

Dies Lustricus

The *dies lustricus*, or day of purification, took place eight days after birth for a girl, and or nine for a boy, when the child was officially welcomed into the family. At the conclusion of ceremonies, a baby was given a name, which is why babies who died early were usually left nameless.

A freeborn Roman boy was given a three-part name consisting of: *praenomen* (a personal name given by his parents from a limited selection such as Marcus and Titus), *nomen*, (gens or clan name e.g. Caecilius, Julius), and *cognomen* (an additional personal name with a larger element of choice than the *praenomen*, e.g. Cicero). This distinguished him from non-Roman citizens who had a two-part name. Slaves were given a single name by their owner. We know the names of some male slaves from Vindolanda: Severus (Harsh), Candidus (Shining), and Audax (Bold).

Girls usually had two names, the first name often being the feminine form of their father's *nomen*, and the second name being a *cognomen* – e.g. a daughter of Lucius Caecilius Lucundus might be called Lucia Caecilia.



A special amulet which identified the child as a free Roman (foreigners, slaves and freedmen were not entitled to wear them) was also given to them during this period to protect them from evil forces. Boys received a *bullae*, a flat disc made of lead or gold, depending on how rich their family was, and girls received a *lunula* or moon-shaped pendant to wear round their neck. So far, none of these amulets have ever been found at Vindolanda, possibly because the vast majority of its inhabitants were not Roman citizens and hence not entitled to wear them. At any one time there may



only have been single figures of Roman citizens living there. I couldn't find any information on what form celebrations for non-Roman citizens took, but they were quite possibly similar to those for a freeborn Roman.

Although the ceremony seems to have been private, it was a time of rejoicing and congratulation among the relatives and friends, who, together with the household slaves, presented the child with little metal toys or ornaments in the form of flowers, miniature axes and swords, various tools, and especially figures shaped like a half-moon (*lunula*), etc. These were called *crepundia*, and were often left with an exposed child as mentioned above.

Birth certificates for Roman citizens, which included the date of birth were introduced during the reign of Augustus. Registration was not however required until the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Once a child reached its first birthday it could have legal privileges and the parents could apply for it to have full Roman citizenship. Three years was viewed as the threshold to the next stage, but we would have been surprised at what was expected from children in the lower social classes even before such a tender age. Epitaphs and reliefs on graves show tiny children at work in mines or laundries, and some children could already have been practising spinning techniques as toddlers. For these poor mites, childhood was almost non-existent.

BOYS	GIRLS
1) When did the day of purification take place? 2) At what point in the ceremonies was the child given a name? 3) Explain how freeborn Roman boys were named and how this is different from non-Roman citizens and slaves. 4) What was the design and purpose of the <i>bullae</i> ? Draw an annotated image.	1) When did the day of purification take place? 2) At what point in the ceremonies was the child given a name? 3) Explain how freeborn Roman girls were named and how this is different from non-Roman citizens and slaves. 4) What was the design and purpose of the <i>lunula</i> ? Draw an annotated image.
BOTH GENDERS	
1) Give illustrated and annotated examples of <i>crepundia</i> . 2) When were birth certificates introduced in Rome? 3) How might a poor or slave child grow up?	



This cradle from Herculaneum seems to be the only surviving piece of archaeological evidence to indicate sleeping arrangements of infants. A tiny skeleton was found in this cot, on a mattress stuffed with leaves, surrounded with textiles which were likely blankets.

Feeding



In antiquity, the only safe way to feed a newborn baby was breastfeeding. The vast majority of babies were breastfed, often for what we would regard as a very long period, either by the mother, or by a wet nurse. Several recent studies have analysed skeletal samples using stable isotope analysis. As an example, one of these studies of bone collagen from 37 rib samples from the Isola Sacra necropolis in Rome indicates that transitional feeding began by the end of the first year and weaning did not occur until the child was between two and two and a half years of age.

It was not always possible then, as it is not always possible now, for the mother to nurse her children, or, in the case of elite women, the mother may simply not have desired to, and then her place was taken by a slave (*nutrix*). Families who could afford it would employ a good wet nurse, ideally Greek, good tempered and below the age of 40. Her character was important because the Romans believed that this was passed through breast milk.

In ancient Rome wet nursing was a commercial activity. Mother's milk was sold like cow's milk and many markets had *lactaria*, where wet nurses gathered to offer their services. (Breast milk was also considered to be a powerful substance that could treat various ailments as well as poisoning. Recipes for eye remedies often recommended that ingredients be diluted in human milk.)

If human milk was not an option, mothers would have to resort to animal milk. Finding animal milk (usually goat's milk) in a big city such as Rome was not always easy, and the milk could prove indigestible or even dangerous. Ancient baby bottles have been discovered, often in young children's graves, such as the one found at Corbridge, but they were probably designed for feeding toddlers rather than very small babies. They are in the shape of a small pot with a handle set at right angles to a small spout which may have had a cloth or some kind of leather teat added to it to regulate flow when pouring the milk. It would have been very difficult to keep them germ free. Weaning was a dangerous time for the child due to the risk of infection from water, foodstuffs and vessels used for feeding the child.



- 1) What was the only safe way to feed a newborn baby?
- 2) How was the problem of a mother unable or unwilling to breastfeed overcome?
- 3) Why was the character of the breastfeeding woman important?
- 4) Explain who gathered at *lactaria* and what was sold there.
- 5) How would parents feed a child who could not drink human milk?