

Golden, Mark. *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. Pp. xix, 268. Figures, notes, bibliography. \$28.95.

Of the many books that have recently appeared dealing with Greek life and society, one of the most significant is *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*. As the latest title in the reputable Ancient Society and History Series by Johns Hopkins University Press, the book ably fills a lacuna in the understanding of a significant facet of ancient culture. Mark Golden provides an authoritative treatment of the role of children and the relationships they engendered in the Greek world. As the title indicates, the volume is concerned with only a segment of antiquity—from 500 to 300 B.C. Because a good deal of the evidence from this period is derived from the city-state of Athens, the focus is on Athens alone. However much this city may have dominated politics and culture during the classical period, it must be remembered that Athens was not necessarily the typical Greek *polis*, and the position of Athenian children and societal attitudes towards children may not reflect the reality of the rest of Greece.

The literary sources that provide the primary information for the study of children in ancient Athens are notoriously problematic, and in his short but important preface, Golden alerts his readers to the difficulties such sources impose: Attic comedy parodies and often exaggerates the human condition; characters from tragedy rarely belong to everyday life; forensic speeches delivered in Athenian law courts are not always factually reliable; and several significant authors such as Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon are writing from a particular bias. Despite those difficulties, Golden uses his sources carefully and judiciously. Indeed, one of the many merits of the book is that the ancient testimonia are weighed and critically evaluated. Another significant category of information on Athenian children is artistic representation. Vase painting and

sculpture provide important depictions of children in a variety of roles. Regrettably, there are too few illustrations in the text from the available corpus; however, additional illustrative material is abundantly cited.

The socialization process of children from birth to maturity was complex. In seven chapters, Golden manages the subject well by exploring the different interactions of children and adults in Athenian society. The characteristics of children are treated in the first chapter. Although the ancient sources are inconsistent in how they viewed children, in antiquity the distinguishing attributes of childhood were those that were most distinctive from adult qualities. As was the case with other subordinate groups in Athenian society (such as women and slaves), children were defined as being *unlike* adults, particularly adult males. Because distinctions between children and adults were of interest to ancient authors, behavioral differences between girls and boys received little attention. Given the fact that the disparity between behavioral characteristics of men and women were keenly noted by the same ancient sources, it is striking that the germ of sexual inequality cannot be traced more conclusively to childhood characteristics. However, sexual differences are more readily seen in the roles boys and girls fulfilled not only in the household but in the community as well. In his second and third chapters, Golden maintains that children participated more actively in the life of the community than had been previously thought. Even though boys were groomed at an early age to interact more directly in communal life, girls were permitted a rich involvement in cult ritual which helped prepare them for their socially sanctioned roles within the home. Children, of course, played, and the kinds of games that supervising adults encouraged were games that prepared children for their designated places in the adult life of the community. Here, too, different types of play were appropriate to sex roles. Boys were expected to engage in games that tested their mettle and prepared them for warfare and their roles as defenders of the *polis*. Girls, on the other hand, were encouraged to cultivate those latent qualities that would one day make them suitable wives and mothers.

It is the play life of Athenian children that will be of most interest to enthusiasts of ancient sport. Like children everywhere, Athenian youths invented games that were many and varied. Toys that were used in play and later dedicated to protective divinities included dolls, cymbals, rattles, tops, balls, clay animals, and the ubiquitous knucklebones (*astragoloi*). Games typically engaged in by boys were contests of strength, games involving flight and pursuit including one called *drapetinda* ("runaway slave"), blood sports (cock fighting was a great favorite), and guessing games. Adult commentators remark that such pursuits prepared boys for their roles as soldiers and also instilled an appreciation for proper social relationships. Physical training was part of the school regimen for boys which began at the age of six or seven. Exercise and practice in the palaestrae and gymnasia of Athens could result in athletic competition in local festivals such as the Greater Panathenaea as well as competition at the four major Panhellenic sites of Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, and Isthmia. In his discussion of boys' associations with their playmates,

Golden brings up the question of the nature and extent of homosexuality in Athens, citing that heterosexual activity for male youths before marriage was limited to female slaves and prostitutes because of the established social order in the city. Certain benefits that were derived from homoerotic relationships included social and political advantages from associations with well-placed partners. Social restrictions, for the most part, kept girls apart from boys outside the home; however, sisters and brothers played together inside the confines of the house. Unfortunately, the evidence is slight for the play activity of girls. Vase painting scenes suggest that girls played ball, received dance instruction, and perhaps engaged in swimming races. Literary sources attest that other games that girls enjoyed reinforced sex roles, such as playing with dolls which mimicked the nurturing aspects of motherhood. Athletic competition for girls was limited to running races held in connection with the Arkteia, the quadrennial festival devoted to Artemis of Brauron, a competition that has links with female initiation rites and prenuptial rituals.

In the next three chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) Golden addresses the important issues of interpersonal relationships within the household—a subject that has never been adequately treated in the scholarly literature. The complexity of various types of relationships that occurred in the home is considered from three different points of view: relationships within the nuclear family, bonds created in the extended family, and contacts forged with outsiders who enter into the family unit. In a careful analysis of the evidence, Golden re-evaluates the commonly held supposition that the emotional commitment of parents was weakened by the high mortality rate of children. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that emotional bonds between children and parents were especially strong. That parents expressed affection and valued children does not belie the practice of the exposure of newborns which Golden forcefully argues was undertaken by the ancient Greeks, a question that is still heatedly debated by scholars. Regarding the effect that the presence of household slaves had on the rearing of children, Golden rightly points out that the lack of evidence makes it difficult to conclude whether the presence of slaves in Athenian households had negative effects on children. Golden concludes that intensified violence and brutality towards slaves was a product of the need for a grown child to integrate himself more successfully in a community that felt contempt for slaves; although this conclusion is attractive, it remains speculative. The last chapter (Chapter 7), which deals with the size of dowries as evidenced in New Comedy, takes the reader a little far afield from the expressed topic of the book, although the size of dowries certainly had an impact on household economics and familial relations.

Golden is, of course, the acknowledged authority on childhood in classical Athens. His dissertation and many subsequent articles on issues connected with children are highly regarded for their scholarship. The present book is no exception. The wealth of documentation will be of value to scholars who will also appreciate Golden's critical use of the evidence and creative approach to problems. A sophisticated lay audience might admire the carefully reasoned arguments, but the volume goes beyond the expertise of the general reader.

However, any reader will be treated to Golden's delightful humor, and the joke about the shoes of Mother Theresa and Imelda Marcos (pp. 47-48) is not to be missed.

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