

GROWING UP FATHERLESS
IN ANTIQUITY

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 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

*The demographic background**Walter Scheidel*

The severe mortality regime of the ancient world caused many minors to lose their fathers. In Classical Athens men attained legal maturity at the age of eighteen while women commonly married in their mid-teens and passed under the control of their husbands.¹ In Roman society, males entered legal adulthood at the age of fourteen and assumed unqualified competence at twenty-five.² Women were considered mature at twelve and often appear to have begun marrying in their late teens.³ In Roman Egypt men started paying poll tax at fourteen and the majority of women found husbands in their mid-to-late teens.⁴ According to the Old Testament, Jewish men became liable to conscription and taxation at the age of twenty, whereas the later rabbinic tradition set the age of majority at twelve years for women and thirteen years for men.⁵ Under these circumstances the loss of fathers during the first fifteen to twenty years of life mattered most and merits our attention here.

The average scale of loss was a function both of the overall age structure of the population and of male marriage practices. With the help of a computer simulation of the Roman kinship universe, Richard Saller established the basic parameters.⁶ In his own words, this exercise “generates a model population by simulating the basic events of birth, death and marriage, month by month, in accordance with the age-specific probabilities of those events as established by the demographic parameters.”⁷ Saller devised three different scenarios to capture the probable range of life experiences in Roman society. The default model, labeled “Ordinary,” aims to represent the general population by positing a mean age of first marriage of twenty

¹ E.g. Garland 1990: 180, 211; Pomeroy 1997: 23; 196, n. 10.

² E.g. Saller 1994: 185, 188; Gardner 1998: 146–8. ³ Saller 1994: 25–41, 185. See also below.

⁴ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 27, 113. ⁵ Num. 1:2–3; Exod. 30:13–14; *Niddah* 5.6.

⁶ Saller 1994: 43–69, superseding Saller 1987. His model was generated by the CAMSIM program developed by James Smith.

⁷ Saller 1994: 44.

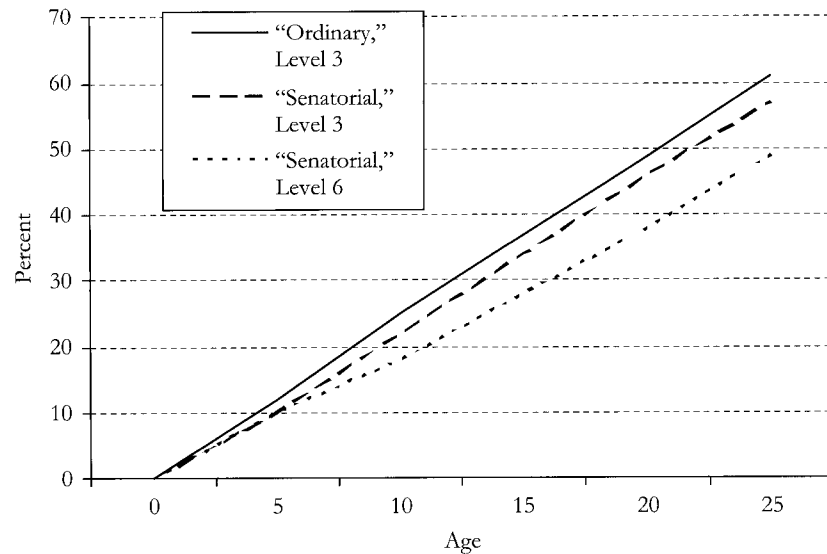


Figure 1 Proportion of fatherless individuals according to different scenarios of paternal marriage age and life expectancy (source: Saller 1994: 48–65).

years for women and thirty years for men, and an age structure consistent with a standard model life table based on a mean female life expectancy at birth of twenty-five years. The other two (“Senatorial”) options envision marriage at younger ages as documented for elite circles, with means of fifteen years for women and twenty-five years for men, and a mean life expectancy at birth of either twenty-five or thirty-two and a half years, to allow for the (arguably remote) possibility of significantly lower elite mortality.⁸

In terms of the average risk of losing one’s father, these three scenarios differ to a limited degree but ultimately generate fairly similar outcomes (Fig. 1). Depending on our choice of demographic conditions, between 28 and 37 percent of all individuals would have lost their fathers by age fifteen, and between 49 and 61 percent by age twenty-five. Thus, broadly speaking, about one-third of all Romans would have lost their fathers before they attained maturity (for men) or were married (for women). Closer to four in

ten male Athenians became fatherless before they entered the *ephēbeia*, and over half of Romans did so prior to the *aetas perfecta* of twenty-five, the age of legal majority at which time one had complete freedom from curatorial oversight.⁹

These reconstructions critically depend on two variables, male age at first marriage and age-specific mortality levels. This raises the question of whether these starting assumptions are sufficiently well established to support these models, and to what extent historically plausible modifications might alter the predicted outcomes.

In the most general terms, as the annual odds of death gradually increase with age from the mid-teens onwards, delays in male marriage raise the proportion of minors who grow up fatherless. With regard to classical Greek society, late male marriage – around age thirty – seems largely uncontroversial.¹⁰ By contrast, Saller’s thesis of relatively late first marriage among Roman men has recently been challenged by Arnold Leis, William Percy, and Beert Verstraete.¹¹ They not only – correctly – emphasize that literary evidence for Roman aristocratic marriage customs suggests lower male marriage ages even than Saller’s “Senatorial” model, of closer to twenty years rather than twenty-five, but less convincingly reject Saller’s reconstruction of non-elite marriage practices derived from shifts in commemorative preferences in funerary inscriptions from the western parts of the Roman Empire. Saller takes the age at which deceased men began to be primarily commemorated by wives rather than parents – of around thirty years in most samples – as indicative of the customary age of male first marriage.¹² As I have argued elsewhere, this reading is more readily consistent with the available data than is the rival claim of Leis, Percy, and Verstraete that commemorative shifts for men were largely determined by the presence or absence of living fathers.¹³ At the same time, however, it deserves notice that this finding of late male marriage is limited to those elements of the population that are represented in the epigraphic record, that is, predominantly “Romanized” and urban groups. Comparative evidence from late medieval Tuscany suggests that male marriage age in villages could be much lower than in cities: unfortunately, we have no way of ascertaining whether or not this was also true of Roman populations.¹⁴

This leaves us with an ambiguous result: while Saller’s projections are likely to approximate the experience of urban populations in the western Roman

⁸ Saller 1994: 45–6; Coale and Demeny 1983: 43–4 (Model West Levels 3 and 6 Females). For elite mortality, cf. Scheidel 1999.

⁹ See the Introduction to this volume for a brief overview of guardianship in the Greco-Roman world.

¹⁰ E.g. Pomeroy 1997: 23. ¹¹ Leis, Percy, and Verstraete 2003. ¹² Saller 1987 and 1994: 25–41.

¹³ Scheidel 2007b. ¹⁴ Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 203–11.

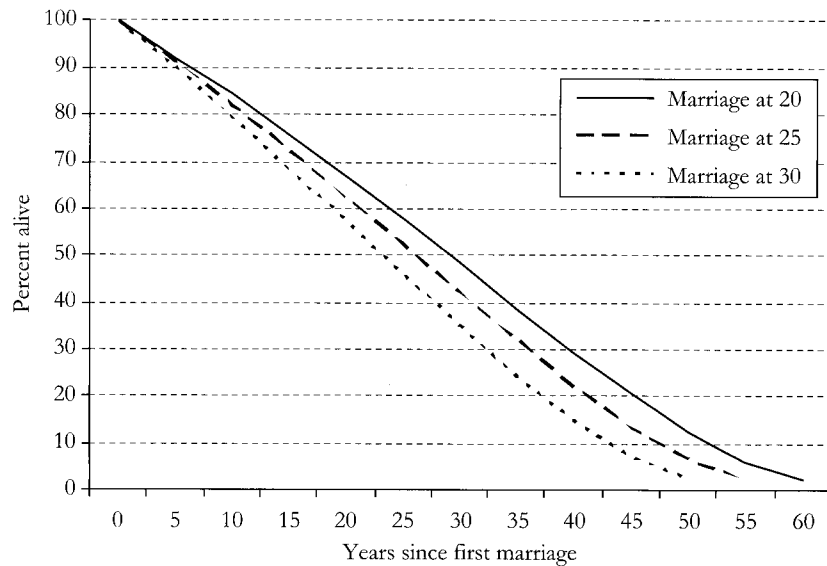


Figure 2 Probability of male survival according to paternal age at first marriage (Model West Level 3 Males) (source: Coale and Demeny 1983: 43).

Empire, we must allow for the possibility that thanks to male marriage at younger ages, the rural majority may conceivably have witnessed a lower incidence of fatherlessness. Even so, any such difference was bound to be modest (Fig. 2). For children born to fathers soon after their first marriage, the difference was fairly negligible: a person born to a thirty-year-old man was only 10 percent more likely to lose that father within the first fifteen years of life than someone born to a twenty-year-old man. The offspring of older men were more heavily affected by paternal marriage age: for instance, a person born fifteen years after the father's first marriage at age thirty faced a chance of losing that father within the first fifteen years of life that was one-third higher than for someone born fifteen years after a father's first marriage at age twenty (viz. 48 versus 36 percent). On average, however, the overall incidence of paternal loss among minors was only moderately sensitive to male age at first marriage.¹⁵

Mortality, the other principal variable, also merits further scrutiny. Saller's simulation is based on standard model life tables that rigidly

¹⁵ The impact of birth order is explored in greater detail below.

extrapolate from (known) low-to-medium-mortality regimes to (unknown) high-mortality regimes with scant regard for the peculiarities of archaic disease environments. Critics have charged that at very low levels of life expectancy – that is, at those levels that are relevant for ancient historians – these models may well exaggerate the scale of infant mortality and underestimate death rates among adolescents and young and middle-aged adults.¹⁶ If correct, the latter suggests that ancient rates of fatherlessness might have been (even) higher than predicted by standard model life tables. Once again, however, any reasonable amount of adjustment has only a limited effect on the overall likelihood of paternal loss. Woods' new alternative high-mortality life tables for southern European populations consistently posit higher age-specific mortality risks for teenagers and young and middle-aged adults than existing models: in his estimate, compared with Coale and Demeny's predictions, the odds of dying in a population with a mean life expectancy at birth of twenty-five years (for women) were higher by 39 percent from ages twenty to twenty-five, by 44 percent from ages twenty-five to thirty, by 35 percent from ages thirty to thirty-five, by 30 percent from ages thirty-five to forty, by 25 percent from ages forty to fifty, and by 8 percent from ages fifty to fifty-five.¹⁷ In this scenario children born to men in their twenties, thirties, and forties – that is, the great majority of all children – would more often have lost their fathers as minors than previously thought.

The extent of this divergence is impossible to quantify in detail without rerunning the entire simulation of the Roman kinship universe with new mortality rates. Nevertheless, the differences in the mean probability of parental death are relatively modest overall: in the case of women – while Woods' life table deals only with women, we may reckon with similarly sized differences for male life tables – the odds of dying in any given five-year period between ages twenty and fifty rise from 9 to 12 percent in the standard model to 12 to 15 percent in the new projections. Thus, the resultant rates of paternal loss were by no means dramatically higher than in existing reconstructions. Figure 3 illustrates the difference in the survival chances of mothers: the corresponding curves for fathers (which are unavailable for the Woods model) may assume a somewhat different shape but the average degree of divergence would presumably be similar.

¹⁶ See Coale and Demeny 1983: 3–36 for the data and methodology underlying conventional model life tables. For criticism, compare Woods 1993; Scheidel 2001c; Woods 2007.

¹⁷ Woods 2007: 379, table 2.

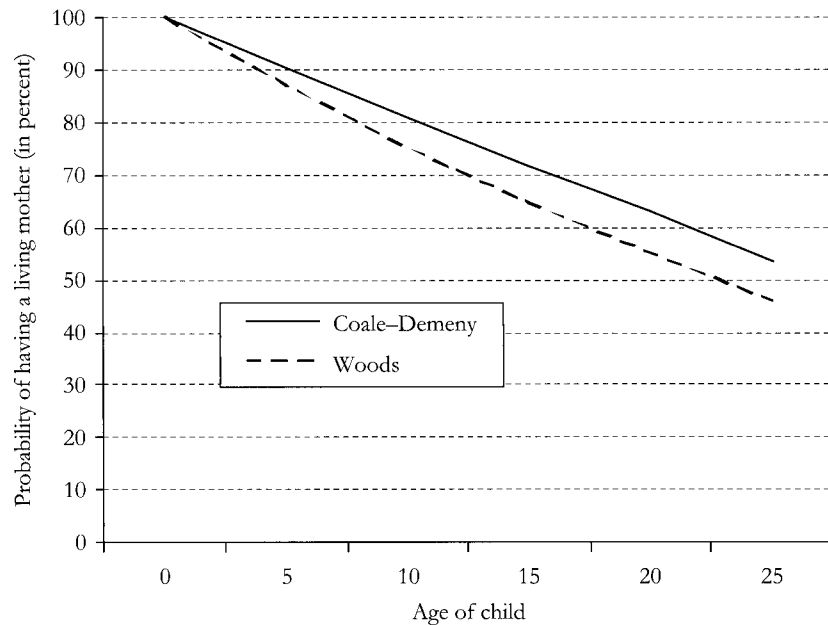


Figure 3 Probability of maternal survival for a child born to a woman aged thirty in a population with a mean life expectancy at birth of twenty-five years (source: Coale and Demeny 1983: 43; Woods 2007: 379).

All in all, we may conclude that Saller's projections are fairly robust in the sense that they are only mildly sensitive to historically plausible changes in our assumptions concerning male age at first marriage and adult mortality rates. In a further step, we may compare the average likelihood of the death of a father to that of the loss of other adult male relatives who were suitable guardians of minors, most notably paternal uncles and grandfathers. Figure 4 suggests that the presence or absence of a living father was the single most important indicator of the level of protection enjoyed by a minor. In the majority of cases the loss of a father could not have been offset by the appointment of a paternal uncle or grandfather as guardian simply because no such relatives were still alive and able to serve in this capacity.

At the same time, brothers who were old enough to serve as guardians (that is, twenty-five years old under Roman law) must have been rare except among children born to older fathers, but such children were disproportionately prone to losing their fathers as minors and even less likely to benefit from the presence of paternal uncles or grandfathers. In order to illustrate the probable

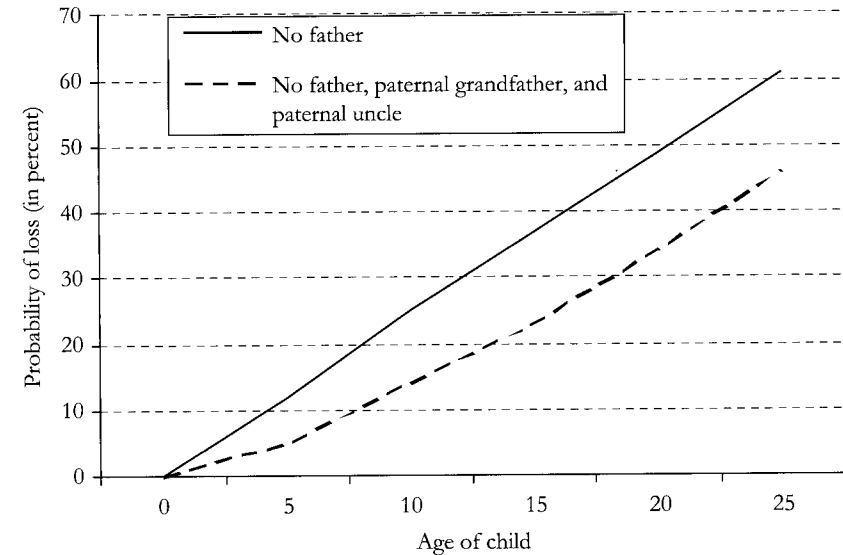


Figure 4 Probability of loss of father and of loss of father, paternal grandfather, and any paternal uncles ("Ordinary," Level 3) (source: Saller 1994: 52).

shifts in the identity of adult male caregivers depending on paternal age, I consider two bounding scenarios: the experience of a child born to a father aged twenty-five and that of a child born to a father twice as old.

Figures 5 and 6 show that a child born to a twenty-five-year-old man was relatively well buffered against risk. While he or she would not be able to draw on the services of an older brother – unless an older male had been adopted by one's own father – the risk of ending up without a mature male paternal relative who was suitable as a guardian was fairly low: only one in seven by age fourteen, and one in three by the less important threshold of age twenty-five. Conversely, the corresponding odds were much worse for a child born to a fifty-year-old man: close to one-half by age fourteen, and five in six by age twenty-five. In other words, risk was more than three times as high by age fourteen, and two-and-a-half times as high by age twenty-five.¹⁸

To what extent would the presence of adult brothers mitigate the deficit of other mature male relatives among children born to older men? This

¹⁸ Despite frequent paternal remarriage, children born to older men were also on average more likely to have older mothers and hence fewer mature maternal relatives who could serve as guardians: cf. Saller 1994: 52–3.

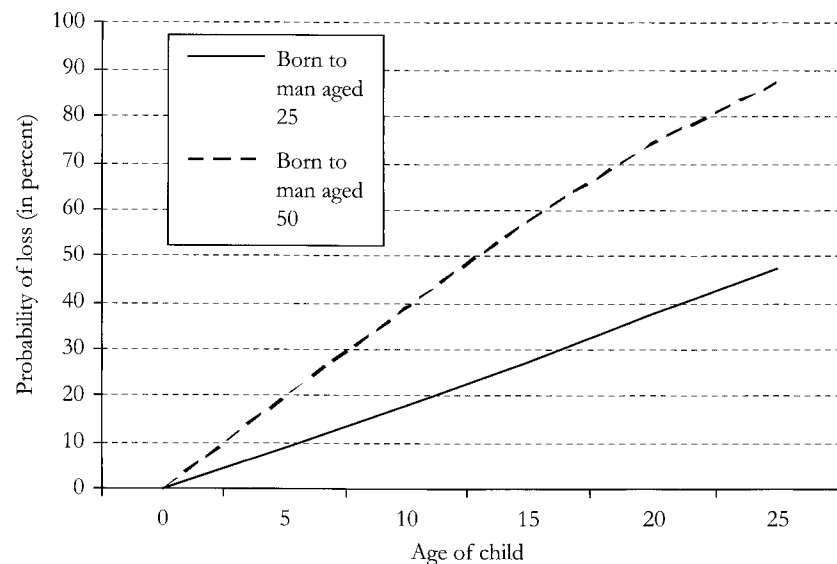


Figure 5 Mean risk of loss of father depending on paternal age at birth of child (source: Coale and Demeny 1983: 43).

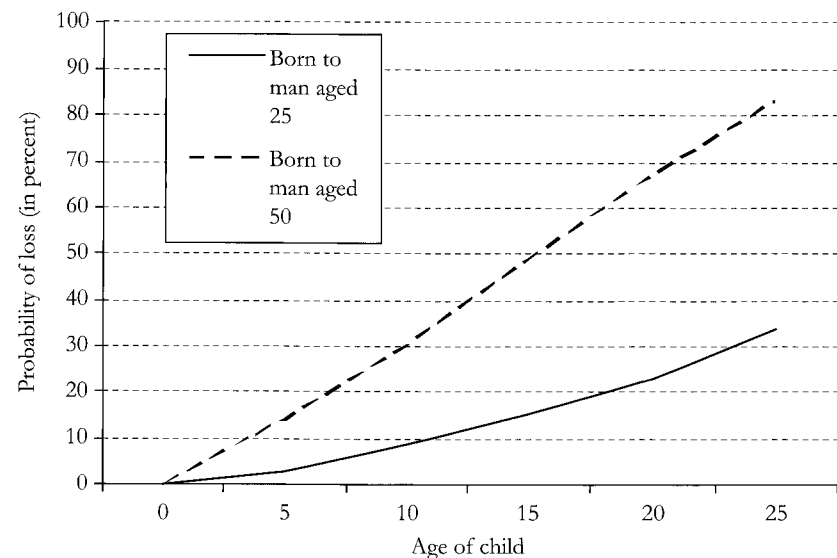


Figure 6 Mean risk of loss of father, paternal grandfather, and any paternal uncles depending on paternal age at birth of child (source: Coale and Demeny 1983: 43; Saller 1994: 52).

question is difficult to answer precisely without recourse to Saller's simulation program but can nonetheless be addressed with some confidence. If we schematically envision a scenario in which two brothers were born twenty and ten years prior to the birth of a child fathered by a fifty-year-old man, their mean chances of being alive at the time of the birth of the third child were 43.6 and 48 percent, respectively.¹⁹ By the time that that child reached age fourteen, his or her chance of having a twenty-five-year-old brother who could act as a *tutor* or *curator* had already dropped to one in three. At that age, the average cumulative risk of lacking a living father, paternal grandfather, paternal uncle or mature brother was one in three, and hence more than twice as high as the odds that a coeval individual born to a twenty-five-year-old man might find him- or herself in the same situation. While the presence of mature brothers increased the availability of close-kin guardians for the offspring of older men, it could not fully compensate for the higher rates of loss associated with high paternal age.

It is true that some minors must have had at least one adult (paternal) cousin who could have provided tutelage. Recourse to this type of relative was a function of two unrelated variables, paternal birth order and paternal age at one's own birth: children of late-born fathers were more likely to have adult cousins (who had been born to older uncles) who might serve as guardians, as were late-born children of any fathers with brothers who had produced male issue. In the Egyptian census returns several individuals lived in the households of (older?) cousins, which indicates that this need not have been an uncommon arrangement.²⁰ Unfortunately, although this option may on average have been more readily available to the children of older fathers, existing simulations do not allow us to quantify its potential significance.

With this caveat, and all other things being equal, it nevertheless appears likely that the children of younger fathers were better off than the progeny of older men. Not only were the former less likely to lose their fathers as minors, they also had a much better chance of being cared for by mature close paternal relatives in the event of their father's death than were the children of older men.

¹⁹ Incidentally, this chimes with Saller's estimate that a notional average fifty-year-old man had a 69 percent chance of having any living sons (1994: 52), although his simulation does not allow for the birth of an additional child at that age. Thus, my example overstates actual reproductive success, and thereby also the likelihood of the presence of surviving older brothers.

²⁰ See Bagnall and Frier 2006: 145-At-20 (co-resident cousins of declarant are minors), 159-At-10 (age difference unknown), 173-At-11 (age difference unknown), and perhaps also 159-At-13 (possible co-resident underage cousin). I owe these references to Sabine Hübner.

Taken together, the growing risk of fatherlessness associated with rising paternal age, the concurrently growing paucity of other mature male relatives, and the relative scarcity of mature brothers indicate that birth order was an important determinant of a child's security and well-being. The census records of Roman Egypt show that men customarily continued to father children well into their fifties: the median age of paternity appears to have been around 37–8 years.²¹ We can only surmise that Greeks and Romans more generally displayed similar habits, with the result that a substantial share of all children would have been fathered by men in their forties and fifties.

In conclusion, we may distinguish among three ideal-typical categories:

- Children of relatively young men whose fathers lived on and continued to father more children. They would grow up under the care of their fathers and might later be called upon to assume responsibility for their younger siblings once their father had finally died.
- Children of relatively young men whose fathers died young and who subsequently grew up under the tutelage of mature male relatives of the deceased father, and who did not have to assume responsibility for younger siblings later on.
- Children of older men who more frequently lost their fathers as minors and were more likely to grow up under the care of others and to come under the control of guardians who were not close paternal relatives.

In practice, the boundaries between these ideal types were fluid, and intermediate experiences must have been common. Even so, these scenarios arguably represent the most typical outcomes and provide a rough demographic template that helps historians to structure the experience of growing up fatherless in antiquity.

²¹ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 146.

CHAPTER 3

Oedipal complexities

Mark Golden

It was King Cecrops who first founded marriage at Athens. As a result (according to Charax of Pergamum) he was called *diphyēs*, “two-natured,” because through him humans recognized that they were born of two beings.¹ Charax, a historian who may have lived in the second century CE, knows another explanation for Cecrops' epithet, and there were more besides – that he was bilingual, that his temperament changed over time, that he was half-serpent and half-man – but the invention of so fundamental an institution as paternity is in line with his other associations.² Cecrops is variously credited with being Athens' first king, with choosing Athena as his city's patron, with recognizing Zeus as the supreme god, with (less successfully) ending the sacrifice of living victims.³ We might regard him (as writers from at least the fourth century BCE did) as a culture hero.⁴ Or even as the father of his country. After all, in one version of Athena's struggle with Poseidon to be recognized as the tutelary deity of Athens, Cecrops arranged a vote of the citizens. The women voted in a bloc for Athena and, more numerous as they were, narrowly carried the day.⁵ The men responded in a manner not unknown in respect to modern elections: they removed women's right to vote or to be called Athenians and, more pertinently here, decreed that children must be known by their father's name alone. Cecrops, it seems, discovered paternity as a biological fact and then presided over its establishment as a prime marker of social identity. Fathers not only mattered, they mattered more.

If Cecrops found fathers, many in antiquity lost them. (In both Greek and Latin, they were termed orphans – *orphanoi/ai*, *orbilae* – even if their

Thanks to the editors for their invitation to contribute to this volume and to Jan Bremmer, Scott Forbes, Karen Hunt, Pauline Ripat, and Michael Wahn for subsequent encouragement and advice.

¹ Charax, *FGrH* 103 F 38–9; Clearchus, *Ath.* 13.555d; cf. *Suda* s.v. *Kekrops*; schol. *Ar. Plut.* 773.

² Gourmelen 2005: 97–112. ³ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.1–2; Paus. 8.2.2–3, cf. 1.26.5.

⁴ Vidal-Naquet 1981b: 198–9; R. C. T. Parker 1987: 193–8. ⁵ August. *De civ. D.* 18.9.

balanced, where we would expect to find most variation, and where comparisons with the lot of others are likely to lead in more directions. A glance through the *Greek Anthology* reveals both Apollonides' epitaph for Menoetus, who drowned hurrying home to see his sick father, and Strato's envy of Euclides: his father has died and cannot meddle in his love life (unlike Strato's).¹¹⁵ This is without taking into account ambivalence within individuals.¹¹⁶ I suspect that more evidence for antiquity would make generalizations even less reliable, not more.

¹¹⁵ *Anth. Pal.* 7.642, 12.231.

¹¹⁶ See, e.g., Strauss (1993: 3–4, 125–6) on Theseus and sons succeeding fathers at Athens, and Evans (1985) on the mix of joy and grief at a Roman *paterfamilias*'s death. Mind you, if Theseus' forgetting to change his sails on his homecoming and Aegeus' subsequent suicide count as evidence for filial hostility (as argued in Sourvinou-Inwood 1979: 21), what should we make of the death of Odysseus' dog (*Od.* 17.326–7)?

CHAPTER 4

*Callirhoe's dilemma: remarriage and stepfathers
in the Greco-Roman East*

Sabine R. Hübner

INTRODUCTION

The wicked stepmother is a famous social type in Greek and Roman myth and comedy; we hear, however, comparatively little about the stepfather in antiquity. This is indubitably the reason why the stepmother in antiquity has already received a thorough treatment in a full-length study,¹ while the stepfather has been widely neglected thus far in scholarship on the Greco-Roman family. In order to rectify this situation, I propose to survey his portrayal in the literary, legal, and documentary sources from the Roman and late antique East with a view to determining the relevance, influence, and authority he held over children who were not his own. By means of this investigation I hope to discover what the introduction of a stepfather might have meant for an otherwise fatherless child with respect to his living arrangements and emotional and economic welfare. Of course, stepfathers entail remarriage. Accordingly, this study will also attempt to shed some light on attitudes toward remarriage for widows from different ideological, sociological, and economic points of view, as well as on the relative frequency of children growing up under a stepfather in these centuries.

The stereotypical stepmother is notoriously wicked.² According to Patricia Watson, this picture is “an encapsulation of the negative traits assigned to females in general by a misogynistic tradition which flourished in Greece and Rome.”³ While stepmothers are almost invariably shown as evil and jealous intruders, stepfathers, who occur much less frequently in our sources,⁴ are

¹ Watson 1995. Cf. Gray-Fow 1988b; Noy 1991.

² Watson 1995, *passim*. See, e.g., *Dig.* 5.2.4 (Gaius) for the bad influence a stepmother could exert on the children's father.

³ Watson 1995: 2. For the stereotype of the wicked stepmother see also Dixon 1988: 49, 155–9; Gray-Fow 1988b.

⁴ Greek terms for “stepfather” are πατριός (e.g. *CIG* 3445 from Lydia), or πατρός (*Catalogus codicum astrologorum* 2.174), πατρῶός (*P. Oxy.* 2.266 [96 CE]); μητριός (*Theoromp. Com.* 12), and κηδεστής (*Dem.* 36.31; more often, however, used to mean “brother-in-law” [e.g. *Eur. Hec.* 834],

depicted in a much more balanced manner. Instead of constituting a strongly delineated caricature like the “stepmother,” the image of the stepfather was a flexible one, apparently dependent on a highly contingent set of circumstances, such as the economic and social background of the family. In many cases the stepfather is portrayed as a surrogate father, a protector of fatherless children, and indeed, we sometimes see him even adopting his stepchildren as legitimate heirs when he had no viable heirs of his own.⁵ Yet, at other times we also hear of prejudices and widely held assumptions about a stepfather’s purportedly selfish motives in marrying a widow with children. Nevertheless, we never find stepfathers who are “cruel” or “amorous,” the defining character traits of stepmothers in Greek and Roman literature.⁶

THE SITUATION OF THE ORPHANED FAMILY:
WIDOWS AND THEIR CHILDREN

The father in the ancient family was the undisputed head of household, social representative to the outside world, and often main economic provider. Therefore, the loss of a husband and father was a blow to most families, especially to those which, for one reason or another, could not rely on a network of relatives and friends for support.⁷ The main concerns a widowed mother faced after her husband’s death were: to feed and clothe her children; to provide dowries and arrange suitable marriages for her daughters; and to secure adequate education or apprenticeships for her sons. Of course, these concerns were even more pressing for mothers of low economic and social status. Normally, the costs for these expenses would be covered by her late husband’s patrimony, held in trust and managed by a guardian or the mother herself until the children came of age.⁸ However, if the patrimony was not sufficient, the mother had to cover the remaining expenses from her own possessions or any other resources

⁵ “son-in-law” [Isoc. 10.43; *SEG* 24 (1974): 228], “father-in-law” [Ar. *Thesm.* 74.210] or even “guardian” [*P.Cair.Isid.* 62 (= *SB* 6.9167) (296 CE)]. All of these terms are attested very rarely. Sometimes a stepfather is referred to periphrastically as “the husband of my mother” (*P.Mich.* 3.191/2 [60 CE]).

⁶ Corbier 1991: 72–3; Cox 1998: 89; Patterson 1998: 199. ⁷ Watson 1995.

⁸ That widows needed support and protection was a commonplace all over the ancient Mediterranean: For Archaic times see Wöhrle (this volume): 162–74; for ancient Israel see Sigismund (this volume): 83–102. In Classical Athens the eponymous archon was the legal protector of orphans and widows, *Ath. Pol.* 56.7; Isae. 6; Lys. 32; [Dem.] *Or.* 43.75; cf. Hunter 1989a: 295; Günther 1993: 308–25. Divorce was another quite common reason for dissolution of marriage in antiquity; children, however, usually stayed with their fathers (Treggiari 1991a: 473–82; Treggiari 1991b; Parkin 1992: 123–4; Bagnall and Frier 2006: 123).

⁹ Cf. below on the stepfather in antiquity and the frequency of remarriage.

which she could call upon.⁹ Moreover, aggravating this situation, some fathers left their children with debts, which creditors tried to recover all the more relentlessly after the father’s death.¹⁰ As an example of just how straitened circumstances could become, a poor widow from sixth-century Oxyrhynchus justified her decision to give up her nine-year-old daughter for adoption thus:

My husband died, and I was left, toiling and suffering hardship for my daughter by him in order that I might provide her with necessary sustenance; and now, not having the means to maintain her ... she being now nine years old, more or less, I have asked you ... to receive her from me as your daughter.¹¹

Beaucamp provides us with many more examples from early Byzantine papyri, which show that widows lacked economic support and social status.¹² Presumably, at least some of these widows’ complaints should be attributed to rhetorical tropes, employed by women who had every reason to present themselves as vulnerable, poor, and weak, in order to attract sympathy and aid when appealing to officials.¹³ In fact, we have in contrast to these petitions many private letters that show women actively running households without any difficulties while their husbands were either away or dead.¹⁴ However, if a widowed mother lacked sufficient economic means and was unable to find support from relatives or adult children, she and her children found themselves in a precarious situation.¹⁵ The options for these widowed mothers were grim, to say the least: manual labor,¹⁶ selling their children into prostitution,¹⁷ slavery,¹⁸ or perhaps more mercifully, giving them up for adoption.¹⁹

This is not to say that widowhood was easy for wealthy mothers. As we shall see below, widowed mothers in the Greco-Roman East who resided

⁹ *Cod. Iust.* 2.18.22 (227 CE).

¹⁰ For Roman Egypt see *P.Mich.* 5.232 (36 CE); *SB* 1.5761 (91–6 CE); *P.Soterichos* 22–5 (103–9 CE); *P.Oxy.* 3.493 (early second century); *P.Monac.* 3.80 (102–17 CE); *BGU* 7.1654 (118 CE); *P.Oxy.* 3.494 (156 CE); *SB* 1.5343 (182 CE); *P.Ryl.* 2.121 (second century); *SB* 4.7339 (late first century); *BGU* 2.378 (second century); *P.Giss.* 34 (264/5 CE); *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67026/7 (551 CE); *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67156/7 (570 CE); *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67131 (sixth century). Cf. Bowman 1986: 98; Krause 1994–5: III, 138–45.

¹¹ *P.Oxy.* 16.1895; cf. Rowlandson 1998: no. 234. ¹² Beaucamp 1985.

¹³ *Dig.* 16.1.2.2–3 (Ulpian); Evans Grubbs 2002: 51–4; Hanson 2000: 156; Hanson 2005: 100.

¹⁴ Bagnall and Criboire 2006: 79–81. See, e.g., *P.Mich.* 8.464.

¹⁵ E.g. in *P.Oxy.* 34.2711 (268–71 CE), the late father’s uncle had taken in his orphaned grandnephews and grandniece, whom their father “had left quite utterly destitute.”

¹⁶ Cf. Bradley 1985: 326–9; Krause 1994–5: II, *passim*; Rowlandson 1998: 218–79; Golden (this volume): 54–5.

¹⁷ E.g. *BGU* 4.1024 from the end of the fourth century CE. Cf. Rowlandson 1998: no. 208; Bagnall 1993: 196–7; Krause 1994–5: III, 190–3.

¹⁸ *Cod. Iust.* 2.4.26 (294 CE), 4.43.1 (294 CE); *Cod. Theod.* 3.3.1 (391 CE); Krause 1994–5: III, 133–5.

¹⁹ E.g. *P.Oxy.* 16.1895 (554 CE). Cf. Krause 1994–5: III, 130–45, esp. 134–6; Rowlandson 1998: no. 234.

with their orphaned children usually lived alone with them, not with their natal families or their late husbands'. So, even if the patrimony was managed by the children's guardians, these widows bore sole responsibility for the everyday affairs of parenting.²⁰ Of course, fathers in antiquity provided not only financial support for their families: the father was also an authority figure who protected his children from external dangers and kept them on the straight and narrow. Thus it comes as no surprise that there were quite a few single mothers who did not feel equal to the task and complained – much as they do today – about the stresses and burdens of raising children alone. Gregory of Nyssa reported that his widowed mother Emelia, who was left with ten minor children, “was distracted with various anxieties” and suffered under a “heavy load of sorrows.”²¹ Thus, even if money was not an issue, raising a family on one's own could prove to be a daunting challenge nonetheless.²² The widow who was able single-handedly to manage her affairs, raise her children, see to their education and marriages – and all without damaging their patrimony – was highly esteemed, to say the least.²³

THE “STEPFATHER” IN THE GRECO-ROMAN EAST

As the previous section makes clear, there were many advantages and rewards that could lead a widow with children to consider remarriage. However, although stepfathers were not so continuously maligned as stepmothers in antiquity, there does seem to have been a persistent prejudice against their raising children inherited from a previous marriage. Such general notions may be misleading, however; it is therefore appropriate to begin with a chronological examination of a stepfather's depiction in the various literary, legal, and documentary sources pertaining to the Greco-Roman East. In exploring this evidence, we want to learn more about the various factors a widow took into consideration when contemplating remarriage, such as the effects a new marriage would have on her children, their economic situation, and their living circumstances. In particular, I want to focus on the way in which a stepfather either successfully filled the void left by a father's death or posed a threat to the orphan's well-being. In addition, I wish to provide some insight into the ancient “patchwork

²⁰ Cf. below, 67–9; 73. ²¹ Gr. Nyss. *Vita Macrinae* 7 (ed. P. Maraval, Paris, 1971).

²² Jo. Chrys. *De sacerdotio* 1.2 (ed. A. M. Malingrey, Paris, 1980); *Lib. Or.* 14.68.

²³ Compare, e.g., Dem. 27.13–15, 29.26; *P. Cair. Masp.* 2.67156 (570 CE); *Lib. Or.* 1.26, 58; Jo. Chrys. *Sacerd.* 1.2; Gr. Nyss. *Vita Macrinae* 6. Cf. Krause, 1994–5: 111, 130–45; Van Dam, 2003: 102–3.

family” and the nature of the stepfather–stepchild relationship from economic, legal, and emotional points of view.

In fifth- and fourth-century Athens, a paternal relative would normally have been appointed after a father's death to guard the orphan's inheritance. Should the mother subsequently remarry, most often her children would remain with their late father's family rather than follow their mother into her new marriage.²⁴ Sometimes, however, and especially when there were no close relatives either living or willing to take the orphans in, a widow would take her children with her, an arrangement that often seems to have worked well whenever we find evidence of it. Stepfathers in fourth-century Athenian court speeches are shown as affectionate and supportive of their stepchildren at private and public occasions.²⁵ For instance, from Isaeus we know of a certain Archedamus who took in his stepson Apollodorus and brought him up after the boy's paternal uncle and guardian had embezzled his patrimony. When the boy reached majority, Archedamus helped his stepson to recover all his fortune by bringing an action against Apollodorus' corrupt uncle.²⁶ Apollodorus, mindful of his stepfather's kindness, later returned the favor by ransoming his stepfather from captivity, supporting him with his money when he was in need, and even adopting his half-sister's son, the grandson of Archedamus, as heir when his own son died.²⁷ In another speech of Isaeus we learn of the stepfather of an Astyphilus, Theophrastus, who cherished Astyphilus no less than the biological son he had by Astyphilus' mother. Astyphilus entered Theophrastus' home when he was a little boy, where he was brought up and provided with the same education as his younger half-brother. Theophrastus even tilled the land that Astyphilus had inherited from his father, thereby doubling its value.²⁸ In yet another speech we hear that a certain Callias brought an action against the lessees of his stepson's paternal estate while serving as the boy's guardian, thereby justifying the trust placed in him.²⁹ The orator Isocrates, after having married a widowed mother of three sons and with no child of his own, even adopted one of his stepsons, the youngest one, Aphareus. Aphareus was also one of

²⁴ Lys. 32; Isae. 7.5; Hunter 1989a: 295–7.

²⁵ This finds cultural support in Greek myths where we find Amphitryon rearing his stepson Heracles together with his own son; Telegonus adopting Egaphus, the son of his wife, Io, and Zeus; and finally Asterius marrying Europa and raising her three sons, Minus, Rhadamanthys, and Sarpedon. For the striking contrast between stepfathers and stepmothers in Greek myths, see Watson 1995: 39–42.

²⁶ Isae. 7.5–7; cf. Hunter 1989a: 296. ²⁷ Isae. 7.15; cf. Cox 1998: 152.

²⁸ Isae. 9.3–5, 27–30; Cox 1998: 89. ²⁹ Andoc. 1.124–7; cf. Cox 1998: 90.

Isocrates' most talented students and later became a famous orator and tragedian himself.³⁰

Not all relations between stepfathers and stepsons, however, proceeded so smoothly: a certain Phormio quarreled with one of his two stepsons over the guardianship of their paternal estate and their mother's possessions.³¹ Yet, the stepson apparently used this step-relationship merely as a distraction: the true cause of this quarrel arose from the young man's profligate and litigious misbehavior rather than from Phormio's purportedly malicious actions as stepfather. In fact, Phormio had been entrusted with the guardianship by the natural father himself (who had also asked him to marry his widow), and, moreover, Phormio's other stepson supported his stepfather's case. We see another example of a strained stepfather-stepson relationship in that between Cnemon and his stepson Gorgias in Menander's *Dyscolus*.³² However, in this case the friction was probably meant by Menander to be an expression of Cnemon's misanthropic view of the world in general rather than a portrayal of the stepfather-stepson relationship as stereotypically doomed. In any event, Cnemon eventually decided to adopt Gorgias when the latter saved him from drowning, and Cnemon, having no son of his own, realized that "a man needs someone, someone there and ready to help him out."³³ In sum, even though in these two examples we encounter step-relationships that lead to discord and disharmony, it must be stressed that in the evidence as we have it, the friction is ultimately attributable to other sources. In fact, close relations between a stepfather and his stepson could lead to friction between the young man and his paternal relatives, as whenever a stepson preferred to bequeath his property to a half-sibling (i.e. a child of his mother and stepfather) instead of a distant relative on his paternal side.³⁴

Moving from Hellenistic to Roman times, we lack the literary evidence of the sort that we discussed above. Our best evidence for studying the stepfather in the Eastern Mediterranean in Roman times is Roman law, particularly after 212 CE when it became the law of the land. Another vital source is the papyri of Greco-Roman Egypt, which provide us with a unique insight into the daily life of the ancient patchwork family, a view that one cannot acquire from literary sources alone. This evidence is in

³⁰ [Plut.] *Mor.* 838a, 839b; cf. Isae. 8.40–2 (a certain Diocles contended that his stepfather adopted him posthumously, even though the latter had three daughters with Diocles' mother). See Rubinstein 1993: 87, 96, 101; Corbier 1991: 72–3; Cox 1998: 90; Patterson 1998: 199. For Greek myths, see Watson 1995: 39–42.

³¹ Dem. 36, 45; Cox 1998: 90. ³² Men. *Dys.* 5. ³³ Men. *Dys.* 708–47.

³⁴ Isae. 9.3–5, 27–30; cf. 7.7–15, 8.40–2, 11.8–9; [Dem.] 43.4; Cox 1998: 89.

turn supplemented by some epigraphic evidence from other parts of the Greco-Roman East.

Taking Roman law as our starting point, we encounter here a completely different picture of the stepfather than in our Athenian court speeches. In Roman law stepfathers are generally depicted as legacy hunters aiming at embezzling their stepchildren's inheritance. However, we should be cautious in attributing this discrepancy to changing or different conceptions of the stepfather from Greek to Roman society rather than to the nature of the evidence.

Roman jurists were chiefly concerned with the economic consequences of remarriage and therefore endeavored to protect a fatherless child's estate against a mother's second spouse in diverse and manifold ways.³⁵ Thus, it was obligatory for every orphaned child to have a guardian appointed, usually the nearest male relative on the father's side, who was responsible for administering the fatherless child's property, to provide the child with daily maintenance from its revenues, and to turn over the estate with a full accounting when the child reached his or her majority.³⁶ Under this arrangement the widow might have responsibility to raise the children,³⁷ but no legal authority over their property.³⁸ Therefore, her remarriage would not have threatened her children's patrimony, which was safeguarded against the stepfather's grasp by the child's guardians.

These laws, however, applied only to Roman citizens. In Roman Egypt and Asia Minor we find evidence of numerous mothers acting as guardians for their fatherless children. For instance, there are several examples in the papyri³⁹ and inscriptions⁴⁰ recording widowed mothers, regardless of whether

³⁵ Dixon 1997: 155. ³⁶ Saller 1994: 183–5; Evans Grubbs 2002: 23.

³⁷ *Cod. Iust.* 5.49.1 (223 CE). Cf. *Nov. Iust.* 22.38.

³⁸ *Dig.* 26.1.16.pr. (Gaius); *Dig.* 26.6.2.2 (Modestinus); *Dig.* 38.17.2.23 (Ulpian); *Dig.* 38.17.2.26 (Ulpian); *Dig.* 38.17.2.28 (Ulpian); *Dig.* 38.17.2.45 (Ulpian); *Cod. Iust.* 5.31.3 from 215 CE; *Cod. Iust.* 5.31.1 from 224; *Cod. Iust.* 2.12.18 from 294; *Cod. Iust.* 2.34.2 from 294; *Cod. Iust.* 5.35.1 from 224; *Cod. Iust.* 5.31.8 from 291; *Cod. Iust.* 5.34.6 from 293; *Cod. Iust.* 6.56.3 from 315; *Cod. Theod.* 3.18.1 from 357; *Cod. Iust.* 6.56.6 from 439; *Cod. Iust.* 6.58.10 from 439; *Nov. Theod.* 11 from 439; *Cod. Iust.* 5.31.11 from 479; cf. Chiusi 1994: 163. In fact, a widow was obliged to request a guardian for her underage children if her deceased husband had not named one in his will or no *tutor legitimus* was available. If she failed to do so, she lost all rights of succession to her children's property should they predecease her (*Dig.* 26.6.2.2 [Modestinus], cf. 38.17.2.23 [Ulpian]). See De Filippi 1980: 61–3; Chiusi 1994: 157–8. For women from Roman Egypt who submitted a petition for a guardian, cf. *P. Oxy.* 34.2709 (206 CE); *P. Oxy.* 6.888 (after 287). Cf. Taubenschlag 1955: 157–70; A. Lewis 1970: 116–18.

³⁹ E.g. *SB* 16.12720 (142 BCE; cf. Rowlandson 1998: no. 125; Bagnall and Derow 2004: no. 123); *SB* 5.7568 (36 CE); *BGU* 8.1813 (62 CE); *P. Oxy.* 2.265 (81–95 CE); *P. Oxy.* 6.898 (123 CE); *P. Oxy.* 3.496 (127 CE); *P. Oxy.* 3.497 (early second century CE).

⁴⁰ For early Roman Asia Minor see Balland 1981: no. 81 from late first century BCE – early first century CE; *SEG* 6 (1932): 672 from the late first century CE.

they remarried or not, who were in control of their minor children's property, a custom apparently going back to a time before the arrival of Roman rule.⁴¹ After Roman law became applicable to all free inhabitants of the Empire in 212, we find several attempts to adapt this prevailing custom to the new legal dispensation: Evidence from third-century Egypt shows mothers acting only as "assistants" (ἐπακολουθήτρια or παρακολουθήτρια) of their fatherless children's guardians.⁴² However, in the later Roman period (from the late third century onwards) we again find widows in our papyri who act as sole guardians of their minor children.⁴³

One result of mothers being in control of their orphaned children's property was that a minor orphan lived with the fear that his mother might spend his father's estate, alone or with her new partner, before he or she was able to assume the inheritance.⁴⁴ A petition from Karanis in the Arsinoite nome from 175/6 CE provides us with an exemplary case of just such a family drama: a young man, who had lost his father early in life, sued his mother for recovery of his patrimony.⁴⁵ His mother had acted as his guardian after his father's death. However, she had remarried and when her son by her first husband reached maturity, she refused to cede to him rightful ownership of his late father's estate. It is therefore understandable that when Roman law later, at the end of the fourth century, officially granted mothers the right to administer their children's patrimony, it was on the condition that they promise not to enter a new marriage: "Mothers who request the guardianship of administering business affairs for their children after the loss of their husband, are to avow in the public records that they will not enter a second marriage, before the confirmation of such a duty can come to them legally."⁴⁶ It was also feared that a widow who was in charge of her children's inheritance would be tempted to use part of it to increase her dowry and thereby her chances of remarriage,⁴⁷ or perhaps later

⁴¹ See also Montevecchi 1981: 113–15; Chiussi 1994: 175–91; Van Bremen 1996: 228–30; Evans Grubbs 2002: 254–7; Wolff 2002: 78, n. 31.

⁴² *P. Oxy.* 58.3921 (219 CE); *P. Oxy.* 6.909 (225 CE); *P. Oxy.* 6.907 (276 CE); Montevecchi 1981: 113–15; Evans Grubbs 2002: 256.

⁴³ *P. Sakaon* 31, 36, 37 (= *P. Thead.* 15; *P. Ryl.* 3.114; *P. Thead.* 18) from 280, 280/1, and 284 CE, respectively; Beaucamp 1990–2: II: 172–9; Evans Grubbs 2002: 257–8.

⁴⁴ Cf. Wöhrle (this volume): 169–70.

⁴⁵ *P. Lond.* 2.198. Cf. *P. Oxy.* 6.898 (123 CE) for a mother apparently defrauding her son of his property. See also Evans Grubbs 2002: 255–6.

⁴⁶ *Cod. Iust.* 5.35.2 = *Cod. Theod.* 3.17.4 (390 CE), trans. Evans Grubbs 2002: 247. See also *Nov. Iust.* 118.5 (543 CE). Cf. Taubenschlag 1955: 157–70; Lewis 1970: 116–18; Humbert 1972: 410–13; Gardner 1986: 150–1; Beaucamp 1990–2: I, 325–30; Chiussi 1994: 192–3; Krause 1994–5: III, 91, 124–7; Arjava 1996: 91–2.

⁴⁷ *Cod. Iust.* 5.12.13 (293 CE), 7.33.3 (293 CE). Cf. Krause 1994–5: III, 39–40; Arjava 1996: 98–105; Evans Grubbs 2002: 115.

embezzle it in favor of her second husband and any children she had by him.⁴⁸ If a mother did subsequently renege on her promise not to remarry, she would not lose the guardianship, but she *and* her new husband would have to stand surety for the children's patrimony with their own property, and they could be held liable in a case of clear mismanagement.⁴⁹ In any case, it must be stressed that these later Roman laws were meant first and foremost to safeguard the welfare and property rights of a widow's children, not necessarily to prevent remarriage per se: even up to the Justinianic period two or more successive marriages were not forbidden either by Roman law or by the Church canons.⁵⁰

Even if the law was ambivalent about remarriage, it is clear that the *ideal* widowed mother refrained from remarriage for the sake of her children, at least in families in which there was a significant estate to protect.⁵¹ Of course, in families in which there was no patrimony, the stepfather who was willing to marry the widow and take in her children would have been seen not as a threat but as a beneficial surrogate, the last resort for securing the family's survival.⁵² For instance, we hear of the mother of the later empress Theodora, who was widowed with three young daughters, the eldest not yet seven years old. Theodora's mother hastily remarried after her husband's death in order to win another man who would take over her first husband's

⁴⁸ It might be exactly for this reason that we occasionally find clauses in Roman wills in which a man forbids his widow to remarry before their children reach adulthood (*Dig.* 35.1.62.2 [Clementius]; Humbert 1972: 208–13; Krause 1994–5: I, 93–4; III, 33–48; Saller 1994: 175. So, it was with the aim to prevent such abuses that Theodosius ruled in 382 that a widow with children who remarried was required to transfer everything she ever received from her first husband to her children by him (*Cod. Theod.* 3.8.2 [382 CE]; *Cod. Iust.* 5.10.1 [392 CE]; cf. Dixon 1988: 50). She was entitled only to a usufruct of the property, thus preventing her from alienating the possessions of her former husband during her lifetime or by will to anyone other than his children (*Cod. Theod.* 3.8.2.17 [382 CE], 3.9.1 [398 CE], 3.8.3 [412 CE]). See Yiftach-Firanko 2006.

⁴⁹ *Cod. Iust.* 5.35.2.2 (390 CE); *Cod. Iust.* 8.14.6 (439 CE); *Nov. Iust.* 22.40 (536 CE); cf. Kaser 1971: 163, nn. 31 and 168; Chiussi 1994: 161. A novel of Justinian from 539 stresses that it was taken for granted that maternal love would prevent a mother from embezzling her children's inheritance (*Nov. Iust.* 94). Cf. Clark 1993: 60; Krause 1994–5: III, 13–14.

⁵⁰ *Cod. Iust.* 6.60.4 (468 CE); 5.9.6.pr. (472 CE), 6.41.4.pr. (472 CE). Majorianus in the West in 458 ordered all widows under the age of forty to remarry within five years (*Nov. Maior.* 6.5). Justinian expressively conceded to widows that they might enter a new marriage whether they already had children or not (*Cod. Iust.* 6.40.2 [531 CE]; cf. *Nov. Iust.* 2.3 [535 CE]). Cf. Kaser 1971: 348; Humbert 1972: 283–5; Gardner 1986: 55; Krause 1994–5: III, 123–9; Arjava 1996: 170, 189–90. Legal sources implying high rates of remarriage for widows at least in the upper social strata are *Cod. Theod.* 13.10.4 (368–70 CE), 13.10.6 (370 CE); *Nov. Maior.* 6.5 (458 CE).

⁵¹ *Cod. Iust.* 5.37.22.5 (326 or 329 CE); *Cod. Theod.* 8.13.1 (349 CE); *Cod. Iust.* 6.56.4 (380 CE); *Cod. Theod.* 3.8.1 (381 CE), 3.8.2 (382 CE); *Cod. Iust.* 5.10.1 (392 CE); cf. Humbert 1972: 375–92; Arjava 1996: 167–77; Evans Grubbs 2002: 223–5. For the diverging views of Church fathers on remarriage see, e.g., *Jer. Ep.* 54.15.4; August. *Ep.* 104; Jo. Chrys. *Adviduum iuniorum* 1–2. Cf. Bremmer 1995: 46; Watson 1995: 10–11; Nathan 2000: 121.

⁵² *Plin. Ep.* 6.33.2; 8.18.7–8; Krause 1994–5: I, 63, 129.

job as the bear keeper at the Hippodrome in Constantinople and thereby provide for her and her daughters.⁵³ Although this story is filtered through the polemical view of Procopius, it nonetheless paints a reasonably realistic picture of the sort of considerations that motivated widows from the lower reaches of society as they sought new marriages in order to secure the survival of their families.

How beneficial a stepfather could be for his new family is illustrated by a marriage contract from sixth-century Antinoopolis in Middle Egypt. This contract was drawn up between a certain Aquilinus and his bride, Euprepeia, who brought with her her minor son Victor from a previous union. Aquilinus, the future stepfather, pledged himself to cherish his stepson and raise him like his own child, obviously not a matter of course.⁵⁴ Aquilinus apparently had no children of his own, so if the new relationship produced no offspring, his stepson Victor could have even hoped to become his stepfather's heir.⁵⁵ At all events, we may presume that under these conditions a man who considered marrying a widow with children was far from resembling the legacy-hunting stepfather depicted in Roman law codes; instead, he was likely to be put off by the thought of the obligations and financial burden he was going to shoulder for a family that was not his own.

Of course, the prejudice of the Roman jurists against stepfathers was not merely theoretical. It had its basis in the propertied classes, as we see in the case of Apuleius, the second-century CE rhetorician from Madaura.⁵⁶ Apuleius' stepson accused him of having married his mother only for money and of trying to persuade her to disinherit him and his brother in his favor, "fearing that ... she might, as often happens, transfer her whole fortune to the house of her new husband."⁵⁷ Apuleius took pains in court to argue that he received only a very modest dowry from his wife Pudentilla: "You will see that Pudentilla's dowry was small, considering her wealth, and was made over to me as a trust, not as a gift."⁵⁸ Far from displacing her children in the

⁵³ Procop. *Historia arcana* 9.2–4; Krause 1994–5: 1, 130.

⁵⁴ *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67340 recto. 54–65: ἔτι ὁμολογεῖ [[Ἀκυλλίνος]] ὁ θαυμασιώτατος ἔχειν Βίκτορα τὸν τεχθέντα παρὰ τῆς προγεγραμμένης [[Εὐπρεπίας]] ἀπὸ το(ῦ) γενομέ(νου) αὐτῆς ἀνδρός, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ [?] ἀναλημφθεῖσαν παρ' αὐτῆ[ς ?] καὶ τοὺς ὡς εἰκὸς τεχ[θ]ησομ(ένους) ἀπ' αὐτο(ῦ) θάλπειν καὶ ἀποτρέφει[ν ?] ὡς εἰκὸς τεχθ[η]σομ[έν]ου[ς].

⁵⁵ See n. 54 above.

⁵⁶ *Apul. Apol.* 71 (trans. Butler 1909); see also *Apul. Apol.* 91, 93. Cf. the case of Septicia in Augustan times, who disinherited her two sons from her first marriage in favor of her second husband (Val. Max. 7.7.4); cf. also Petron. 110.6–7; *Miracula Theclae* 20 (Dagron 1978: 344); Ambrose, *De viduis* 15.86 (Migne, *PL* 16.274); Amphiloch. *Or.* 2.8 (*CC ser. Gr.* 3.60–1).

⁵⁷ *Apul. Apol.* 99–100 (trans. Butler 1909). Cf. Gardner 1986: 55; Dixon 1997; Evans Grubbs 2002: 225–7.

⁵⁸ *Apul. Apol.* 91 (trans. Butler 1909).

will, then, Apuleius had even tried to reconcile her with her two sons so as to dissuade her from disinheriting them:

All these concessions I extorted from Pudentilla with difficulty and against her will I wrung them from her by my urgent entreaty, though she was angry and reluctant. I reconciled the mother with her sons, and began my career as a stepfather by enriching my stepsons with a large sum of money.⁵⁹

In fact, Apuleius claimed that their marriage only took place on the following condition:

If my wife should die without leaving me any children, the dowry should go to her sons Pontianus and Pudens, while if at her death she should leave me one son or daughter, half of the dowry was to go to the offspring of the second marriage, the remainder to the sons of the first.⁶⁰

Given the rhetorical positions adopted in this case, it is safe to conclude that the image of the fortune-hunting stepfather depicted in Roman legal sources seems to have been a view widely held by Roman society.

As we see from the above example, remarriage did not only involve paternal property: we must realize that if the mother had property, it was also at stake. Even if the management of guardians protected a father's inheritance, a mother's remarriage inevitably meant some sort of financial disadvantage for the children of a previous union, since at least her dowry would go to the stepfather.⁶¹ Also, there was a definite anxiety that a mother would favor her second husband – and, even more, the children she had by him – in her will. We have a vivid depiction from early eighth-century Jeme in Upper Egypt, opposite modern-day Luxor, for such a family tragedy.⁶² Several documents of a family archive revolve around a certain Georgius, son of the craftsman Loula who died while Georgius was still in his early teens. His mother Elizabeth, who had remarried soon after and had two children by her second husband, apparently should have held the boy's patrimony in trust after his father's death. However, when Georgius later reached majority, Elizabeth not only refused to hand his rightful possessions over to him⁶³ but also gave over her entire estate, which was quite substantial, to her second husband when she drew up her will a few years

⁵⁹ *Apul. Apol.* 93 (trans. Butler 1909). ⁶⁰ *Apul. Apol.* 93 (trans. Butler 1909).

⁶¹ For references see below, n. 68.

⁶² Wilfong 2002: xvii; cf. Krause 1994–5: 1, 86–9. The law found in these Coptic documents originating from the early period of Muslim rule in Egypt generally appears to have been based in later Roman provincial law. Steinwenter 1955: 53, 57; Wilfong 2002: xi. In any case, we are here interested in the family scenario, not the substantive law.

⁶³ *P.Kru.* 37.17–48; cf. Wilfong 2002: 64–5.

later.⁶⁴ Her explicit aim in this will was, as she states, to exclude Georgius, her son from her first marriage, from all rights to her property.⁶⁵ We might wonder whether she acted out of pressure from her second husband. After his mother's death, Georgius instituted proceedings against his stepfather and stepsiblings and obtained a settlement in which he was granted the portion of his mother's inheritance to which he was entitled.⁶⁶

Despite such justifiable fears, we also have evidence that shows mothers having children from several spouses and allowing for all of them equally in their wills.⁶⁷ Thus, although some new husbands tried to ensure that their own children would gain the lion's share of the property, our evidence gives us several examples of mothers who protected their children by their first husbands, even after remarrying.⁶⁸ Of course, any existing children would have to compete with potential stepsiblings for resources, if any were born in the new marriage: any new stepbrothers and stepsisters from a mother's second union necessarily meant that a smaller proportion of the mother's estate would go to the children of her first marriage. If the mother remarried, it was therefore always better from the point of view of the children from the first marriage if she did not have any children by her second husband.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *P.Kru.* 68; cf. Wilfong 2002: 58–61.

⁶⁵ Cf. Livy 39.9.6; *P.Lond.* 2.198 (c. 175/6 CE); Lib. *Ep.* 319, 426, 837, 1169; *Cod. Iust.* 6.2.3 (215 CE); *Nov. Iust.* 155 (533 CE); see also Krause 1994–5: III, 38–9.

⁶⁶ *P.Kru.* 38.18–31; see Wilfong 2002, 65–6. Cf. *Cod. Iust.* 9.32.2 (215 CE). Cf. the case of T. Sempronius Rutilus who served as his stepson's guardian and together with the young man's mother wasted his inheritance (Livy 39.9).

⁶⁷ *P.Oxy.* 6.968 (second century CE); *P.Oxy.* 4. 837 (117/18 CE); *P.Ryl.* 2.76 (late second century); *P.Harr.* 1.68 (225 CE); *CPR* 6.78 (265 CE); *P.Oxy.* 9.1208 (291 CE); *P.Prag.* 1.42 (early sixth century). Regarding the provision for children by different fathers, we can see the social ideal advertised in a grave inscription from first-century Rome, which praised a certain Murdia who had made her sons from her two marriages equal heirs and in addition passed to her son from her first marriage the entire estate she had received from his father (*CIL* VI.10230 = *ILS* 8394; cf. Evans Grubbs 2002: 225).

⁶⁸ If a mother wanted to disinherit her children, she had to bring proof that her children had behaved undutifully. Although there were similar laws on the books concerning fathers and freedmen, mothers are singled out in several instances: e.g. *Cod. Theod.* 2.19–21 (319 CE); *Cod. Iust.* 3.28.28 (321 CE); *Cod. Theod.* 8.13 (349 CE); 3.8.1–2 (381 CE); *Cod. Iust.* 5.9 (472 CE); cf. Humbert 1972: 410–13; Dixon 1988: 59, 65. All of her children together were entitled to inherit at least a quarter share of her estate. In fact, a mother was not allowed to give her second husband a dowry that was so big that her children could no longer receive at least a quarter (*Cod. Theod.* 2.21.1 [358 CE], 2.21.2 [360 CE]; Krause 1994–5: III, 38), nor was she allowed after 472 CE to give as a dowry or by will a larger share to her second husband than to any of her children (*Cod. Iust.* 5.9.6). A woman who had married again had no right to disinherit her children from her first marriage (*Cod. Theod.* 3.8.1). The right to freely dispose of her possessions was granted only as a privilege to a woman who had married once and remained a widow after her husband's death.

⁶⁹ Watson showed, however, that some stepfathers also took pains to raise a stepson even if they already had children of their own (1995: 41–2); cf. Bagnall and Frier 2006: 187–Ar–22.

Apart from the preservation of an orphan's inheritance, a mother's remarriage could also have an effect on the fatherless children's living situation. Independent of questions of inheritance, in Roman society we find a general aversion to stepfathers raising stepchildren. In the case of a mother's remarriage, the clear preference, legally and socially, was the placement of the child with relatives or guardians for their upbringing. We can adduce here a rescript of the emperor Alexander Severus from 223 CE which stated that when it was to be decided with whom fatherless children should live – their mothers or their legal guardians – remarriage was a negative factor to be weighed against the mother.⁷⁰ Justinian later referred to this edict when he ruled that no one would be better suited to raising such children than the widow, but only on the condition that she refrained from remarrying.⁷¹ Jerome, presenting a very rigorous Christian attitude against remarriage, warned a widow against remarrying because she would then give her children “not a stepfather but an enemy, not a parent but a tyrant.”⁷² Her new husband would not stand her affection for her children since his jealousy would lead him to believe that she still loved her first husband. Even though Jerome is known as a staunch critic of remarriage, jealousy is in fact a traditional objection to giving one's children a stepfather, and especially as a reason against the cohabiting of stepfather and stepchildren.

On the other hand, as we have seen above, some stepfathers lived harmoniously with their stepchildren. The census returns from Roman Egypt (to which we will return below) provide us with even more cases of stepfathers who had taken in their stepchildren. And just as we see mothers treating all of their children by all marriages equally, so – despite the fear that a stepfather might commandeer his stepchildren's property – we also see some stepfathers in Roman Egypt (as we did in Classical Athens) entrusted as guardians of their stepchildren's inheritance. A certain Tapeteuris, for instance, married for the second time, bequeathed the better part of her property to her son from her first marriage and appointed her second husband, the boy's stepfather, guardian until her son reached maturity.⁷³ This seems to imply that although there was suspicion, in at least some cases, mothers felt comfortable with

⁷⁰ *Cod. Iust.* 5.49.1 (223 CE): “The bringing up of your wards should be entrusted to their mother in preference to all other persons, if she has not given them a stepfather” (S. P. Scott 1932). In fact, many fatherless men of the upper social strata in Republican and early imperial times were raised by relatives when their widowed mothers remarried (cf. Hallett, Müller, Harders, Bernstein, all in this volume).

⁷¹ *Nov. Iust.* 22.28 (536 CE); cf. Krause 1994–5: III, 13–14.

⁷² *Jer. Ep.* 54.15.4 (trans. Watson 1995: 10); cf. *Ep.* 123. Cf. Bremmer 1995: 46; Nathan 2000: 121.

⁷³ *P.Fouad.* 33 from an unknown location in Egypt. As mentioned above, it was suggested for Classical Athens that a woman only brought her children into her new marriage if her new husband was simultaneously entrusted with the guardianship of her children. cf. Krause 1994–5: I, 249–54.

making stepfathers guardians of their children's interests. We have further evidence that stepfathers acted as *kyrioi* for their adult stepdaughters, a function that implies close ties and strong trust between a stepfather and his stepdaughter.⁷⁴ For married daughters, their paternal homes usually served as a refuge if they were disregarded or maltreated in their husbands' homes, and occasionally we see the stepfather filling that role as well.⁷⁵

We have heard about some documented cases from the Greek period for stepfathers taking the additional step of legally adopting their stepchildren.⁷⁶ For Roman times we have two funerary epitaphs erected by stepsons for their stepfathers from third-century CE Galatia: both men had adopted the children from their wives' previous unions.⁷⁷ To adduce another example, from Roman Egypt we have two consecutive census returns from 131 CE and 145 CE from the Prosopite nome for a family consisting of the father, Chentmouphis, his wife, Demetrous, their son, Anikos, and his sister, Thamistis, who was four years older than her brother.⁷⁸ In both returns Thamistis is declared as the daughter of Chentmouphis and Demetrous and as the full sister of Anikos. However, in the cover letter dated to 161 CE, which accompanied these two copies of the census returns, Thamistis is said to be only the half-sister of Anikos on the mother's side and her father unknown.⁷⁹ It is therefore not going too far to assume that Chentmouphis, perhaps upon marriage, had adopted the daughter of his wife whom she had from an earlier relationship.⁸⁰

To offer a vivid insight into the everyday affairs between a stepfather and his stepchild, I want to draw attention to an exceptional contract on papyrus from sixth-century Aphrodito, drawn up between a stepfather and his stepson.⁸¹ Despite its uniqueness, it tells us a great deal about the hurdles that had to be cleared in blending two families into one. In this contract a certain Senuthes, a clerk in the praetorian office in Antinoë, promises to take in his stepson, Johannes, the son of his second wife, to live together

⁷⁴ *P. Mich.* 3.191/2 (60 CE. A certain Achilleus served as *kyrios* for his married stepdaughter); and *P. Oxy.* 2.266 (96 CE. A certain Onnophris was the *kyrios* for his married stepdaughter Thaeisis).

⁷⁵ The major problem for orphaned girls was to find a dowry. Fatherless women without dowries who nonetheless succeeded in marrying often found themselves subsequently with little or no leverage in the marriage: without a father to fall back on or a dowry to rescind, such a woman had no means of applying pressure on her husband if he threatened her with a divorce. For this reason Ambrose admonished orphan girls who were not in the position to expect a dowry to remain unmarried (*Ambr. Exhort. virg.* 4.2 [Migne, *PL* 16.357]).

⁷⁶ Cf. 65–6 above. ⁷⁷ Calder 1930: 373–4.

⁷⁸ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 131-Pr-1; 145-Pr-1.

⁷⁹ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 218, 233. Thamistis was, in other words, an *apatōr*. See Youtie 1975 and Malouta (this volume): 120–38.

⁸⁰ For examples see Krause 1994–5: III, 44–5. ⁸¹ *P. Cair. Masp.* 3.67305 (568 CE).

with him in harmony, to clothe him, and generally to provide for him. In addition, he pledges to do his utmost in his modest circumstances to care for the boy, at this time probably a youth in his early teens. Overall, this contract recalls apprenticeship arrangements. Through the several apprenticeship contracts that survive in our papyri we know that apprentices, mostly boys from the lower classes, worked and lived for several months to a couple of years in the households of their masters, received room and board, and were integrated into their masters' families.⁸² The contract between Senuthes and Johannes is, however, unusual for two reasons: first, apprenticeship contracts were normally negotiated between a master and the apprentice's parents or relatives, not by the apprentice himself;⁸³ and second, there are terms in this contract that exceed those drawn up in typical apprenticeship contracts, terms in fact that properly belong to adoption contracts. So, for instance, the promise of Senuthes to raise Johannes in place of natural children is a guarantee usually furnished by adoptive parents in adoption contracts from the same period.⁸⁴ However, this does not seem to imply that Johannes was to become his stepfather's legal son or heir, as would have been the case in adoption.⁸⁵ In fact, Senuthes even reserves for himself the right to turn out his stepson if Johannes is not obedient or does not work assiduously.⁸⁶ A real adoption of a child, however, could not be revoked that easily.⁸⁷ Added to this unusual mix of adoption and apprenticeship is the fact that Senuthes had stood surety for Johannes, who owed a moneylender 36 carats, presumably debts he had inherited from his late father. It also could have represented the inheritance tax that came due when Johannes succeeded to his father's patrimony.⁸⁸ Senuthes insisted that the boy had to hand over to him from his monthly earnings the sum of 6 carats for the following ten months. This money was thus for the repayment of his stepson's debts and for the expense of maintaining him.

⁸² For apprenticeship contracts: Bradley 1991a: 107; Krause 1994–5: III, 183–8; Rowlandson 1998: 267–8, no. 204; Van Minnen 1998; Criboire 2001: 82.

⁸³ We have only one exception, *P. Oxy.* 38.2875 from the early third century CE; but also here the mother was present and consented to this agreement.

⁸⁴ Compare *P. Cair. Masp.* 3.67305.9–10 (καὶ πάσαν [ἐπι]μέ[λειαν] καὶ φροντίδα θέσθαι τῇ σῇ εὐτεκνίᾳ ἐν τάξει γνη[σί]ων τέκνω[ν]) with, e.g., *P. Oxy.* 9.1206 (335 CE): ἀπογράφομαι αὐτὸν εἰς ἑμαυτοῦ γνήσιο[ν] υἱόν). For adoption in the papyri see Taubenschlag 1959: 327; Kurylowicz 1983: 61–75; Beaucamp 1990–2: II, 48–52; Krause 1994–5: III, 80–1; Hübner 2007.

⁸⁵ Cf. *P. Lips.* 1.28 (381 CE); *P. Oxy.* 9.1206 (335 CE); *Dig.* 45.1.132.pr. (Paul); Krause 1994–5: III, 81.

⁸⁶ *P. Cair. Masp.* 3.67305.12–13: [μ]ῆδ[έ]ποτε ἐ[κ]βαλεῖ[ν] σε τῆς κ[ο]ιν[ῆ]ς βιώσεως ἄκοντα, χωρὶς ῥαδιουργίας καὶ ἀταξίας.

⁸⁷ Kurylowicz 1983. ⁸⁸ Cf. Krause 1994–5: III, 138–45.

Unfortunately, we do not know whether a provision for subsidy was standard in the case of a stepfather taking in his wife's children from a previous union: this is the only contract we have between a stepfather and a stepson.⁸⁹ A stepfather was in no way obliged to support his stepchildren; rather, their sustenance had to be met by their paternal inheritance. If this was not sufficient, the mother would be held liable, not, as one might suppose, the children's guardian or even less the stepfather.⁹⁰ If a stepfather financially provided for his stepchildren, it was generally assumed that he acted *paterna adfectu*, "out of paternal affection."⁹¹

To return to our contract between Senuthes and Johannes, it is striking that it is the stepson who is made to support himself out of his own labor. The sum of 6 carats per month, which Senuthes demanded to be paid for the next ten months, comes to 60 carats for the whole period. If Johannes reimbursed his stepfather regularly for the given period on this schedule, he would have repaid his debt of 36 carats, as well as an additional 24 carats, which perhaps was meant to include interest on his debt and the cost of his maintenance. All in all, these 24 carats probably represented a sum equal to the total expense that Senuthes expected to incur on Johannes' behalf.⁹²

In any case, we see that the relationship between Senuthes and his stepson was defined largely by economic considerations rather than the emotional ties of a caring father-son relationship. A father who raised a son expected to be cared for and supported in return by his son when he reached old age. However, since even the expectations of natural parents with respect to reciprocal care and support in old age were sometimes disappointed, a stepfather was therefore in a much worse position in terms of relying on his stepson's future benevolence.⁹³ Stepsons and stepfathers legally owed each other nothing. As stepchildren, neither were they in the *potestas* of their stepfathers,⁹⁴ nor was their relationship governed in any way by legal or moral obligations. Thus a stepfather's authority over his stepson was very limited. From the preceding considerations, it is understandable as to why

⁸⁹ In late medieval Florence we find some sort of compensation for a stepfather who raised his stepchildren. He was paid for their keep by the children's paternal relatives (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 125).

⁹⁰ *Dig.* 25.3.5.4 (Ulpian); cf. Krause 1994-5: 1, 129.

⁹¹ *Cod. Inst.* 2.18.15 from 239: "If, influenced by paternal affection, you have furnished means of support to your step-daughter (Scott translates *privigna* here with daughter-in-law), or have paid out money as salaries to teachers, you will have no right to recover such expenses" (S. P. Scott 1932).

⁹² Note that 24 carats or one *solidus* equaled 10 *artabae* of wheat, i.e. about 300 kilograms (Bagnall 1993: 332), enough to feed a child for a year, but not sufficient for many further expenses.

⁹³ Parkin compared Greek and Roman notions about what children owed their aging parents (2003: 203-36).

⁹⁴ *Gai. Inst.* 1.64.

Senuthes regarded it as necessary to draw up such a contract. Senuthes appears to have used the debt he had assumed on his stepson's behalf as a source of leverage over the latter: should Johannes behave in an undisciplined or licentious way, Senuthes threatened that he would cast him out "naked, naked, together with your debt" at a moment's notice.⁹⁵ For Johannes, however, it was a hard, but necessary bargain: obviously hard-pressed by creditors, he had little choice in the matter and at least ended up with a guarantor and a home, if not a father.

The risks and disadvantages of giving a child who had lost his father a stepfather by remarriage were obvious to any mother in antiquity. We may see some of the emotional and economic distress of single motherhood dramatized in Chariton's novel *Callirhoe*. Recently having lost her husband and having been sold into slavery, the noble heroine Callirhoe discovers that she is pregnant. In a heart-rending internal debate, Callirhoe realizes that she is forced to choose between honoring the memory of her "lost" husband, Chaereas, and safeguarding the future of her unborn son. While she considers whether or not to marry Dionysius, the leading man of Miletus, since he is the only person able to provide her son with the appropriate social status, economic support, and education, she has a dream in which her husband tells her to take good care of their child. She thus opts for remarriage out of concern for her son, later pretending that it is Dionysius' child with which she is pregnant. Callirhoe is convinced that if Dionysius knew that he was not the biological father, his jealousy would not let her raise another man's child in his house.⁹⁶

Unlike the romantic world of the Greek novel, the widows who most stood in need of remarriage – poor widows with minor children, even those still of childbearing age – probably faced the most formidable challenges in finding new marriage partners. The wealthy, the childless, or those who were able to leave their children for others to raise would have had a much easier time finding a suitable second husband.⁹⁷ Particularly the wealthy, however, faced impediments related to their status when it came to remarriage. It was precisely their attractiveness as potential brides with property that created the suspicion that in remarriage they might abandon their children by their first husbands and endanger their inheritance prospects – in effect putting their interests before their children's. We thus find an interesting

⁹⁵ *P. Cair. Masp.* 3.67305.26-7: δηλαδῆ, εἰ δ[ὲ] καὶ| σὺ ἀν[ά]γωρος φανείης [καὶ] ἀνετ(ος) ἐν [πᾶσι] τ[οῖς] ἔργ[ο]ις, ἀ]κρ[ί]τω[ς] ἐξ]ελεῖν ἀπ' ἑμο(ῦ) γυμνὸν ... γυμ[ν]ὸν, μετὰ καὶ τοῦ [σ]ο(ῦ) χρ[έ]ους| τῶν αὐτῶν [δύ]ο νομισμ(άτων).

⁹⁶ Chariton, *Call.* 2.10-11. ⁹⁷ Firm. Mat. 5.3.3, 25; Jer. Ep. 22.16; Krause 1994-5: 1, 128-9.

dilemma confronting nearly all widows with children of all social strata with respect to remarriage: poor widows, on the one hand, desperately needed to remarry in order to hold their families together, but found it difficult to find new husbands willing to take them;⁹⁸ wealthy widowed mothers, on the other hand, were attractive prospects, but faced significant familial and social disapproval in remarrying. For neither, then, was remarriage an easy option. But let us now turn to the question of the implications of a mother's remarriage for her fatherless children and, particularly, the relative frequency of living with a stepfather.

LIVING WITH A STEPFATHER

We must start by looking at the statistical evidence, which can give us some clues as to the frequency of the introduction of stepfathers into orphaned families. The best evidence in antiquity concerning this question is the census returns from first- to third-century Roman Egypt, recording for the most part inhabitants of the towns and villages of Middle Egypt. Every fourteen years the head of a household was obliged to identify the members of his household – wives, parents, siblings, lodgers, and slaves – to the Roman authorities.⁹⁹ In these returns we find only nine cases of remarriage of widows or divorced women.¹⁰⁰ None of these women was over the age of thirty-five when she remarried. On the other hand, we have forty-five cases recorded in the census returns of widowed or divorced women living alone with their children and not having remarried. In eleven of these cases the children were no older than fourteen and therefore legal minors.¹⁰¹ Apparently, many women who lost their husbands did not remarry in Roman Egypt, even if the widowed or divorced woman was still young and capable of bearing children.¹⁰²

It is hard to estimate how many widowed mothers remarried but left their children to others to raise (usually the late husband's family), as the returns do not show us these cases of remarriage: "Since surviving issue of prior marriages provide the invariable occasion for mentioning remarriage, its incidence was certainly higher than the returns indicate."¹⁰³ In any case, we

⁹⁸ E.g. Jer. *Ep.* 54.15. ⁹⁹ Bagnall and Frier 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 117-Ar-7; 131-Me-1; 145-He-2; 173-Ar-2; 173-Ar-11; 187-Ar-22; 187-Ar-29; 187-Ar-32. If not explicitly stated it is not possible to differentiate between divorced or widowed.

¹⁰¹ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 33-Ar-2; 103-Ar-9; 117-Ar-5; 145-Ar-2; 173-Pr-4; 187-Ar-29; 187-Ox-4 (?); 243-Ar-1 (?); 243-Ar-3; 257-Ar-1; *P. Oxy. Census* (Bagnall, Frier, and Rutherford 1997): 89-Pt-51. Cf. Bagnall and Frier 2006: 126–7.

¹⁰² Bagnall and Frier 2006: 126–7; Hanson 2005: 86–7. ¹⁰³ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 126.

have only four unambiguous instances in the census returns that record widows who remarried and took their fatherless children into their new marriages.¹⁰⁴ We can only speculate as to the reasons: perhaps there was no one else to whom the widowed mother could have entrusted her children; or perhaps her new spouse did not object because he had no children of his own. In fact, three of these four stepfathers did not have children of their own at the time of remarriage and were therefore probably willing to take in their brides' children (in all three cases, these children were sons).¹⁰⁵ In one instance the widow was also the owner of the house into which the stepfather moved after the marriage.¹⁰⁶ Apparently he did not have much choice but to accept his stepson. Compared with these four cases of a co-residential stepfather, we find sixteen widowed fathers in the census returns who had remarried and had given their children a stepmother.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps, then, the imbalance we find in the literary and mythological representations of stepmothers and stepfathers does not reflect only the general misogyny of the ancient world; perhaps we should also understand this imbalance in light of the relative rarity of cohabiting stepfathers as opposed to cohabiting stepmothers, who were by far the more common phenomenon.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

The main concern in our literary and legal sources about a widowed mother's remarriage focuses not on the emotional impact that remarriage

¹⁰⁴ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 117-Ar-7 (a woman brought a son from a previous union into her second husband's family; her husband was the head of a household consisting of him, his married two brothers and his widowed elderly mother; the couple had not yet any common children); 131-Me-1 (a woman lived with her second husband and her thirty-three-year-old son from her previous marriage in a house of which she was the owner. The couple did not have any common children); 145-He-2 (a woman had brought her twenty-six-year-old son into her new husband's household. The couple later had their own adult son; both sons were married and still lived with their mother and their (step)father under one roof); 187-Ar-22 (a forty-year-old woman had brought her two children, no older than sixteen and twelve upon her remarriage, into her second husband's household and he already had two children by two previous marriages. When the return was drawn up, the couple had a five-year-old girl together). To these four families we can probably add those two cases in which a woman had children living with her from two or more subsequent marriages but was again divorced or widowed (173-Ar-11; 187-Ar-29). It is possible, however, that these women summoned their children into the homes which they headed only after the dissolution of their second marriage.

¹⁰⁵ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 117-Ar-7; 131-Me-1; 145-He-2. ¹⁰⁶ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 132-Me-1.

¹⁰⁷ Bagnall and Frier 2006: 131-Ox-1; 159-Ar-5; 173-Pr-5; 173-Pr-10 (*bis*); 187-Ar-8; 187-Ar-22; 186-Ar-32; 201-Ar-2; 201-Ar-5; 215-Ar-4. To this number we can add those five cases in which a man had children from two or more subsequent marriages living with him but was again divorced or widowed or had died, but where the half-siblings were still living together (131-Ar-11; 131-He-4; 145-Ar-9; 173-Me-1; 215-He-2).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Watson 1995: 80–1.

would have on the children, but rather on the financial consequences. There was a particular problem facing propertied families when it came to remarriage, namely the presumed conflict between the children from the former union and the new lines of succession created by the new marriage. Stepfathers marrying into the propertied elite often had to defend themselves against accusations that they married with an eye to embezzling the orphan's patrimony, and this prejudice prevailed regardless of whether or not the stepfather and stepchildren lived under the same roof. In those cases in which the mother acted as guardian for her orphaned children, her new husband and stepfather of her children could have been held liable should his stepchildren's patrimony suffer any loss while he was married to their mother. While in the propertied social strata a stepfather was regarded as a threat to his stepchildren's inheritance prospects and suspected of legacy hunting, in the lower strata a stepfather who was willing to marry a widow and take in her children was seen as a last resort. In any event, the proportion of fatherless children who grew up under one roof with a stepfather seems to have been low, while cohabiting stepmothers outnumbered cohabiting stepfathers by a good margin.

Moving beyond the limitations imposed on us by the ancient preoccupations with property and succession, we may ask ourselves what effect a stepfather would have had on a child's life. Even though we cannot reconstruct a full picture of such a relationship because it was, of course, shaped by individual circumstances, living arrangements, and economic aspects, we may safely assert that living in such a patchwork family was difficult for all involved. The non-residential stepfather presumably had only a minor impact on the child's daily life; moving into a stepfather's home, however, was altogether a different proposition. In these few cases the major issues between co-residential stepfathers and stepchildren appear to have centered on problems of authority and obedience, as we have seen in the case of Senuthes and his stepson Johannes. Such problems as these were exacerbated whenever fathers left their children destitute. While in wealthy families such problems might not arise too often since children were provided for from their paternal property, we can easily imagine that when a stepfather became their only provider, such an arrangement could easily develop into a source of constant friction in the home, with the stepfather regularly complaining about the cost of raising his wife's children. Such friction must be seen in the light of the prevailing duties (or lack thereof) that characterized the stepfather-stepchild relationship. In this connection, it is important to stress that no legal relationship between a stepfather and his wife's children from a

previous union was established by a remarriage: a stepfather was not legally obliged to support his stepchildren financially, nor did these stepchildren fall under his *patria potestas*. These responsibilities came only with the adoption of his stepchildren, not remarriage to their mother. Yet this lack of legal and social commitment was symmetrical: while the stepfather was not necessarily expected to help pay for his stepchildren's upbringing, neither were the stepchildren later compelled to care for him in his old age.

Notwithstanding the limits of this legal relationship, we have seen that some stepfathers went beyond the bounds of law and took on a quasi-paternal role, and that this role was indeed defined by parental affection. These stepfathers welcomed their stepchildren into their homes, served as guardians, shielded them against wrongful claims of relatives, and even occasionally adopted them as their heirs. Likewise, we see considerable trust placed in those stepfathers who acted as guardians for their minor stepchildren, and also for their adult stepdaughters. Individual accounts provide us with further evidence that some stepchildren developed close bonds with their stepfathers and half-siblings.

Overall, it becomes clear that the role of the stepfather was much less emotionally charged than that of the stepmother. We do not find an equivalent to the *saeva noverca* (cruel stepmother) or the *noverca venefica* (stepmother as poisoner) aiming at seducing her stepson, or stealing her stepchildren's patrimony or trying to murder them, so common in our sources from antiquity.¹⁰⁹ The only prevailing prejudice against stepfathers in antiquity is the accusation of legacy hunting – at least for those men marrying into the propertied classes. In the lower strata a stepfather was more likely to improve his stepchildren's financial situation than to further endanger it.

Astonishingly, we hear next to nothing in our sources about stepfathers mistreating or sexually abusing their minor stepchildren, which flies in the face of everything we know about stepfathers today, as Golden rightly remarks.¹¹⁰ The currently widespread stereotype of the bullying or sexually violent stepfather does not appear in our ancient sources, and his relatively benign character (apart from the threat he posed to the inheritance) stands in stark contrast to the stereotype of the wicked stepmother that dominates ancient literature. Apart from ascribing this difference to the inherent misogyny of the ancient tradition, this discrepancy might be at least partly attributed to the fact that a cohabiting stepfather was the

¹⁰⁹ Watson 1995: 39–40. ¹¹⁰ Golden (this volume): 52.

exception rather than the norm in antiquity.¹¹¹ All this stands in contrast to the modern Western world, where we find at least four to five times more residential stepfathers than residential stepmothers, a situation primarily attributable to the fact that mothers today usually retain physical custody of their children regardless of marriage status.¹¹²

¹¹¹ In fact, this is also the case in the European fairy-tale tradition: one rarely, if ever, reads of the wicked stepfather!

¹¹² Coleman and Ganong 2004: 134 for the USA. For the UK it is estimated that there are about seven times as many cohabiting stepfathers as stepmothers (Jensen and McKee 2003: 4).

CHAPTER 5

*“Without father, without mother, without genealogy”:
fatherlessness in the Old and New Testaments*

Marcus Sigismund

The engagement of scholars of antiquity with the topic of “fatherlessness” is of high importance because the problem of fatherlessness presents a conspicuous gap in the otherwise well-studied field of the ancient family.¹ However, a study on the topic should not be pursued simply on account of some desire to fill a historiographical lacuna. Instead, by entering into a dialogue with practicing social scientists, scholars of antiquity may be able to provide useful comparative data on this phenomenon, a collaboration which could in turn help us to understand better the manifold problems associated with modern fatherlessness. As we shall see, the New Testament and other contemporary, non-canonical texts represent a rich source of ancient data with respect to how the early Christian community understood and engaged with the problem of fatherlessness.

A quick survey of contemporary Christian writings reveals that fatherlessness is an increasingly contentious topic within several Christian denominations, since the modern phenomenon of children growing up without a father runs counter to the traditional Christian family image.² Unsurprisingly, this state of affairs has occasioned many – often highly emotional – discussions in the Christian media, particularly in Anglo-American Evangelical circles. The inherent dependence of this discourse on the Bible as the normative authority of religion, which understands God as its “Father,”³ underscores the Biblical rootedness of the modern Christian, family-oriented model of society. However, this discourse is

¹ The issue of fatherlessness is ignored almost completely in current handbooks (see below). The following, however, are helpful as background for this essay: Cohen 1993; Osiek 1996; Perdue 1997; Moxnes 1997; and Osiek and Balch 1997. I am grateful to David Ratzan for his comments and suggestions on the English version of this paper.

² The growing number of single parents and children being raised in such homes has increasingly become a pastoral concern. See, e.g., Graham 1998 and Domsgen 2006. See also the Introduction to this volume for the issue in contemporary politics.

³ On the theological interpretation of God the Father, see Strotmann 1991; Grelot 1994; Böckler 2000. For a general account on this topic, see Schlosser *et al.* 2001.