S. W. Flynn, ed., *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*. Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East. Abingdon: Routledge, 2019. 240 pp.
ISBN: 9781138543768. £96.

This slim volume, published in the series Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East, serves as a useful and succinct introduction to an ever-burgeoning field of the history of childhood in antiquity. It contains ten articles ranging from biblical and ancient Near Eastern vows (involving birth and sacrifice) to Mary of the earliest infancy gospel in contemporary adolescent perspectives and is arranged in three thematic sections (Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East, Christian writings and the Greco-Roman world, and material culture).

In the foreword, the editor hails the inclusion of two "unique" (xi) contributions, one combining biological anthropology with forensic expertise (Susan Guise Sheridan) and the other "looking back at an ancient text from a more contemporary vantage point," focusing on the female child (Kieser) (xi). It is, however, worth noting the many interesting points that emerge from other contributions.

Analyzing narratives of parturition in Genesis, for instance, Claudia D. Bergmann notes that "the difficulties surrounding the births of important ancestors become worse and worse" (21), reflecting "the difficulties involving the birth of Israel itself" (22) and how both link with other important themes throughout the Hebrew Bible. The much-discussed issue of infant exposure in antiquity is approached by Bosworth from the parental side, asking why babies were abandoned in the first place and who might have "gathered" them up. To David A. Bosworth, stories like those of Moses (Exod 2) were

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/SLA/article-pdf/7/1/155/774616/sla.2023.7.1.155.pdf by guest on 29 May 2024

composed to highlight the birth pangs of the new Israel in an Egyptian, rather than Mesopotamian, context.[1] An impressive gallery of abandoned babies in biblical and Greek antiquity is recruited to reinforce Bosworth's conclusions that the main reasons for abandonment were illegitimate pregnancy, the newborn's sex (females were more likely to be abandoned than males), poverty, and prophecy. Whether such a survey further supports a conclusion elevating the biblical pronatal stand over the proexposure with the Greeks remains an open question.

Kristine Garroway explores the apparent discomfort of biblical narrators with "teenage daughters of marriageable age" (60), stemming from the paradox of the need to control but also to ensure reproduction through marriage, which can, in turn, result in maternal agency in socializing their own children. Paternal culpability is also at stake; thus, Jacob should have married Dinah rather than let her wander off (63). As Ben Sira remarked, a daughter is a dubious treasure that can easily turn into a perpetual liability (42.9–14), which is, as Garroway correctly observes, the reason why biblical narratives appear to focus on pubescent females.

Sharon Betworth dwells on the famous story of Herodias's daughter (commonly identified as Salome) in Mark 6.14–29, comparing it with female initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries as reflected in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The former is singled out on account of its negative portrayal of children (assuming that she was a child at that point), the latter because of Mark's need to "distinguish the practices and narratives of the early Jesus followers from those of the cult of Demeter and Kore" (78). This is an intriguing suggestion that could have benefited from examining comments made by Josephus, Mark's contemporary, who compares Judaism with the (Eleusinian) mysteries. The latter notes that one cements a bond between initiates and their goddess only during a definite period, while the other (Judaism) maintains a divine bond in perpetuity.[2]

John W. Martens focuses on the possibility of a ritual entry of children into the first-century churches that Paul founded. He questions whether baptism supplanted circumcision or complemented it. Paul himself does not offer a clear-cut, unambiguous answer. The presence of children in Pauline churches, a fact that cannot be ignored, and the necessity of inclusion resulted

1. For the precise opposite, see Hagith Sivan-Zlotnick, "Moses the Persian? Exodus 2, the 'Other,' and Biblical 'Mnemohistory,'" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 116 (2004): 189–205.

2. *C. Apion* 2.189–190; W. C. Van Unnik, "Flavius Josephus and the Mysteries," in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions*, ed. M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 244–79.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/SLA/article-pdf/7/1/155/774616/sla.2023.7.1.155.pdf by guest on 29 May 2024

in "baptism for all" (103). But this too may have taken various forms, one, at least in Galatia, in the shade of the Mother Goddess (Cybele). Did the cancellation of circumcision lead to "imagining the inclusion of all children through baptism?" (109). Perhaps, but this vision did not rectify the gender imbalance that Paul also espoused.

Wonderfully original is Christian Laes's article on accusations of sexual misbehavior in the Roman classroom (first to fourth centuries). Studded with original citations, this invaluable article throws precious light on the perils of pedagogy lurking not only for boys but also for the few girls who were entrusted into the hands, or rather arms, of allegedly venerable wise men. Criticism had been voiced already concerning this tendency in the first century and later by both pagans and Jews and was ultimately joined by Christian censure. It would be interesting to balance this grim picture with Augustine's reflections on the benign role of the classroom and of teachers.

Julie Faith Parker plunges into the topic of Judean pillar figurines (none reproduced) by appealing to "childist biblical interpretation" that puts, fair and square, children or rather childhood at the center of the investigation primarily by questioning scholarly biases. Accordingly, such views are undermined, and in their stead the viable potential of such figurines to act as toys, as well as adult instruments, is explored by comparison with the ubiquitous Barbie. This intuition is well supported by comparable analysis of artifacts of child's play in Roman context.[3]

The longest article in this collection (by Sheridan) synthesizes the results of analysis of some 15,000 bones and fragments deposited in a crypt of a well-known Jerusalemite site, the monastic church of St. Stephen. These belonged to some 167–250 individuals (109 adults and 58 children at least). This enormous trove has already provided fascinating insights into monastic material culture, pilgrimage, and children. There are many caveats that should not be ignored and are duly enumerated. It is, for example, impossible to quantify the number of females among the remains (159). The crypt was apparently used for burial for nearly 200 years, roughly between the fifth to seventh centuries (179). The assumption that children were buried with monks (171) is particularly intriguing, but how do we determine from bones the vocation of the adults buried there? Moreover, the age of the children

3. Fanny Dolansky, "Roman Girls and Boys at Play: Realities and Representations," in *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Christian Laes and Ville Vualtano (New York: Routledge, 2017), 116–36.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/SLA/article-pdf/7/1/155/774616/sla.2023.7.1.155.pdf by guest on 29 May 2024

buried (and there were apparently girls among them [171]) ranges from infancy to adolescence. Most died before age ten, likely during weaning, a hypothesis supported by other quantitative studies that place the highest child mortality rate before age five. The presence of an astonishing number of children is accounted for by referring to distinct categories of monastic affiliation: oblates, students, patients, orphans, or neighbors, the last two favored by Sheridan. Yet literary evidence that directly links the presence of children in such groups with the St. Stephen cult, sanctuary, or cemetery is all but absent. Even the presence of live children in late ancient Jerusalem is poorly attested, and it cannot be linked with the cult of St. Stephen. The most important (and likely unique) reference to children in Christianized Jerusalem of the fourth century comes from the pilgrimage diary of Egeria (ca. 380 CE). Referring to Palm Sunday, Egeria notes that "all the children in the neighborhood, even those who are too young to walk, are carried by their parents on their shoulders, all of them bearing branches, some of palms and some of olives, and thus the bishop is escorted in the same manner as the Lord of old."[4] The association of children and palms had been also noted by the pilgrim from Bordeaux some half a century before Egeria: "Going along to Jerusalem to the gate which is toward the east as you go up unto the Mount of Olives, there is a valley which is called Jehosaphat on the left-hand side where there are vines. There is also a rock where Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ. But on the right-hand side there is a palm tree whose branches children carried and laid down when Christ was coming."[5] I have no doubt that this unique Jerusalemite-Christian tradition is borrowed from the Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) when children are given specific instruction on how to wave a palm frond.[6]

As a coda or afterword, perhaps better placed side by side with Parker's contribution, Doris M. Kieser employs the figure of Mary in the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James as a mirror of contemporary adolescent sexuality for "scrutinizing the scrutiny" of pubescent femininity. The presentation of Mary in Protoevangelium of James at three different stages of maturity renders her relevant "in current dialogues about adolescent females and sexuality, purity and virginity, menstruation and parturition" (204). Perhaps

4. Egeria, *Itinerarium Egeriae* 66, in *The Pilgrimage of Etheria*, trans. McLure and C. L. Feltoe (London, 1919).

5. Translation from Andrew Jacobs, http://andrewjacobs.org/translations/bordeaux.html.

6. Hagith Sivan, *Jewish Childhood in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 115–16.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/SLA/article-pdf/7/1/155/774616/sla.2023.7.1.155.pdf by guest on 29 May 2024

too tall an order. No fault, however, is to be found in the call (209) to the "average twenty-first century female" "to take issue with the notion of purity as a determiner of moral sexual status." And indeed of many other entrenched constructs of the "second sex."

Hagith Sivan
Leawood, Kansas, and Tel Aviv, Israel

Michele Renee Salzman, *The Falls of Rome: Crises, Resilience, and Resurgence in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 462 pp. ISBN: 9781107111424. $39.99, £29.99.

Michelle Salzman has written an important book. The title is misleading in some ways; for a start, "the falls of Rome" refers to Rome as a city, not to the Roman Empire, as many might expect. (I will come back to two other ways I do not quite agree with the title later.) But what she argues, and she is wholly convincing, is that the major crises in Rome's late antique history were in each case rather less serious than many historians have supposed. The sieges and/or sacks of Rome in 410, 455, and 472, and several during the disaster of the Gothic war between 537 and 550, were not necessarily fatal; in each case they offered challenges for the senatorial aristocracy, who for a long time were largely Rome-based, to rebuild and reconstruct, which senators took up with some commitment. And she demonstrates her point, with the appropriate nuances in each case, very successfully.

Salzman starts with the civil war of 312, which wasn't really a crisis for Rome anyway, as Constantine's battle was outside the city; her fourth-century chapter is in effect scene-setting for the structures of late antique senatorial power after 400. But the Visigothic sack of Rome in 410 and the more serious pillaging by the Vandals in 455 are effectively downplayed; Rome's resilience, and that of its aristocratic elite, is here made fully clear. Salzman is inclined to think that the civil war of 472, which led to a battle on the Palatine hill, was rather more serious; here the evidence is sketchy, and I was not fully convinced, but it does not matter that much; her concern is once again to show how the still-resilient senatorial aristocracy rose to the occasion and repaired the city, as they had done before—and indeed the next two generations, under Odoacer and Theodoric, showed both a senatorial and a Roman resurgence (her second major resurgence, after that of

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/SLA/article-pdf/7/1/155/774616/sla.2023.7.1.155.pdf by guest on 29 May 2024