

The more distant the period investigated, the fewer sources we have. Therefore, when Theodor Graf brought to Wien thousands of papyri, students of ancient history received an exceptional source of knowledge. Archduke Rainer bought these findings and the first collection of this size known until today as "Papyrus Archduke Rainer" was founded. It was the beginning of papyrology as a regular branch of study, although the first papyrus was published already in the eighteenth century.

European and American institutions started purchasing papyri and they have collected thousands of them. Legal and financial documents, inventories, many a time unknown literary and religious texts have been published by papyrologists bringing data helpful for students of antiquity, Hellenistic, Roman and Arabic world.

Papyri together with other sources, as texts inscribed on stone (epigraphic sources), ancient belles-lettres and specialist literature, like law-books and codes, allow us to explain secrets of antiquity, not only those concerning great politics. Papyrology allows its students to see how everyday life in the past ages looked like. Important aspects of life are childhood and the relation between social standing of people and their family status.

Explaining mysteries of the past could shed some light on present phenomena. This is one of the aims of the present project.

Generally speaking, the main subject of this project is illegitimacy in the Roman empire.

As a matter of fact, before the edict of Caracalla issued in AD 212, in which the emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus granted Roman citizenship to almost all free inhabitants of the Roman empire, the Roman empire, both Italy and provinces, was inhabited by various groups of people. These groups not always shared legal customs, status and privileges. One of the research tasks of this project is to investigate the position of children born out of wedlock in those different groups inhabiting the Roman empire, to compare them with legitimate children and to see whether legal and social position of the former was indeed much inferior. As the effect of the project the definition of illegitimacy in the Roman empire will be reconstructed. Another effect will be describing differences in perceiving illegitimacy in different communities inhabiting the Roman empire.

Children born out of wedlock were socially stigmatized in different periods in European history even until the twentieth century. The origin of this discrimination is, however, unclear. The preliminary research proves that children in the Roman empire before the fourth century were not a privileged group, but they were not stigmatized too. This conclusion applies especially to children born of long-lasting relationships. Such *de facto* families did not differ significantly from families based on marital unions.

Although extramarital children were not entitled to intestate succession after their parents, parents could easily appoint such children heirs in their wills. Furthermore, Greek and Latin terms used to describe illegitimate children were not as pejorative as their modern counterparts, English 'bastard', Italian 'bastardo' or French 'bâtard'.

The situation, however, changed radically between the third and fourth century. The emperor Constantine the Great was the author of laws which differentiated between illegitimate children: those born of monogamous and long-lasting relationships and the rest.

Legal situation of the former group was better. Moreover, the emperor limited *testamenti factio passiva* of all extramarital children, limiting testamentary freedom of their parents and he even introduced severe penalties for those who tried to violate those prohibitions. The questions are, what caused such a radical change concerning illegitimacy in the Roman empire, whether the said laws of Constantine were the effect of a social need and how they influenced social position of illegitimate children in later centuries. The proposed project aims at answering these questions.

The project is important for a few reasons. It will allow elucidation of one of the aspect of everyday life in antiquity and will improve our knowledge on Greco-Roman world and society. Moreover, the results will be useful for other scholars, like students of different historical periods or scholars interested in legal and social aspects of illegitimacy even today.