

Growing up in the Roman empire

Coming of age (boys)

When a Roman boy was said to have reached adulthood, he laid aside his *bullā* and the *toga praetexta* of his childhood and took up the *toga virilis* in a ceremony that signified him becoming a man and a full Roman citizen. Exactly when this took place depended partly on the boy's physical maturity and partly on when his father decided it was time, but it usually happened when he was between the ages of 14 and 17.

When as a timid youth I first shed that protective purple toga,
And my amulet hung there as an offering to the girdled Lares,
When dressed newly in white, with pleasant companions, I
Dared cast my eyes over the whole Subura with impunity,
At the age when the road's unclear, and in our ignorance of life,
Confusion clouds the anxious mind at the branching crossroads.

Persius, *Satires*
5.30-35

lines 1 - 2: Persius refers to leaving behind his *toga praetexta*, and dedicating his *bullā* to the household gods (the Lares).

line 4: the Subura was a rougher neighbourhood in Rome.

What determines whether a person is a child or an adult?

Do you think it's strange that a Roman boy went from child to adult in one ceremony?
How different is this to nowadays?

Do you think that Persius thinks, looking back, that he had reached
full maturity at the time?



A young Octavian (later emperor Augustus) wearing a toga praetexta and a bulla in HBO's tv series Rome.