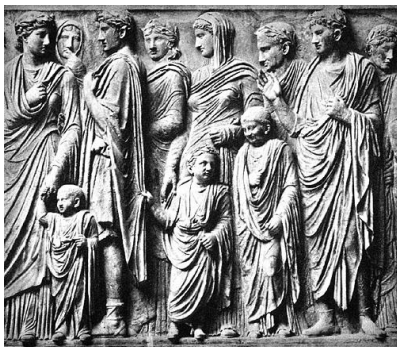


The Roman child



He is usually born in the home of his parents. During the birth, the mother is assisted by other experienced women (neighbours or relatives). From birth the newborn is subjected to paternal power. If it is a girl and her father agrees to keep her, the latter orders that the family feeds the baby. If it is a boy, he is placed on the ground in front of his father who must then take him in his arms, which means he recognizes him as his son who will succeed him in the charge of family's head. Note that under the Roman Republic, there was no declaration of birth with the official authorities. Birth registration for a legitimate child began during the reign of Emperor Augustus. From Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the father had 30 days to register the birth of his child, this decision was applicable to all legitimate children or not.

If the father is indifferent to the child, the child is rejected from the family. He is then exposed on the public road, well he will survive only a few hours for hunger, cold and stray animals will quickly overcome him. This frequently happens for children with malformations, children from poor families and those born on a bad day. Concerning the latter, the historian Svetone reports that on the death of Germanicus, a Roman general much loved by the Romans, numerous newborns were abandoned in the streets. Some were taken in by families without children. Adoption was a common practice in Rome where it is considered that parentage is not necessarily biological but depends solely on the family's head decision. Other children will be taken care of by slave traders who will sell them once they are able to work.



Official entry into the family

As infant mortality is high, many children die within days after birth. Well the child official entry into the family is often delayed. For girls it will be 8 days and 9 for boys. During the day of purification ceremony, the newborn will get his first name. This ceremony takes place in front of the domestic altar: the lararia where family's gods sit. Most often a relative passes a with saliva wet finger on the forehead and lips of the baby. A bulla is hung around his neck: it is a kind of bag containing amulets to protect the child. In the free men families, this bulla was gold but in the free and poor families, it was leather. This bulla will be worn up to the age of 17 when the boy will put on the robe pretext and until marriage for girls (marriage was often very early from the age of 12).

Divine protection, feeding and child cares

Having been accepted by his father, the baby is placed under the protection of a multitude of divinities. To do this, the custom was following: during the first days after the birth, three men used to carry a pestle for the first, a broom for the second and an axe for the third. doing this would protect the house in a way to repel the evil forces. To frighten the evil spirits the baby was offered noisy toys like rattles.



At the age of 3 the baby is weaned. Breastfeeding is entrusted to the mother or to a nurse carefully chosen to avoid contaminating the newborn. Gradually the diet will be modified to transform the soft body of the baby into a more structured body. The purpose was to build a body suitable for physical activity that awaits the future soldier or gestation and childbirth without problems for the girls. By a strict diet the overweight is avoided: for the Romans this denotes a certain dullness. As soon as the infant has been recognized by his father, he is bathed and wrapped. The purpose of this operation is to shape the body of the child. Often the father attends the daily bath that is cold. The mother or nurse takes advantage of the opportunity to shape the body while the bones are still soft. The head, jaws and buttocks are massaged to bring them closer to aesthetic standards. The swaddling tries to make the bones and limbs stiff. The body is enclosed in strips large enough not to damage the skin. But strips are tightened in places where parents want it to be finer: the wrists, the elbows, the knees and the hips. This type of swaddling lasts about two months. Then the limbs are gradually released. We always start with the right arm so that the child becomes accustomed to using it and thus becomes right-handed because at Romans, everything on the left is bad luck. Then after a few weeks we release the left arm is release, then the feet and finally the rest of the body.