

Latin

GCSE: Component 3

Monday 17th April 2023

LO: to analyse and evaluate primary sources on Roman childhood and education

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For each of the following sources:

i) identify the context in which the source was written (who is it by, who is it to, where was it written, why was it written)

ii) provide 3 facts we can learn about the lives of Roman children from the source

Children

- Birth and death

Birth announcements written on walls in Pompeii.

Our daughter was born early in the evening on Saturday 2nd August

Announcing the birth of Cornelius Sabinus!

CIL 4.294, 8149*

Cicero writes to his brother Atticus with good news.

Please be informed that I have been blessed with a little son. Terentia (Cicero's wife) is doing well.

Cicero, Letters to Atticus 1.2.1

Not all children lived to adulthood.

To the spirits of the dead. Hateria Superba who lived for one year, six months and 25 days. The most unfortunate parents Quintus Haterius Ephebus and Julia Zosime made (this) for their daughter, for themselves and their descendants.

CIL 06, 19159

To you, Fronto, father, *and* mother, Flaccilla, I entrust this girl, my little pet/sweetie and my darling, so that tiny Erotion may not shudder at the dark shadows/shades and the monstrous mouths of the dog of the underworld. She was going to complete the chills of her sixth winter now, if she had not lived as many days too few. Among so old protectors may she play mischievously and may she chatter my name with lisping mouth. May the turf not harshly cover her soft bones; and may you, earth, not be heavy for her: she was not for you.

Martial, *Epigrams* 5.34

A letter from a Roman citizen to his sister, or a pregnant wife from her husband, dating from the first century BC demonstrates the practice of exposing an unwanted new-born child to the elements.

I am still in Alexandria. ... I beg and plead with you to take care of our little child, and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. In the meantime, if (good fortune to you!) you give birth, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, expose it.*

Ovid tell the mythical story of Iphis whose mother hid the fact she had given birth to a girl in order to save the child's life.

When the time drew near for his wife to give birth to the child, [her husband] warned her and instructed her with these words:

“There are two things which I would ask of Heaven: that you may be delivered with small pain, and that your child may surely be a boy. Girls are such trouble, fair strength is denied to them. Therefore (may Heaven refuse the thought) if chance should cause your child to be a girl, (gods pardon me for having said the word!) we must agree to have her put to death.”

And all the time he spoke such dreaded words, their faces were completely bathed in tears; not only hers but also his while he forced on her that unnatural command.....

Soon, when her pains gave birth, the mother knew her infant was a girl (the father had no knowledge of it, as he was not there). Intending to deceive, the mother said, “Feed the dear boy.” All things had favoured her deceit—no one except the trusted nurse, knew of it.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9, 669-684, 704 -706 (adapted)

- **Coming of age rituals**

- The toga of manhood (toga virilis)**

When a boy was around fifteen years old, he came of age. He dedicated to the household gods his boyhood toga (the toga praetexta) with its purple border along with the bulla, a lucky charm he had worn around his neck since infancy. He put on a plain white toga (the toga virilis) and was then escorted by his family and friends to the forum where he was formally registered as a citizen. His name was recorded on the roll of his family's tribe. After a sacrifice was offered at the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, the rest of the day was devoted to celebrations and a banquet.

Bulla

Roman boys, both rich and poor, would have been given a bulla, a special amulet to protect them until they safely reached adulthood. It is unclear when the child would have first received it but it is possible that it could have been as early as the dies lustricus (around 9 days after birth) to mark the child's entry into the family.*

Roman boy wearing a bulla

A rich child may have had a bulla made of gold and a poor child of leather or a less precious but still shiny material. These tokens are not found buried with children who died prematurely so we can assume that the bulla would be passed on to the next born child with the hope that it might be more effective this time.

When a boy reached adulthood, he would take off his bulla and lay it aside in a rite of passage that symbolised his safe passing into adulthood. However, it might still be worn after that point on certain special occasions. Along with the toga praetexta, it was symbolic of youth.

The bulla was only for boys. Girls would wear a lunula (a crescent moon-shaped pendant), to similarly ward off evil spirits. It would be dedicated along with the rest of her childhood toys to the goddess Venus on the eve of her wedding day.



Gold Bulla



- **Attitudes towards children**

Bringing up a child properly

A careful upbringing is of great importance: for our minds are easily formed in our youth, but it is a harder thing to cure bad habits in later life.

The choice of a well-natured tutor goes a long way because his manners will pass to the child. Nothing breeds anger more than a soft education without discipline. Seldom does a mother's or schoolmaster's little darling come to any good but rather produces one who is unable to deal with the harsh realities of life.

Check a child's tendency to angry outbursts but not to an extent that you take away his personality. Find a middle way between unlimited freedom which leads to over-confidence, and harshness which wears him down. Praise gives a child courage and confidence – but too much praise makes him insolent and bad-tempered. Therefore, learn when to spur him on and when to hold him back.

Don't allow him to keep begging for things: if he does, let him go without until he is quiet in order to show him that nothing is gained by whining. Let him be pleased when he has done well, but without becoming over-excited in case he develops an over-inflated opinion of himself. Allow a certain amount of leisure but never idleness or sloth.

Education

- Girls' and boys' education

Image of writing materials from a wall painting in Pompeii



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pompei_-_House_of_Julia_Felix_-_MAN.jpg

- In schools, pupils generally wrote with a pointed stylus on wooden tablets coated with a thin film of wax, seen here on the right.
- Several tablets could be strung together with strips of leather to form a notebook.
- Older pupils wrote on papyrus rolls with a quill and ink which was stored in an inkwell, seen here on the left.

- Different stages

- A carving showing a school scene



<https://www.alamy.com/6388-roman-school-teacher-seated-in-centre-and-pupils-stone-relief>

- This is a scene from a secondary school.
- The figure second from the left is the teacher.
- The two pupils holding papyrus scrolls, from which they are reading, sit on high backed chairs.
- The figure standing behind the pupils holding a book of wax tablets may either be (i) a slave wearing a tunic or (ii) a pupil who has arrived late.

Quintilian outlines the ideal curriculum at the Grammaticus' school

As soon as the boy has learned to read and write without difficulty, it is the turn for the teacher of literature. My words apply equally to Greek and Latin masters, though I prefer that a start should be made with a Greek: in either case the method is the same. There are two important things; the art of speaking correctly and the interpretation of the poets but there is more beneath the surface than meets the eye.

Nor is it sufficient to have read the poets only; every kind of writer must be carefully studied, not merely for the subject matter, but for the vocabulary; for words often acquire authority from their use by a particular author. Nor can such training be regarded as complete if it stops short of music, for the teacher of literature has to speak of metre and rhythm: nor again if he is ignorant of astronomy can he understand the poets; for they frequently give their indications of time by reference to the rising and setting of the stars.

Ignorance of philosophy is an equal drawback, since there are numerous passages in almost every poem based on the most intricate questions of natural philosophy, while among the Greeks we have Empedocles and among our own poets Varro and Lucretius, all of whom have expounded their philosophies in verse.

No small powers of eloquence also are required to enable the teacher to speak appropriately and fluently on the various points which have just been mentioned. For this reason, those who criticise the art of teaching literature as trivial and lacking in substance put themselves out of court. Unless the foundations of oratory are well and truly laid by the teaching of literature, the superstructure will collapse.

Horace describes how his father chose the best school for him

The reason for these things was my father, who, though a poor man with a poor little farm, did not want to send me to Flavius' school, where great big boys, born from great big centurions, used to go, dangling satchels and writing tablet on the left shoulder, duly bringing eight copper coins each on the Ides: but he dared to take his boy to Rome, to be taught the sort of skills which any knight and even a senator would teach his descendants. If, as happens in a large population, anyone had seen my clothes and slaves following me, he would believe that those funds were provided for me from an ancestral estate. He himself was there among all the teachers as a most incorruptible guardian for me. What more can I say? He kept me pure, which is the first honour of virtue, not only from every foul deed, but also from every foul slander; and he was not afraid that someone might treat it as a fault on his part if one day I might aim at small wages as an auctioneer or, as he himself was, a tax collector; and neither would I have complained: on the contrary, because of this now praise and even greater thanks is owed to him from me.

The Greek writer Plutarch commends Cato for himself choosing to be his son's teacher.

After the birth of his son, no business could be so urgent, except government business, as to prevent him from being present when his wife bathed and swaddled the babe. And the mother nursed the child herself.....

As soon as the boy showed signs of understanding, his father took him under his own charge and taught him to read, although he had an accomplished slave, Chilo by name, who was a school-teacher and taught many boys. Still, Cato thought it not right, as he tells us himself, that his son should be scolded by a slave or have his ears tweaked when he was slow to learn, still less that he should be indebted to his slave for such a priceless thing as education. He was therefore himself not only the boys' reading-teacher, but his tutor in law, and his athletic trainer, and he taught his son not only to throw the javelin and fight in armour and ride a horse but also to box, to endure heat and cold, and to swim strongly through the currents and billows of the Tiber. Cato wrote out with his own hand his book, the History of Rome, in large letters so that his son might have an opportunity in his own home to become familiar with his country's ancient customs and traditions. He declares that his son's presence put him on his guard against using indecent language just as much as if he were in the presence of the Vestal Virgins,

Juvenal complains about the demands put upon a schoolteacher – for little reward.

When do Celadus and Palaemon, learned as they are, ever get the rewards their hard work deserves? Whatever the amount (and it's less than a rhetor gets), the pupil's greedy *paedagogus* takes his cut – as does the one who hands the money over! Give into them, Palaemon, and accept that a chunk of your pay will disappear, just as a pedlar accepts a loss when he's haggling the price of a rug or snow-white winter quilt. But make sure you get some reward for sitting up beyond midnight: no blacksmith or one who cards wool would work such hours..... Make sure you get something for breathing in the stink of oil lamps (as many as the boys you teach!) whose black soot completely discolours your copy of Horace and whose dirty grime clings to your copy of Virgil. Even so, it's rare to get paid without appealing to the court. And parents set impossible rules for you, their boy's schoolmaster, demanding you should unfailingly know all the rules of grammar, should memorise histories and memorise all the poets perfectly so that if you happen to be asked a question while on the way to the baths, you can immediately say who Anchises' nurse was, the name of Anchemolus's stepmother - and where she was born! -, how many years Acestes lived and how many jars of Sicilian wine he gave to the Trojans. Parents demand that you shape the tender characters of their sons as if moulding faces from wax; you'll be ordered to act like a father to that crowd, forbidding them to get into trouble or develop bad habits – no easy task! 'But that's your job,' the parents say and when the end of the year comes, you'll get for twelve months' work the same amount of money a driver gets for winning a single race in the Circus.

- **Pupils' experience**

What have you to do with us, wicked schoolmaster, hated by boys and girls alike? The crested cockerels have not yet broken the silence and you are already thundering on with your cruel continuous roaring and beatings. Bronze echoes just as loudly when the anvil is struck as you, and the shouting rages more gently in the amphitheatre when the supporters cheer on the winning gladiator. We, the neighbours, do not ask to sleep all night. It is a small matter to stay awake, but serious to stay awake all night. Dismiss your pupils. Are you willing to receive as much to be quiet, chatterbox, as you do to shout?

Martial, Epigrams 9.68

- In this poem Martial exaggerates the noise from a teacher in a nearby school.
- He compares the noise to workmen hammering metal or people shouting in the amphitheatre.
- Schools did not have permanent buildings so classes were often held outside.
- School started early and lasted for about six hours

Incentives for learning

While smiling teachers often give children biscuits to try and tempt them to learn their alphabet...

Horace Satires 1.1.25-26

Marcus Verrius Flaccus, a freedman, gained special fame by his method of teaching. For to stimulate the efforts of his pupils, he used to make them compete against one another, not only setting the subject on which they were to write, but also offering a prize for the author of the best work. This was some old book, either beautiful or rare.

Suetonius, On Grammarians.17 (adapted)

Although corporal punishment was common in schools, Quintilian expresses his disapproval of this practice.

I disapprove of flogging, although it is the regular custom. Firstly, it is a disgraceful form of punishment and certainly an insult. Secondly if a boy is so insensible to instruction that scolding him is useless, he will merely become hardened to blows.

Quintilian, The elements of oratory 1.3.13 (adapted)