruzzo were not buried with grave goods, unlike older children and adults. But once they had completed their first year of life, according to D’Ercole, children assumed a social identity and fully entered the adult community, at which point they were buried in the same manner as all others in the community. His conclusions suggest a social unimportance of the youngest children in Iron Age societies in this region. In a similar vein, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood argues that small children in ancient Greece had no social persona and no relationships beyond their closest family, their deaths having had an impact only on the family and not on society in general.² Bernard Dedet goes a step further, claiming that newborns and infants in southern Gaul in the Iron Age were not considered human in contemporary society because of their mode of deposition at death: naked, in the foetal position, and excluded from the communal cemetery.³ But are these claims truly valid for these particular regions or those further afield?

One way to explore how people reacted to the death of their infants is to assess the mortuary treatment of them, and it is here that we have a broad evidential base for south-west Europe and the western, central, and eastern Mediterranean regions. It is possible to recognize two broad cultural groups that responded in different ways to infant death and burial from the eighth to the second centuries BC: the cultures that buried their babies in the buildings of their settlements and excluded them from the communal cemetery (Gaul,

¹ D’Ercole 1999, 38–9.

² Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, 42, 44–5.

³ Dedet 2008, 159; and 2013, 44.