Life in Antique Rome

The women

In "familia"
The family consisted of several relatives (wife and husband, children, grandparents, in-laws, nephews and nieces) and slaves united in a "domus", a broadened term for "house". In such a numerous group of people living under one roof, the dominant figure was the "paterfamilias", the oldest male that decided for everyone. From this it is obvious that women held a secondary role since rights were given only to the men. Men had the right to decide the life or death of their children ("ius vitae necisque"), and could also decide to sell them into slavery. Men could also freely divorce their wives.

Women remained under the control of their father until they married ("cum manu"), being passed onto another family.

However, Roman women had more freedom than their Greek counterparts: at least they weren't confined to the house while their husbands were gone.

Under Julius Cesar, women had more freedom and many wives were able to have love-affairs, increasing their personal power. Many of them didn't do housework, but supervised slaves and educated their children since there was no organized school.

personal appearance

Noble wives enjoyed a certain prestige and had to pay special attention to their appearance. Of most importance was the hairstyle: researched, elaborate, always gathered or worn up, and accented with gold or stone earrings, necklaces and cameos. The style of dress was varied with the "tunica" theme, mixing colors and embellishments.

Procreation

From texts by Soranus (around I century), we have discovered that abortion was practiced (even in cases of danger to the child or mother) along with contraceptive methods. In addition to the practical techniques of today women practiced contraception by: holding their breath, drinking cold drinks, spreading honey, resin or quince oil, inserting a wad of wool, or drinking strange mixed concoctions of wine.