

ARRESTING PUBERTY*)

My colleague Fridolf Kudlien in his recent paper “Empticius servus . . .” (Historia 35 [1986] p. 248) has remarked on the fact that in the ancient slave-market youth was at a premium. He points out that the *mangones* applied vegetable salves to arrest puberty and quotes Pliny N.H. XXI 170. The growth of pubic hair was arrested (N.H. XXX 41). The following Greek parallels attest to the widespread belief that the onset of puberty could be delayed.

Galen tells us that one of Crito’s books (on cosmetics) had a chapter headed: ἀνήβων παιδίων διαφυλακτικά (Gal. XII 447.11–12. K.). Galen specified what medicines were used and considered effective, viz. ἄλευρον κυάμινον (XII 50.9–10 K.), the root of hyacinthus (XII 146.18–147.1 K., cf. Diosc. IV 62 and Paul of Aegina 7.3 [268.9–11 H.]), bat’s blood (XII 258.18–259.3 K.), dog’s milk (XII 269.9–11 K.).

Not only was pubic hair to be arrested: the child’s testicles were to be kept small, an Utopian concept. See Gal. XII 449.15–16 K. Galen adds with some distaste: γράφειν αἰδοῦμαι τὰ τοιαῦτα . . .

At what age was puberty thought to occur? Galen says at least twice that the normal age was 14 (XVII 2, 637.8–9 K. and *ibid.* 792.12–13). But he adds that there was no fixed period (XVII 2, 637.11 et sqq.). If there was no fixed period for puberty, then the ancients may be forgiven for thinking their drugs effective in cases where puberty was naturally delayed.

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