

Abstracts

Patria potestas and the stereotype of the Roman family
Richard Saller, *University of Chicago*

The Roman family in the conventional view was a highly authoritarian, extended patriarchal unit. This view, based on Roman law, has influenced political and social thought in the western tradition up to the present. Jean Bodin used the Roman father's nearly absolute legal powers in the family to argue that absolute sovereignty was ancient and natural. Today some historians of the family point to those legal powers to explain divergent patterns of family life in northern and southern Europe after the mediaeval reception of Roman law in the latter area. Yet, in spite of its influence, this legalistic view of the family is likely to be false in several respects. On account of the age structure of the Roman family the extended patriarchal household must have been unusual. Furthermore, the non-legal evidence suggests that the father's relationship with his children was not shaped primarily by the legal rules. Consequently, the tensions in the father-son relationship may not have been the result of Roman law, as often suggested, so much as of the natural economic pressures on families depending on limited inherited resources in an agrarian society.

'The sucking child': Adult attitudes to child care in the first year of life in seventeenth-century England
Patricia Crawford, *University of Western Australia*

Advice books to parents and autobiographies are examined for information on adult attitudes to infants. In opposition to the widely held view that seventeenth-century parents were neglectful and cruel, it is agreed that

many parents were, in fact, deeply concerned about the welfare of their children and recognised that the nature and quality of their care were critical for their child's successful development. Advisers were agreed that the daily care of babies was the responsibility of women. On the other hand, ultimate authority was seen as lying with the father and there was much criticism of the methods of maternal child care. This gender bias in much of the surviving literature, it is suggested, has been overlooked by those historians who have adduced low standards of child care in the seventeenth century.

'Vata, derf i aufstehn?': Childhood experiences in Viennese working-class families around 1900

Reinhard Sieder, *Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, University of Vienna*

Proletarian childhood in Vienna round 1900, reconstructed on the basis of oral testimonies, was primarily shaped by the children's involvement in a household economy of scarcity and overcrowded housing conditions. This created situations in which children learnt to adapt to a materially based and ideologically enhanced system of hegemony and subordination and to the gender specific roles of working-class wife and husband. The proletarian methods of upbringing reflected the work-place experience of the parents and were reinforced by the social control exerted by the daily interaction with neighbours, with the children spending much time out of doors because of the overcrowding of their homes. Strong body taboos helped to stabilise the hierarchical order although it was a common experience for children and parents to share the same bed. The high degree to which working-class children were repressed in their families and the resulting tensions strengthened children's readiness to become involved with informal child and youth gangs and with the youth groups of workers' parties and other organisations.

Comparative household morphology of stem, joint and nuclear household systems: Norway, China and the United States

James Lee and Jon Gjerde, *California Institute of Technology*

In almost every society, the household is a fundamental social unit, the first level of aggregation on the social map above the individual. Households function as units of production, distribution, transmission, consumption, reproduction, and residence. They serve as the focus of

fundamental social values. Almost everywhere it is because of their commitment to *family* and *home* that most people marry, bear children, work, accumulate, transmit, and inherit cultural and material resources. In this brief essay we offer some new insights to the comparative history of these activities and social norms by developing a new and simple method of household classification, one that in conjunction with the current Henry–Laslett–Hammel method will allow us to differentiate the households produced by any human society.

Prenuptial pregnancy in a rural area of Devonshire in the mid-nineteenth century: Colyton, 1851–1881

Jean Robin, *Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure*

This paper arises from a continuing larger study of Colyton concerned with record linkage of households and of individuals through the use of the national censuses, parish and other vital registers, Electoral Rolls based on property qualifications, Poor Law records and other sources. The aspect considered here is that of prenuptial pregnancy. Evidence from records of marriages and baptisms is used to show that disregard for the morality which demanded that sexual intercourse should not take place before marriage was widespread, and the social and economic implications of prenuptial pregnancy within different sections of the community are discussed.

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