

**Please cite the Published Version**

Pudsey, April and Vuolanto, Ville (2022) Enslaved children in Roman Egypt : experiences from the Papyri. In: Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150 – 700 CE. Cambridge University Press, pp. 210-223. ISBN 9781108476225 (hardback); 9781108568159 (ebook)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108568159.012>

**Publisher:** Cambridge University Press

**Version:** Published Version

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# Enslaved Children in Roman Egypt: Experiences from the Papyri

April Pudsey and Ville Vuolanto

The ancient Mediterranean was home to a youthful population. Demographic dynamics favoured a relatively high proportion of children and adolescents who were visibly present in their multitudes in the cities, towns, and villages; a significant proportion of these young people were of slave status, some having been enslaved or, as is more likely, born into slavery.<sup>1</sup> The presence and lives of enslaved persons are documented plentifully in textual, material, and literary evidence from across the Greco-Roman world, though almost all of this material reflects the concerns and attitudes of the slave-owning echelons of society, and we have no extant narrative testimony from any enslaved person from Roman Antiquity. Further, though the existence of children and young people is mentioned in key sources on, and studies of, Roman slavery, a specifically youth-focused perspective is meagre.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the scale of slavery in Roman Empire, see Scheidel 2011, 288–92, with further references. His estimation is that in urban contexts in Italy, one third of the population might have been enslaved, and potentially one out of fifteen (ca. 7 per cent) of the rural population of Roman Egypt, would have been of slave status. See Pudsey 2013 on slave numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Research on children and Roman slavery has mostly appeared as a tangential point in discussions of slave supply (see Scheidel 2011, 297–308, with further studies), education (see Keegan 2013), child work (see Bradley 1991, 103–24; Laes 2008; Gamauf 2012), and sexual relations (see Keegan 2013; McKeown 2007a; Laes 2003). In only a handful of studies has the focus been towards experiences of enslaved children (see Wieber 2012; Herrmann-Otto 2012) – significantly, many of these deal with the early Christian world (Kartzow 2018b; Brooten 2015; MacDonald 2014, esp. 36–48, 60–5, 151–3). See also Sigismund-Nielsen 2013; Busch and Binsfeld 2012; Herrmann-Otto 1994. For inspiration and comparative points, we have consulted research on enslaved children in the Antebellum South, which has been more squarely focused on the agency and experience of children: Duane 2017; King 1995; Pargas 2011; Pasierowska 2016; Schwartz 2010;

There are several important questions to be asked: how were the experiences of slavery shaped by age? What were the social and cultural factors that determined the experiences and outlooks of children who were enslaved? How can we understand notions of ownership in the context of children, and relations between children of slave and freeborn statuses? Source material from Roman Egypt of first to sixth centuries CE provides us with a rare glimpse into these concerns in antiquity; surviving documentary papyri include details of transactions, private letters, documented travel, movement, and labour, and tensions and concerns around the physical health of children of slave status. This chapter aims to reconstruct some of the backgrounds, experiences, and concerns of children and young people in Roman Egypt who were to enslaved, through a systematic approach to this material.

Such a reconstruction would be near impossible from source material outside of Egypt, where epigraphic, philosophical, and other texts exist in varied contexts and with sparsity. The papyri from Oxyrhynchos in Egypt offer a distinct opportunity to contribute two new approaches: first, a detailed study of relevant evidence from one city, and second, an approach that focuses on bringing together perspectives in slave studies with those in childhood studies. Our reconstruction relates to an outcome of our project, *PAIDES: Children's Lives in Roman Oxyrhynchos*, for which we have systematically examined some 1,900 literary and over 5,300 documentary papyri, hundreds of material objects, and all of the nearly 100 inscriptions and some literary texts from the city of Oxyrhynchos. Through these, we explore the lives of children within a particular physical, social, and cultural environment, and analyse the roles, relationships, and experiences of children within that environment.<sup>3</sup> For our present purposes, those texts which can be connected both to slavery and children, together around seventy-five, cover over one seventh of the documentary cases in our database from this one ancient city. In what follows, we present these cases and use our analysis of them to reconstruct what we can of the lives, experiences, surroundings, and social environment of children of slave status in Oxyrhynchos. As such, this

Wieber 2012. Publications specifically on children's experience of slavery will be forthcoming from a current Leverhulme-funded project, *Enslaved Childhoods: Redefining Roman Slavery*, Ulrike Roth.

<sup>3</sup> A fuller variety of children's lives and experiences, with enslaved children's experiences contextualized with other documents on children and youth in Oxyrhynchos and wider Roman Egypt, takes place in Pudsey and Vuolanto 2021. See now also Pudsey 2015; 2017; Pudsey and Vuolanto 2017; Vuolanto 2015b; Vuolanto 2017.

study would be the first systematic reconstruction of aspects of children's lives as slaves in an ancient Graeco-Roman city.

#### ENSLAVED CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS

From Oxyrhynchos we have twenty-one preserved census returns that also include minor children; in five of these households there appear children registered as slaves.<sup>4</sup> They appear to have lived in relatively large households, in all likelihood with peers of similar age groups. In one household, for instance, a man in his sixties lists as members of his household his son, aged thirty-two, his son's wife, aged thirty-one, their son aged four, who was born away from home. There is another son mentioned, a daughter of nineteen years, and another daughter who had died. Additionally, we have a enslaved woman with her two children; unfortunately no ages have been preserved for them. Here we apparently observe two children of slave status living with their mother, though without their father or any other relatives, in a household alongside an extended family that also includes a four-year-old boy.<sup>5</sup> Census data for children of slave status shows them as more likely to be living with surviving mothers and siblings than either individually or with their fathers.

There are some surviving notifications of birth for slave children in Roman Egypt – though only one of these relates Oxyrhynchos<sup>6</sup> – and a number of slave children were registered in the city registers as members of metropolitan-status households at the age of thirteen or fourteen.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this is evidently that slaves of metropolitan-status owners were subject to a reduction in poll tax, with the consequence that registering enslaved people's births or their coming of age (at the age of fourteen) was a way of ascertaining their reduced-tax status. As can be observed in the household census more broadly, one feature of the behaviours around completing the household census was the conscious non-recording of those eligible for taxation (boys over fourteen years of age). It is highly

<sup>4</sup> See Table 10.1. Of course, this is a small fraction of the total in even the recorded households; many children of slave status may not have been recorded as such for various reasons, or recorded at all, and many census returns are incomplete due to accidents of survival.

<sup>5</sup> P. Oxy XXXIII 2671 (216/7), the return relates to Leonidou in the Herakleopolite nome. See Table 10.1 for other cases. See Pudsey 2013 table 24.3.

<sup>6</sup> P. CtYBR inv. 1386, 143–4.

<sup>7</sup> *Chrest.* Wilck. 217 (172–3 CE); PSI VII 732, 153–4; P. Oxy. LXVII 4584 (100/101 CE); P. Oxy. IV 714 (122 CE); P. Oxy. XII 1451 (175); PSI XII 1230 (203 CE). See also SB XXII 15210 (77 CE), which may be a enslaved boy with sibling owners.

TABLE 10.1 *Recorded enslaved children in Oxyrhynchos census returns.*

<i>P. Oxy</i> XXXIII 2671 (216/17 CE)	215-He-3	This census return relates to Leonidou in the Herakleopolite nome.
<i>SB</i> XXIV 16011 (11 CE?)		A man in forties and his 7-year-old son, a number of slaves (man aged 50, his sons of 14 and 5).
<i>P. Oxy.</i> XII 1548 (202/3 CE)	201-Ox-1	A man with two daughters (15 and 20), and four slaves: man aged 18, girl aged 13, woman aged 35 and her 9-year-old son (13-year-old lives with 20-year-old and her husband; 9-year-old boy lives with the declarant and his 15-year-old daughter).
<i>P. Flor.</i> I 4 (245 CE)	243-Ox-1	Two brothers have slave boys aged 3, 0, 0, and a girl 5, with their mother 24 and one more slave 19.
<i>P. Oxy.</i> VIII 1110 (187-8 CE)	187-An-1	(Not from Oxyrhynchos.) See Pudsey 2013 table 24.3.

likely that similar tax-focused thinking played a role in the recording of slaves.<sup>8</sup> From the principate onwards, the slave population across the Roman world was largely maintained through slaves born to slave couples on estates and households, often even by straightforward slave-breeding. Indeed, the perceived value of *vernae*, home-bred slaves, was much greater than of enslaved people.<sup>9</sup> Inferring from the comparative viewpoint outside of Egypt, especially from the patterns of slave reproduction, it is highly likely that a great proportion of them were *vernae*, that is, born into slave families.<sup>10</sup>

The registration documents from Oxyrhynchos mention the origin of the slave, and in all but one of these cases these slaves were indeed

<sup>8</sup> Bagnall and Frier 1994, 1–30, and boys over 14.

<sup>9</sup> See Scheidel 2011; Herrmann-Otto 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Bagnall and Frier 1994, 53–74.

homeborn – which would reflect a long-term relationship with the other household members. In one of these documents we meet a boy who was to have his own *epikrisis* (registering of his coming of age) in the same year, and who wants to register a slave owned jointly by himself and his sister: the head of the household and the enslaved boy are purportedly exact age peers. In another registration, made by a certain Trunnia, mother of two and owner of three children, there appears an eleven-year-old daughter, a thirteen-year-old son, and three *vernae* of slave status aged five, nine, and one of unknown age.<sup>11</sup> The importance of social interaction with peers within one's age group is an influential aspect of child development in terms of broader social and cultural interactions, and we see here one important aspect of slavery often overlooked in scholarship of ancient slave studies: at least in some areas of the Roman world, people who were born into slavery, though subject to 'social alienation' in some senses, were raised and subject to peer interactions with those of free status, likely with varying ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds.

The one exception not mentioned to be a *verna* is thirteen-year-old Melas, who was a foundling.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, many of the slave children, both girls and boys, would have shared this background, as foundlings would have been collected and raised as slaves – a practice not specific just to Egypt, but across the Graeco-Roman world. As many of the quite numerous (six from Oxyrhynchos alone) wet-nursing contracts specify, foundlings were found in dung heaps and they were given to wet-nurses (often freeborn themselves) to bring them up usually for two years, and then to return to their finders as slaves. In one of these contracts, it is even pointed out that it was drafted on the very same day as the child was found.<sup>13</sup> These nurslings were unquestionably brought up for profit: not only was it clearly stated

<sup>11</sup> Chrest. Wilck. 217 (172–3 CE); P. Oxy. 12 1451 (175 CE).

<sup>12</sup> PSI XII 1230. There are all together six certain cases preserved from Oxyrhynchos that mention an *epikrisis* of enslaved children.

<sup>13</sup> Wet-nursing contracts: P. Rein II 103 (26 CE); P. Rein 2 104 (26 CE; suckling infant girl found from a dung heap to be wet-nursed for two years); SB 16.12952 (68 CE: a child found from a dung to be raised as a slave); PSI 3 203 (87 CE: an infant found 'today' from a dung heap, to suckle and nurse for two years); SB XVIII 13120 (81/82 CE); P. Oxy. LXXVIII 5168 (18 BCE). See Pudsey 2013. For foundlings (and child abandonment as a neighbourhood phenomenon in Graeco-Roman worlds) see Evans Grubbs 2011; 2013. See also P. Oxy. I 37 (49 CE) and P. Oxy I 38 (49–50 CE: a court case – wet-nurse for a boy found from a dung heap. The master slips in to the house and takes the child – but the nurse and her husband claim the master had taken their freeborn boy instead, as the foundling boy had died earlier. Court decided in favour of the parents getting their child back).

they were to become property of their finders, but also they were assets in trade. One document shows, for example, that after an enslaved girl was wet-nursed for two years, and thus survived her infancy, she was immediately sold after weaning. Thus, the decision to nurse the girl was clearly to draw profit from her.<sup>14</sup> Rescuing and nourishing a small child often had very little to do with the kindness of strangers.

#### SEPARATION FROM THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN: THE MOBILITY OF ENSLAVED CHILDREN

There were many individuals who were sold and resold as children. Enslaved children regularly moved from house to house, town to town, and even province to province. Even the local sales were often enough to separate the children from their parents and their peers, friends, and familiar community. In one case there was an eight-year-old girl sold in a deal between two women, in another a girl aged around twelve years was moved to another house, and in a third one it was a fourteen-year-old boy, Sarapous, who was moving to another house due to a partial sale.<sup>15</sup> Infants were not only subject to becoming slaves in a new household as foundlings, but there were also infants subject to sale and moving to new households with their slave mothers.<sup>16</sup> This issue of sale along with family members is consistent with the family groupings of slaves we see dominating the household census returns, and rather bucks the trend of what we see across the Roman world (and slave societies) more broadly, where enslaved families are typically separated. In one case there appears, for example, a sale of a woman of thirty-five years of age along with her two children: a daughter and a one-year-old son. It is also worth noting the age of the mother in this example is the oldest known recorded age for a slave woman in the Roman period.<sup>17</sup>

In some cases, we observe the enslaved moving, after being sold, across longer distances and often between major cities in Egypt as a common experience. A fifteen-year-old girl, originally from Pentapolis, was purchased by a buyer from Oxyrhynchos. In another case it is mentioned that a now twenty-four-year-old enslaved woman had been bought in the Little

<sup>14</sup> *PSI* XII 1228 (188 CE: sale of a half share of a slave girl. See also *Col. Inv.* 502, a contract for nursing a slave child, first or second century CE.

<sup>15</sup> *P. Oxy.* II 263 (77 CE); *SB* XX 14285; *P. Bingen.* 62 (89 CE).

<sup>16</sup> *SB* XX 14395 (170 CE) and *P. Oxy.* IX 1209 (251–2 CE).

<sup>17</sup> *P. Oxy.* II 375 (c.79 CE).

Oasis when she was either two or twelve years old. A sick ('leucoma') teenager aged nineteen, a hereditary slave from the father, was sold between individuals at Antinoopolis and Oxyrhynchos.<sup>18</sup> Such sales could sometimes follow each other in a rapid sequence. In a document written in Oxyrhynchos a seller vows the details of the history of the individual: a seven-year-old boy was sold for a fourth time: the second selling had been in the Small Oasis, the third and fourth in Oxyrhynchos.<sup>19</sup> It seems that in all these cases the sale would imply also the separation of the child from all of their former family or household relationships, both kin and non-kin, and thereby further impact the emotional lives of these children and their natal and social alienation.

For some children, a sale would imply a move over great distances and a loss of familial culture and even the language. In one case, for example, a girl, Rufina, who was originally a 'Moor' from Caesaria Mauretania (present-day Cherchell, near Algiers), was sold in Rhodes – where the document was drafted – when she was ten years old or in her teens. Eventually she ended up in Oxyrhynchos, as did also Balsamea, a seventeen-year-old Oshroenian Mesopotamian, who was part of a contract of purchase made in Tripolis of Phoenicia. A boy, Zoilos, aged nine years, had been sold twice and was recorded as 'more or less' Macedonian by origin when he appeared in Oxyrhynchos.<sup>20</sup> Another boy, originally named Prokopton but now renamed Aptus, was sold in Oxyrhynchos in 265, seemingly at the age of two. He already had a history of two previous sales behind him – both in Bostra in the province of Arabia.<sup>21</sup> These are very large distances and would have presented swift and impactful changes in cultures, languages, and interactions.

The sales of children are also discussed in some private letters, for instance when a friend hints to an enslaver based in Oxyrhynchos that an Alexandrine lady was interested in buying three young male

<sup>18</sup> *P. Ross. Georg.* III 27 (234–5); *P. Amst.* II 46 (217 or 227); *P. Ant.* III 187a (198 CE). See also *P. Oxy.* XLIX 3477, 270 CE (A *verna* girl of sixteen years of age was sold in Cynopolis in the Delta); another *verna*, Isidora, aged twelve years, was subject to purchase in (Small or Great) Oasis: *P. Oxy.* LV 3784 (227/8 or 281/2).

<sup>19</sup> *P. Oxy.* LX 4058 (158–9).

<sup>20</sup> Rufina: *P. Oxy.* LX 3593 (238–44); Balsamea: *P. Oxy.* XLII 3053 (252); Zoilos: *PSI* XII 1245 (237 CE).

<sup>21</sup> *P. Oxy.* XLII 3054 (265 CE) His age is contested by the editors as implausible; still, all three sales mentioned in the document would fit into this time limit.



acrobats,<sup>22</sup> or when a son writes to his mother because he needs help in selling his small boy, seemingly unaware of how much he should get for the boy from the market.<sup>23</sup>

It is often impossible to know which enslaved children were separated from their mothers and other family members when they were young. In our documents those who had been sold, and thus had the highest probability of separation, are quite naturally overrepresented in written transactional records, compared with those children who did not leave any official traces of themselves. Still, it is clear that a constant threat of being sold to a foreign household, or even to a foreign land, was a very real one and, for children in particular, one that must have been felt with fear and with a great deal of intensity – for some, this risk became a reality.

This forced mobility of enslaved children indeed reflects not only their economic worth to the enslavers and their social vulnerability, but it also highlights elements of slavery as a system, such as enforcing social death and dishonour; indeed, it is a part of the inner logic of slavery that people do not have access to their communities of origin, their families, traditions, and stories: their heritage, their identity, their continuity are negated. As Orlando Patterson crystallizes the implication of these processes: as slaves cannot anchor their ‘living present in any conscious community of memory’, they encounter ‘natal alienation’.<sup>24</sup> This process can hardly be seen more clearly than in these sales of children, and, all too tragically, was likely to have been experienced traumatically by them.

#### THE ‘VALUE’ OF ENSLAVED CHILDREN: WORK AND EDUCATION

Even small children unquestionably had some economic value to the slave-owning echelons of society. This is also confirmed in a marriage contract that mentions *mikrois paisi* – small slave children – as a part of the dowry. As one would expect, the enslaved – including children – were mentioned regularly as a part of inheritance, for example in a case in which an inheritance was to be distributed among seven children after the death of their parents. There were many slaves, among them Sinthoris, a twenty-five-year-old woman with her ten-year-old daughter, whose ownership was to be shared by the

<sup>22</sup> *P. Oxy.* XXXVIII 2860 (second century CE). See also *P. Oxy.* I 117 (second or third century CE): Chaereas writes to his brother, wanting him to sell the children (otherwise unspecified).

<sup>23</sup> *PSI* XIII 1359 (second or third century CE).

<sup>24</sup> See Patterson 1982, 5–16. We owe thanks to Chris de Wet in pointing out the relevance of Patterson’s concept of natal alienation for our chapter.

siblings.<sup>25</sup> A further asset was the reproductive capacity for girls; thus, for example, in one case an enslaved girl of twelve years old was given as an inheritance, with a standard formula ‘with all her future descendants’. In another case a girl called Nike was given as a security of loan with her future offspring.<sup>26</sup> As *vernae* were a major source of the slave supply (or put otherwise, as ‘breeding’ of slaves on estates made good business sense to most), a girl who had survived childhood mortality, to an age when all her reproductive capacity lay in front of her, would have been viewed by an enslaver as a potentially lucrative opportunity for amassing capital. It was only in their early teens that the prices for enslaved women could have equalled those for enslaved men.<sup>27</sup>

The great estates had enslaved children as a part of their work force; thus, Apollonius urges another man, a manager of a farm, to take care that ‘little Polydeuces is to work with Melas the carpenter, and not to leave his side’.<sup>28</sup> We meet also Totoes, still a minor and named after the father of his owners, who is hired to work for another household – he would have been able to return to his home after the contract’s duration had been completed.<sup>29</sup> In a series of documents we frequently find the enslaved as workers in estates alongside free young people. Some of these were seasonal workers, identified as such because of their wages; these include family groups, with children working with their brothers, fathers, and uncles – with half a pay.<sup>30</sup> In some of the account lists, however, it is unclear, whether the words used of the workers refer to slaves more generally, or specifically to child slaves. If a document mentions both *paides* and *paidiskoi* working without pay; *paides* helping in grape harvesting, carrying bricks, using donkeys to carry hay and bricks; *paidarioi* turning over terrain and carrying something; can we infer from these clearly distinguished distinctions that *paides* might be enslaved adults and *paidiskoi* enslaved children?<sup>31</sup> In another document, there were payments both to a *paidarion* and to *paidia*; in still other to

<sup>25</sup> *P. Ifao* 3.5 (second century CE); *P. Oxy.* XIV 1638 (282 CE).

<sup>26</sup> *SB XX* 14285 (59 CE); *P. Oslo* II 40a (150 CE).

<sup>27</sup> See more generally Scheidel 1996. As Harper (2011, 293) points out, this may also be linked to their sexual potential.

<sup>28</sup> *P. Oxy.* XLII 3066 (third century CE) not clear if free or slave, even if name could refer to slave status.

<sup>29</sup> *PSI VI* 710 (second century CE); unfortunately, we do not know the duration of the agreement.

<sup>30</sup> *P. Princ.* II 96, r. col. I (551–7 CE) with Vuolanto 2015b. See also *PSI VIII* 953 (567–8 CE) with families of Goths serving in Apion estates in Oxyrhynchos after the Gothic wars in Italy.

<sup>31</sup> *SB XIV* 11960 (ca. 260): a receipt/calculation for the work done.

*paidariois* and *korasiois*; and once a *paidarion* was to be remunerated for the fish he had bought.<sup>32</sup> There are no self-evident solutions here, but distinctions between concepts used and work attributed to different people seems to imply that child labour would also have been included here – as does comparison with cases where there are differences in payments for the same work.

Enslavers also sought profit by taking care that enslaved young people would acquire new skills. There are five apprenticeship contracts from Oxyrhynchos that relate to slaves. It would appear usual for such individuals to continue living with their enslavers, and to stay with their apprentice master from sunrise until the sunset (this was also typical of many apprenticeship contracts for free young people). Three of these apprentices were apprenticed into the weaving business, one of them a girl, and two other boys were to learn shorthand writing.<sup>33</sup> In terms of everyday experience for these young people we can do little more than speculate around the ways in which individual experience and outlook would have differed between slave apprentices and free apprentices – or indeed, whether in a larger workshop the master would have made much distinction between the many people learning and working. Enslaved children and freeborn children also appear together in some simple notifications of death to local officials, which include slave children; in one of these, from the mid third century, there appear a freeborn boy and two enslaved, the older of which was sixteen, who died in the same household. One is left to speculate if this was due to an epidemic or a major accident.<sup>34</sup> However, taking these pieces of evidence

<sup>32</sup> *P. Mich.* XI 619 (after 183): a *paidarion* and *paidia* were paid. *SB XVI* 12764 (first or second century CE): this is an account list for salaries paid to the slaves (*paidariois/korasiois*) of a certain Thoth. *P. Haun.* III 36 (350–450): accounts, with a *paidarion* Stephanios to be remunerated because of his fish. See also *P. Oxy.* 68.4683 (426 CE): *paidariois* supply for two double jars of Theban wine; *P. Oxy.* LXVIII 4680 (419 CE): Kyriake, a girl *pediske*, an order to supply oil.

<sup>33</sup> *BGU IV* 1021 (third century CE): a slave boy, wool carding, three years (the length of the contract suggests that the boy in question was unskilled), lives with his owner but stays with his master from sunrise to sunset. *P. Oxy.* XLI 2977 (239 CE) wool carding for five years, wages rise according to training (with first six months no pay – which again refers to an unskilled worker), to work from sunrise to sunset. *P. Oxy.* IV 724, a slave boy learning shorthand, living with his apprentice master for the period, which is at maximum two years – it is stated that he can return sooner, if he has learned and the master does not want to keep him. *P. Oxy.* XLI 2988 (second century CE), an apprenticeship contract for shorthand writing, but very fragmentary. *P. Oxy.* XIV 1647 (late second century CE): an underage female slave, an apprenticeship contract to a weaver for four years.

<sup>34</sup> *P. Oxy.* LXXIV 4998 (253/4). See also *P. Oxy.* XLIX 3510 (79/80): a slave boy belonging to declarant's wife, Diogenes, had died (also another slave had died, belonging to declarant's brother, in turn).

together, it is clear that the young people would often have had access to peer relationships both with enslaved children and with free children, regardless of their own background. Such children quite frequently grew up alongside free children and adolescents of similar ages, and shared with them their cultures, social practices, and social environments.<sup>35</sup>

Can we see here any chronological change in slavery, or in the living conditions of enslaved children? Foundlings, picked up to be suckled by nurses and raised as slaves, indeed appear mostly in first-century documents. The young slaves we see referred to in *epikrisis* and gymnasial registrations, and as apprentices, are more common in the second- and third-century documents, again in step with what we see across the cities of the province. On the other hand, we note that our examples of sales and travel of children as slaves are more frequently found in the third-century documents. However, these trends are perhaps less due to temporal and cultural changes and social practices, and more due to patterns in documentation. The nature of survival of documentary papyri relating to child slaves in Roman Egypt is no different to the patterns of survival of many other types of documentary papyri; that is, more documents have been excavated, worked on, transcribed, and published from the second and third centuries in key sites than elsewhere. Moreover, the documentation of certain deeds and contracts would have changed across time and place. Thus, taken together, the cases we have here from Oxyrhynchos give us little detail of change in the practice of slavery itself, or of change in the everyday lives of enslaved children, between the earlier Roman empire and late antiquity.

#### CONCLUSIONS: SLAVERY AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

Enslaved children were everywhere in Roman society. They lived, worked, and experienced life in homes, in fields, and in workshops with apprentices in the city. As the census documents and information concerning the work conditions of enslaved children show, in Roman Egypt their lives were often intertwined with those of free children – perhaps even more so than between enslaved adults and adult free persons. It was not unusual for families of slaves to reside together and to continue to be in constant interaction, especially through work and learning. As for leisure and play, the papyri have very little to say, but interaction was expected at least when concerning the younger children. Studies of material cultures of children in Roman and Late Roman Egypt, however, hint at the roles of

<sup>35</sup> See also Pudsey 2017 and Vuolanto 2015b.

shared peer interactions and play with toys, in household and courtyard settings – these would invariably have involved slave and free children playing together.<sup>36</sup> Also, the comparative material from late antiquity shows that enslaved and freeborn children were in frequent interaction – which was even encouraged as a way for freeborn children to socialize into their adult social roles (as enslavers) at an early age.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, any firm distinction between social environments for children of slave and of free status was not as clearly defined as the enslaved/enslaver dichotomy we see firmly entrenched in many Roman elite texts might imply. These lines of distinction were rather more porous, particularly in the sphere of everyday life.

Slavery was not necessarily a fate for the rest of a child's life. Although in our material from Roman Egypt we do not meet any enslaved children manumitted, we do have one seventeen-year-old and two eighteen-year-old individuals being freed – in one of these cases it was a thirty-year-old freeman who had paid for the manumission fee for 'her mistress'. In one case, a thirty-five year-old *verna* was manumitted by an owner of over sixty years old, thus the owner had known her for all her life.<sup>38</sup> Relationships between enslaved children and their enslavers, once those children had grown up, were necessarily longer-standing than in other cases of individuals purchased or moved as adults. We do not want to suggest, by any stretch of imagination, that the experience of slavery would have been positive or in any way beneficial for those enslaved. Still, the affective aspects of such relationships, in particular between girls and women, can be glimpsed through some documents. In one case, we meet a small enslaved girl with an escort on her way to her singing lessons; her owner, an elderly childless woman, had the idea of bringing the girl up to take care of her in old age; however, the girl was knocked down by a donkey driver while 'crossing the city' and was badly injured –

<sup>36</sup> See Swift, Stoner, and Pudsey, forthcoming.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Joh. Chrys., *An Address on Vainglory*, 68–9 (peer relations), 71 (learning to behave properly towards slaves), as well as Vuolanto 2013, 65–6, and De Wet 2015, 164–5.

<sup>38</sup> Manumissions: *P. Turner* 19 (101 CE), a seventeen-year-old *verna* (Sinthoonis); manumission fee paid by Ammonios, a thirty-year-old freedman, to the owner; *SB* 1 5616: a girl of eighteen years (first century CE); *P. Oxy.* XXXVIII 2843 (86 CE), a woman of thirty-five years, homeborn, manumitted by her owner, who had known her since her birth; *PSI* XII 1263 (166–7 CE), a testamentary manumission: Sintheus frees an enslaved woman and her daughter, with a monthly pay of grain and right to live in the house; *P. Scholl* V (first or second century CE): slave of eighteen years (?) to be manumitted (a testamentary manumission).

this is why we hear of her.<sup>39</sup> In another report, we see a tragic case in which an eight-year-old boy of slave status died after falling from an upper floor window while he was watching dancing girls in the street.<sup>40</sup> Another enslaved child, having the worst of luck in her free time, was a twelve-year-old girl who was swimming with her friends when she was caught in a sluice and was drowned.<sup>41</sup>

We know of these young people because of the various accidents the children encountered. Our information comes through these types of documents: if the everyday life of the ancient population was seldom worthy of comment by the ancient sources, even those preparing documents and letters on papyrus, a child's normal life was less remarkable, and the fate of an enslaved child even less so. These kinds of cases hint that long, familial and even intimate relationships were also possible for enslaved children, some of whom clearly could live – at times – a life with time for play and some agency in their everyday interactions. However, it is clear that they did not have much say in their lives. Certainly, most of the enslaved children – even these same children with somewhat affectionate relationships and time for play – had to work very hard early on, and many, if not most, would have been subject to extreme physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. This is something we do not see recorded in documentary papyri, but a topic dealt with by scholarship based on other evidence outside Egypt.<sup>42</sup>

One case to remind of the harder realities in our corpus is a third-century notification of a runaway slave, about fourteen years old, named Philippus, pale skinned, speaking badly, broad nosed, and wearing a woollen tunic and a used shoulder belt.<sup>43</sup> As is most often the case, here our sources tell us about the boundary conditions for the children's experiences, rather than about the lived experiences themselves.<sup>44</sup> We know nothing else about this Philippus, but what we can see here is that

<sup>39</sup> *P. Oxy.* L 3555 (60–130 CE).

<sup>40</sup> *P. Oxy.* III 475 (182 CE). For this and the previous case, as well as references to a number of other accidents of children in the Roman world, see Graumann 2017, 270–2.

<sup>41</sup> An unpublished third century CE papyrus, a doctor's report, linked to the Ancient Lives Project (Dirk Obbink): 'From Aurelius Philantin ... son of Neoptolemus Aurelius ... I ... certify that ... a slave girl, by accidental death after being caught in a sluice ... while swimming with her friends ... twisted and lifeless body ... by drowning ...'.

<sup>42</sup> See also e.g. Brooten 2015 on the vulnerability of slave children and the effect of their separation from their parents; and Laes 2011, 153–5, 163–6, 223–34, 259–61 on child slaves and work, violence, and sex. See also Roth (in preparation).

<sup>43</sup> *P. Oxy.* LI 3615 (third century CE).

<sup>44</sup> See also Vuolanto 2017, esp. 21–2.

a slave was first and foremost seen through his status as a subjugated person, or, rather, as someone else's property – regardless of his age. Slave children, even when treated well, were always under their master's total domination. What we observe is a localized snapshot of how the practice of slavery operated in respect of children and young people's everyday lives.