

Growing up in the Roman empire

Coming of age (girls)

For a Roman girl, her wedding was the moment that she symbolically passed from childhood into adulthood, as well as from her parents' household to her husband's. On the eve of her wedding, she would dedicate her childhood dolls and her *lunula* (moon-shaped amulet) to the goddess Venus. Girls were normally married by the age of twenty, and most married somewhere in their teens, sometimes as young as 11 or 12 (men, by comparison, tended to marry in their late twenties or thirties).



Sarcophagus of the spouses, 150-170 AD, Museo ducale di Mantua (Italy).

Above: dextrarium iunctio relief (joining of right hands), with the bride wearing her veil. The little figure in front is the god Hymenaeus, carrying a wedding torch.

Roman wedding customs and rituals:

- the bride would wear a flame-coloured veil
- sacrifices would be made and a *haruspex* would take the omens
- symbolic joining of right hands (the *dextrarum iunctio*)
- the *raptio*: the ancient custom of pretending to pull the bride away from her mother by force
- a torchlit procession to the bridegroom's house
- the wedding song
- the calling out of noisy greetings and coarse jokes to the bridegroom
- traditional words of the bride to her husband '*ubi tu Gaius, ego Gaia*' ('Where you are Gaius, I am Gaia')
- carrying the bride across the threshold of her new home

For a Roman boy, coming of age meant entering the world as his own man, and becoming a full citizen. How was girls' experience different?

How different was it for a man to get married, from a woman's experience, do you think?

What evidence is there that Roman girls and women were treated like possessions?

Do you think Roman girls had to get married too soon?