for Allan
By celebrating the anniversary of their birthday every year, Romans marked the passage of time. They gave thanks for the past year and prayed for divine protection for the coming year. Usual elements were fire on the domestic altar, incense, ritual cakes, wine, garlands of flowers, and white robes. These celebrations, and the ritual associated with them, were essentially Roman. There seems to be no Greek parallel for this tradition of annual celebrations of personal birthdays. The birthday poem, as a celebration and a birthday gift, is a Roman genre, attested over three centuries from the Augustan period.

We have seen that there were celebrations and religious ritual when a child was born: fires on the domestic altar and garlands on the front door. All of our evidence for later birthdays is for adults' birthdays. As the focus of the celebrations was a man's *genius* or a woman's *iuno,* and these were fully developed only in adults, that is understandable. But it is inconceivable—in the light of parents' initial celebrations, their frequent recording of precise ages for children, and their consciousness of various stages in a child's development—that children's birthdays were not celebrated in the home, at the domestic altar. What is striking about Roman birthday celebrations is that they were essentially a ceremony carried out by an individual on his or her own behalf. Family and friends might join in, offering gifts and even performing ceremonies on that individual's behalf in other homes, but it was principally the individual who gave thanks for having

1 e.g. Ovid, *Tristia* 3. 13. 13–18; Martial 10. 24.

2 See Argetsinger (1992) for Roman birthday ritual and its natural development into celebration of the emperor's birthday.

3 The *iuno* (*Juno*), the female equivalent of the *genius,* is first heard of in the Augustan period (Argetsinger 1992: 176). Argetsinger has a good discussion of the nature of the *genius,* as being 'both part of a man as well as an external deity' (1992: 186).

Funerary monuments sometimes represent life as a journey. This is particularly so in the 'biographical' or 'life course' sarcophagi. The life course is sometimes a competitive race, which involves a starting point, turning points, and a finish post. Death in childhood truncated this journey, depriving the individual of the variety of stages and experiences which might have been expected. Cicero expressed the stages of the full journey when philosophizing about old age: each age has its own interests, then one moves on to other interests, until eventually all are played out and we are ready for death (*On Old Age* 76).

Particular stages of life of which the state took note were birth, coming-of-age (for males), and death. Taxes or financial offerings had been due on these occasions since early (regal) times at the temples of Juno Lucina, Iuventus, and Libitina respectively (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4. 15. 5). It was from Augustus' time that formal state records of these occasions began to be developed. These occasions were also the major *rites de passage* marked by ritual in Roman society, along with marriages. (The state took no formal note of marriages, although it did have an interest in the outcome of marriages.) Such *rites de passage* marked stages, or occasions, rather than ages. There was little rigid age demarcation within childhood in Roman society until late antiquity: Romans depended more on individual development and perceived capacity to determine fitness for responsibilities.

4 See Whitehead (1984); Huskinson (1996: 110–11), 'Frameworks for life'.

had 'many happy returns' and who prayed for many more. In modern Western society, it would be unusual for a person to celebrate his or her own birthday in this way. We expect others to take the initiative and we might well let the birthday pass unmarked if others do not provide the celebration. Even if we throw our own party, we invite others and it is their participation and good wishes and, often, gifts which make it a 'real' birthday. For the Romans there was a sense of self which was at the core of birthday celebrations, and the essential ritual was between the individual and the divine forces which protected the individual. Part of a child's socialization must have been to learn this ritual and to develop this sense of self. During childhood there were the birthdays of parents or other closely associated adults to observe and learn from.

Ages and Stages
Quintilian enshrined this principle in his work on education in the latter half of the first century (e.g. 1. 3): he emphasized the need for flexibility, according to the individual child's abilities, development, and character.

The number 7 had magic or superstitious connotations, and many systems of dividing the life cycle were based on this number. There were other systems, such as that of Varro, based on the number 5, calculating five stages of fifteen years each: puer to 15, adolescentus to 30, iuuenis to 45, senior to 60, senex thereafter (Censorinus, De die natali 14. 2). Horace (Ars poetica 156-78) presented four stages of the life-span: childhood, youth, adulthood, old age. Such systems were based on numeric symbolism rather than any well thought-out theory of psychology and development. There was considerable flexibility in observing the age distinctions, and it was only in late antiquity that stages of the life cycle were firmly set at a specific age, such as the end of infancy at 7, the age of puberty for girls and boys at 12 and 14 respectively. The variety of age classifications may not have much intrinsic absolute value for insights into child development. But the very variety shows at least two things about Roman attitudes to childhood. First, there were few rigid age barriers to any stage of development: children moved on according to their individual growth and talents and their parents' wishes and resources.

Second, there was considerable discussion of and interest in the development of children, spawning different views of age groupings, but all sharing the basic essentials of development, allowing for infancy, childhood, and adolescence.

There was a great array of divinities associated with children. French (1988: 1361) lists some of these and comments that they show Romans' awareness of the difficulties and dangers of childhood. It is possible that they also reflected something of how Romans conceptualized the child and envisaged its development.

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5 Eyben (1973: 228) has examples.
6 Cf. Marcus Aurelius (Meditations 9. 21. 2), who presents the change from each of these stages to the next as a 'death'.
8 Manson (1978: 283) suggests that the identification of infancy as a differentiated part of childhood may date from the late Republic, with the use of infanitia for the years before puertia.

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They included, for example, Educa, Potina and Rumilia (associated with a baby's eating and drinking), Abeona, Adeona, Statulinius (associated with walking), Cunina (sleeping), Fabulinus (speaking), Pauentia (fearfulness), Vagitanus (crying), Ossipaga (growth of bones).

Cicero specified the qualities of different ages as these: infirmitas for children, fercitas for iuuenes, grauitas for men in the prime of life, maturitas for old men (On Old Age 33, 76). In another work (De finibus 5. 15. 42) Cicero described in more detail the characteristics of young children as they developed: after infancy they learn to stand upright, use their hands, recognize their carers; they enjoy the company of their peers, play games with them, and enjoy hearing the telling of stories; they are generous, curious about activities at home, they begin to learn, and are competitive with their peers. Horace's description (cited above) of each stage of life is vivid in its perception of the qualities and characteristics of each. He began his work The Art of Poetry with advice on style and tone. Language should be appropriate to the character of the speaker (lines 112-18), for example god or hero, mature old man or passionate young man in full bloom, influential lady of rank or a fussing nurse, and so on. Aristotle (Rhetoric 2. 12-14) is sometimes cited as comparable, but, unlike Horace, Aristotle omits childhood in his stages. Horace begins with the child not long out of infancy, one 'who can repeat words and stand firmly on the ground'. This child is anxious to play with his peers, is quick to anger, and just as quick to change moods. At a later stage the young man, not yet with a beard grown, freed from supervision, rejoices in horses and dogs and the grassy, sunny field of the Campus Martius; as impressionable as wax, he is easily influenced to vice, sharp with any who reprimand him, slow to see what will be beneficial, prodigal with money, high-handed, full of desires, and swift to leave aside the objects of his desire.

Seneca (Letters 121) elaborated in some detail on the principle that each age (such as infancy, boyhood) has its own constitutio (121. 15): the infant is toothless, then its teeth grow, and it adapts to each condition. He stressed (121. 3) that one must understand one's own nature in order to know how to act. We must know what is suited to the human animal. Whereas other animals are born with an instinct for their own nature and abilities, humans
have to learn this and be trained (121. 6). This leads to a graphic picture of a child learning to walk (121. 8): ‘The infant, thinking about standing up and scarcely used to that, begins at the same time to try its strength further, and falls down; there are tears, but time and time again he pulls himself up, until, through painful practice, he has mastered what is required by his own nature.’

As we saw above (Chapter 1), Roman law gave some attention to discussing and defining ages at which a child could be considered socially, morally, or criminally responsible. Economic and political responsibility did not come (for a male) until his mid-twenties. Military responsibilities, or at least training, began about age 17 (for males). Within childhood various kinds of responsibility were attached to different ages. Modern systems of law have also to face such questions, and there is a striking similarity with what can be expected of a 10-year-old in ancient and modern societies. In general, the age of 14 or puberty is critical for the perception of a child’s greater responsibility. Below this age, the child is regarded as dolis incapax (incapable of criminality or criminal intent), but those over 10 years of age might be considered capable if they could be shown to have understood the nature of their deed. Julian (mid-second century) expressed this view (D. 47. 2. 23, Ulpian), and in the words of today’s law ‘the capacity to commit crime . . . is not so much measured by years as by the strength of the accused’s understanding and judgment’.

Before 10 a child could be expected to assume various other responsibilities. An ethnographic project, based on the Human Relations Area Files at Harvard, covering fifty cultures, concluded that ‘in some respects, at least, diverse human cultures assign new roles and responsibilities to children in the five-to-seven-year age range’ (Rogoff et al. 1975). This is consistent with Cicero’s observation that early childhood ended at an age of about 6 or 7 (De Finibus 5. 15. 42). The ethnographic study is worth quoting at some length:

From our data it appears that in the age period centering on 5-7 years, parents relegate (and children assume) responsibility for care of younger children, for tending animals, for carrying out household chores and gathering materials for the upkeep of the family. The children also become responsible for their own social behaviour and the method of punishment for transgression changes: Along with new responsibility, there is the expectation that children between 5 and 7 years begin to be teachable. Adults give practical training expecting children to be able to imitate their example; children are taught social manners and inculcated in cultural traditions. Underlying these changes in teachability is the fact that at 5-7 years children are considered to attain common sense or rationality. At this age also, the child’s character is considered to be fixed, and he begins to assume new social and sexual roles. He begins to join with groups of peers, and participate in rule games. The children’s groups separate by sex at this time. Concurrently, the children are expected to show modesty and sex differentiation in chores and social relationships is stressed. All of these variables indicate that at 5-7 the child is broadly categorized differently than before this age, as he becomes a more integral part of his social structure. (Rogoff et al. 1975: 367)

The age of 7 was taken by the Romans as approximately the end of ‘infancy’ in some technical ways. It was at about this age that a child lost its milk teeth and got its permanent teeth. Therefore before this age children were not cremated; but from this time of physical change they joined the adult world for the
The stage of *infantia* was literally the stage of not having the capacity for speech (Varro, *On the Latin Language* 6. 52). Where this was associated with the age of 7, it must have embraced the ability to understand speech. Thus at the end of *infantia* a child was eligible for betrothal, when the parties were supposed to understand the proceedings. Romans did recognize the first year of life, however, as a significant stage even if they did not apply the word ‘infancy’ to it. During that year the first teeth appeared (at about seven months: Soranus 2. 49). A child who reached its first birthday (an *anniculus*) qualified its parents for various legal privileges: for instance, from early in the first century a Junian Latin parent of such a child could apply for full Roman citizenship. The sources contain considerable discussion of the needs and characteristics of infants in their first year, but when they died they were not commemorated as frequently or with the ceremony devoted to children a little older.

Within the first seven years some differentiations were made. The 2-year-old is referred to in literature and inscriptions. The best-known and most eloquent picture in literature is that of Catullus (17. 13), where the *bimus* is represented as sleeping, rocked in its father’s arms. The *bimus* is found in inscriptions of purpose of funerary ritual. The stage of *infantia* was literally the stage of not having the capacity for speech (Varro, *On the Latin Language* 6. 52). Where this was associated with the age of 7, it must have embraced the ability to understand speech. Thus at the end of *infantia* a child was eligible for betrothal, when the parties were supposed to understand the proceedings. Romans did recognize the first year of life, however, as a significant stage even if they did not apply the word ‘infancy’ to it. During that year the first teeth appeared (at about seven months: Soranus 2. 49). A child who reached its first birthday (an *anniculus*) qualified its parents for various legal privileges: for instance, from early in the first century a Junian Latin parent of such a child could apply for full Roman citizenship. The sources contain considerable discussion of the needs and characteristics of infants in their first year, but when they died they were not commemorated as frequently or with the ceremony devoted to children a little older.

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14 Pliny, *NH* 7. 16. 69–70. Rogoff et al. (1975: 334) reports that the age of getting second teeth (6½ to 7½ years) is recognized as a new stage in development by the Ngoni people of Malawi in central Africa.

15 Knothe (1982). Members of the imperial family were occasionally betrothed soon after birth. Meillet (1920) points out that there is no single Indo-European term for ‘infant’: there is a variety of ways of rendering this concept, and it is characteristic of only Latin to use ‘not yet speaking’. The term *infans* seems to have been used as an adjective until the late Republic. Lucretius (1. 186) might provide the first usage of *infantes* as a noun, thus recognizing a particular age group with particular characteristics. The first such use in the singular, *infans*, seems to be that of Cicero in *On Divination* 1. 121.

16 The age of 7 is taken as the defining age for a surviving child in a judgment quoted by Papinian at the end of the 2nd c. (D. 23. 4. 26). By an agreement between a woman’s father and her husband, the husband was to keep the whole dowry if she predeceased a child who had reached the age of 7.

17 See below (Ch. 8) on formal mourning and commemoration for infants and the relationship between formal, public action and personal, private experience.

18 The reference is also used here to ridicule an opponent. See Manson (1978), who argues for the meaning of 2-year-old for this term rather than two-months-old. As he points out (1978: 281), the child has passed two winters.

19 *CIL* 6. 17796; cf. 26544.

20 Ulpian, *Reg.* 16 *(FLRA* 2. 278). One child was sufficient if it survived to 12 (for girls) or 14 (for boys). Cf. Ch. 2 above.


The ages must have been associated with the onset of puberty, although they were not so defined until late antiquity. There is evidence for such early marriages in the upper classes, but they do not seem to have been the norm in wider society. From that age, however, a boy might go through the ritual of attaining manhood by changing his boyhood garb (the toga praetexta) for the toga virilis. Ages known for this ceremony range from 13 to 18. Parents' freedom in deciding when the boy was ready and when there was an appropriate occasion is another example of the flexibility of concepts of stages of development in Roman society. This contrasts with the uniformity decreed by the state in our own societies for ages marking some forms of adulthood, such as the age for voting, the age for purchasing alcohol or tobacco.

During Cicero's governorship of Cilicia in 51-50 BCE he had with him his teenage nephew (Quintus) and son (Marcus). They were getting provincial experience, but were still students and not involved in active service. However, with civil war looming, there seems to have been some urgency about giving them the adult toga. At the Liberalia festival in 50, on 17 March, the traditional (but not obligatory) date for this ceremony, Cicero saw to it for Quintus at Laodicea. Quintus was about 16 years old, and the fact that the ceremony was held in the province rather than in Rome, and in the absence of Quintus' father (who was in winter quarters with the army), suggests some urgency. In the next year Marcus, some months short of 16, went through the same ceremony in Italy. Cicero could not enter Rome, still holding imperium from his proconsular command, so he welcomed the opportunity to induct his son at Arpinum, the family's home town south-east of Rome, as the next best choice.

Both young men were then active in the civil war which broke out between armies led by Caesar and by Pompey.

Octavian was just too young (13), when civil war broke out, to participate. He was sent to the country for safety. Soon after his sixteenth birthday, however, he took on the toga virilis. Even after that, his mother tried to maintain close supervision of his movements and behaviour, and opposed his joining his great-uncle Caesar when Caesar set out for the African campaign later in 47. But Octavian had already performed in public life at the age of 12 (51 BCE), when he gave the funeral eulogy for his grandmother Julia, Caesar's sister; and in 47 he was appointed Prefect of the City at the time of the Latin Festival (an important element in Caesar's plans for stability and continuity at this time). He also became a pontefex in that year, no doubt sponsored by Caesar as part of his plans for Octavian's future. Octavian shared in the celebrations and honours at Caesar's triumphs in 46, and not long afterwards he took the first opportunity after his seventeenth year to join a military campaign, following Caesar to Spain (though arriving belatedly).

At age 14 Britannicus, son of the previous emperor Claudius and stepbrother of the new emperor Nero, was still sitting amongst the children (as a puer) at dinner, rather than reclining amongst the adult men (Tacitus, *Annals* 13. 16, for the year 55); but he may have been held back in his development in favour of Nero, who was three years older and had already assumed the toga of manhood at age 13. This age was considered premature, but, with Claudius ailing, Nero's supporters (including his mother Agrippina the Younger) were anxious to mark Nero's fitness to rule. The senate conferred on Nero special honours and rank, including that of consul-designate, although they provided

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23 For literary references to prostitutes, see Cicero, *In Defence of Caelius* 48: 'Youths have always used meretrici'; Horace, *Epodes* 5. 58; Persius, 31. 32.


25 Cicero, *Att.* 5. 17, Aug. 51 BCE; 6. 1. 12, Feb. 50. For military purposes, boys remained pueri until their seventeenth birthday, when they might begin service as suianres (Gellius 10. 28, quoting Q. Tubero).

26 *Att.* 6. 1. 12. Ovid, *Fasti* 3. 771-88, speculates on reasons for this choice of date for the toga ceremony.

27 *Att.* 5. 20-5, Dec. 51.


29 The main sources for Octavian's early to mid-teens are Nicolaus of Damascus' biography (especially 4-5) and Suetonius' *Augustus*. Inconsistencies between these are discussed in Jane Bellemore's edition of Nicolaus and John Carter's of Suetonius. *CIL* 10. 8375 preserves the day and month (18 Oct.) of Octavian's assumption of the adult toga. See also Broughton (1951-2), under relevant years.
that he was not actually to enter the consulship until his twentieth year. Claudius had presided at Nero's coming-of-age ceremony as his adoptive father, but, according to Suetonius, Claudius looked forward to the time when he could do this for his natural son. Nero would have been in no hurry to bring this event on when he became emperor in 54.30

There was considerable ceremony associated with the donning of the *toga virilis*, at least in families of some standing in the state.31 Coming to full adulthood was a staged development, but this point in the early to mid-teens was recognized as significant, socially and politically. The wearing of the white toga, without the purple band of childhood, was one visible sign. At the same time, freeborn boys put aside the locket (*bulla*) which they had worn from birth, had their facial hair shaved off, and their hair cut short.32 This was part of the religious ritual in the home early in the morning, before the boy set out for the Forum, accompanied by his father and his father's friends and supporters, to perform further religious ritual on the Capitol and to be inscribed in the roll of citizens in the Public Records office in the *tabularium.*33

30 Tacitus, *Annals* 11. 41: ‘virilis toga Neroni maturata quo capessendae rei publicae habilis uidereetur’. At the games, popular favour was cultivated by Nero's wearing of *triumphalis uestis*, while Britannicus wore the *toga praetexta*. Nero could be seen in the splendour of command, while Britannicus was in a boy's outfit. Suetonius, *Claudius* 43.

31 Dolansky (1999) treats the ceremony and its associations at length. See also Ch. 7 below, including the transfer of the public part of the proceedings to the forum of Augustus.

32 Martial 1. 31. 6 and 10. 42. 2 for the cutting of the hair. Some foppish young men cultivated long hair or little beards, to Cicero's disgust (On the Agrarian Law 2. 58, of the son of King Hiempsal of Numidia in 63 BCE; *Att.* 1. 14. 5, of Clodius' supporters in 61; In defence of Caius 33, of Clodia's young men in 56).

33 Cicero, *In Defence of Murena* 69, refers to the readiness of male citizens to join the early morning procession of such boys, even those of humble rank: this would be one of the reciprocal duties of friends and of patrons and clients. On the morning of the fateful Ides of March (44 BCE) senate meeting when Caesar was murdered, Cassius' fellow-conspirators gathered at his house to accompany him and his son to the Forum as part of the *toga virilis* ceremony (Plutarch, *Brutus* 14). A century and a half later Pliny the Younger wrote of the claims on his time of ceremonies such as that of the *toga virilis* (Letters 1. 9. 2). Luenatias is the deity (of youth) to whom offerings were made in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4. 15. 5). Festus (p. 32 L) defined the (golden) *bulla* as the insignia of *pueri praetextati*, hanging down their chests. It was reported that at Caesar's funeral mothers threw onto the pyre their own jewellery and their children's *bullae* and *praetextae* (Suetonius, *Julius* 84. 4). The poets Propertius and Persius both refer to the toga and the *bullae*. Propertius' father had died before Propertius came of age, so his ritual took place before his mother's family gods. He represents himself as receiving advice about his future from Horus when his golden *bulla* had been removed from his young neck and the adult toga put on: he was to be an elegiac poet, not a man for military or political life, and Apollo would guide him (4. 1. 131–2). Persius (5. 30–5) marks his transition to the freedom of manhood by the removal of *bullae* and childhood toga, which are draped over the *Lares*. Seneca reminded Lucilius of Lucilius' joy at putting on the adult toga and being conducted to the Forum (Letters 4. 2).

34 'papae, manias, mollis pilas, reticula, strophia': Varro in Nonius 863. 15 L; Persius 2. 70.

35 See Demand (1994: 88) for details. She speculates (113–14) on the potential psychological effect of these rites on the participants. Some girls, being prepubertal, may have fallen short of society's expectations of girls preparing for marriage. This would have raised anxieties, contributing to the 'illness of maidens'. There is no indication of such systemic anxiety in Roman girls, but their preparedness for marriage must have depended on the quality of advice received from their mother (if alive) and other adult female relations and friends.