

Christian Alexander Neumann (Ed.)

# Old Age before Modernity

Case Studies and Methodological Perspectives,  
500 BC-1700 AD

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# Introduction

## Old Age before Modernity

### Abstract

Old age represents a complex and multifaceted topic that can be analysed from various disciplinary perspectives concerning both the past and the present. To better understand ageing and old age in premodern times, one first has to consider our present time. Due to fundamental demographic, social, political, economic and technological changes from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, mainly differences in ageing and old age, but also continuities become evident. After reflecting on the present time, the development of historical research concerning old age and of the strongly related topics of the ages of man and generational research is described. This volume also aims at integrating these still too separate lines. In the third part, a brief overview of gerontology with respect to its development and the current state of multi- and interdisciplinary research is provided. As more interdisciplinary entanglement between gerontology and the humanities would be desirable, the contributions from the field of gerontology – the psychology of ageing, social gerontology and cultural gerontology – collected here offer theoretical and methodological reflections with regard to the humanities and historical studies in particular. The articles from several humanistic disciplines intend to offer historical empirical evidence for the three perspectives mentioned. Furthermore, questions of intergenerational relationships are treated in each section.

### 1 Studying the History of Old Age – Looking back from Our Time

As Andrew Achenbaum states, “Old age is an age-old, universal phenomenon”.<sup>1</sup> It is a basic anthropological aspect that can be positioned between objective facticity and meaningful cultural construction that shows both synchronous and diachronic variabil-

1 W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Ageing and Changing*. *International Historical Perspectives on Ageing*, in: Malcolm L. Johnson / Vern L. Bengtson / Peter G. Coleman / Thomas B. L. Kirkwood (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 21–29, at p. 21.

ity.<sup>2</sup> While “ageing” describes a gradually ongoing process, “old age”, in contrast, refers to a state. Because of these characteristics, old age represents a complex and multifaceted topic that can be analysed from the angles of many disciplines with reference both to our time and to the past.

A brief look at our own present experience with old age makes it evident how much this topic matters in many respects. The current situation, in which a very large proportion of the populations of Western industrialised countries reach the age of 65 and the percentage of elderly people has considerably increased, marks a decisive watershed in the history of demography and old age.<sup>3</sup> This development, for which Peter Laslett employs the term “secular change”, already began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> One may therefore ask to what extent the perceptions and experiences of old age after this turning point differ from those of preceding centuries. Various parallel developments led to this pronounced change. Improved living conditions and medical progress caused the

2 Michael Stolleis, *Geschichtlichkeit und soziale Relativität des Alters*, in: Peter Gruss (Ed.), *Die Zukunft des Alterns. Die Antwort der Wissenschaft*, München 2007, pp. 258–278; Friedrich Fürstenberg, *Perspektiven des Alter(n)s als soziales Konstrukt*, in: Fred Karl (Ed.), *Sozial- und verhaltenswissenschaftliche Gerontologie*, Weinheim 2003 (Grundlagentexte Soziologie), pp. 75–84; Irnhild Saake, *Die Konstruktion des Alters. Eine gesellschaftstheoretische Einführung in die Alterssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2006 (Hagener Studientexte zur Soziologie); Jaber F. Gubrium / James A. Holstein, *Constructionist Perspectives on Aging*, in: Vern L. Bengtson / K. Warner Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Aging*, New York 1999, pp. 287–305; Martin Kohli, *Die Institutionalisation des Lebenslaufs. Historische Befunde und theoretische Argumente*, in: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 37 (1985), pp. 1–29. “Different societies attribute divergent meanings to the same features of senescence, including aspects of physical ageing”; Achenbaum, *Ageing and Changing* (see note 1), p. 21.

3 Andreas Kruse / Hans-Werner Wahl, *Zukunft Altern. Individuelle und gesellschaftliche Weichenstellungen*, Heidelberg 2010, pp. 29–87; Gertrud Backes / Wolfgang Clemens, *Lebensphase Alter. Eine Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Altersforschung*, Basel 2008 (Grundlagentexte Soziologie), pp. 30–54; Peter Laslett, *Das Dritte Alter. Historische Soziologie des Alterns*, München-Weinheim 1995 (Grundlagentexte Soziologie), pp. 23, 39–40, 62–78, 82–151, 217–260. On (historical) demography, cf. e. g. Maryanne Kowaleski, *Medieval People in Town and Country. New Perspectives from Demography and Bioarcheology*, in: *Speculum* 89 (2014), pp. 573–600; David A. Hinton, *Demography. From Domesday and Beyond*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 39 (2013), pp. 146–178; François Höpflinger, *Bevölkerungssoziologie. Einführung in demographische Prozesse und bevölkerungssoziologische Ansätze*, Weinheim-Basel 2012 (Grundlagentexte Soziologie); Robert D. Hoppa / James W. Vaupel (Eds.), *Paleodemography. Age Distribution from Skeletal Samples*, Cambridge 2002 (Cambridge Studies in Biological Anthropology 31); Arthur E. Imhof, *Einführung in die Historische Demographie*, München 1977 (Beck'sche Elementarbücher); Josiah C. Russell, *British Medieval Population*, Albuquerque 1948.

4 Laslett, *Das Dritte Alter* (see note 3), p. 114.

mortality rate to decline significantly, especially among women and children, and notably increased the average life expectancy at birth. At the same time, the birth rate decreased, and thus both the proportion of the elderly and their absolute number rose significantly. The ageing of societies is predicted to further intensify, and old age will therefore become an even more present phenomenon in need of further attention. This situation has already brought about an increased sensitivity to questions and problems of ageing and old age and has led to a much broader and more nuanced consideration of these topics, both within the scientific community and beyond.<sup>5</sup> Addressing the impacts of old age on such a large scale will certainly be one of the major social, political, and economic issues and challenges of this century.<sup>6</sup> Also in view of that, it is relevant to intensify historical studies on the topic in order to identify both continuities and discontinuities on manifold levels.

Due to the described demographic changes and to state interventions, old age has become an autonomous phase of the course of life and can no longer be seen as a 'residual part' of it. Today, the elderly constitute a large social group that is, however, far from being homogeneous.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the situation in modern times, most people in the premodern era could not expect to grow old. Death in general, which is not only attributable to an advanced age as is the case today, but also to poor hygiene, epidemics, malnutrition, infections after childbirth and wars, was a much more visible part of everyday life.<sup>8</sup> Life expectancy was significantly lower, ranging between 35 and 40 years, and the proportion of people who grew old was significantly smaller.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, once youth (or approximately the 20<sup>th</sup> year of life) was surpassed, there was a fair chance of reaching the age of 50 and beyond, especially for the socio-economically wealthier parts

5 Hans-Werner Wahl/Vera Heyl, *Gerontologie – Einführung und Geschichte*, Stuttgart 2015 (*Grundriss Gerontologie 1*), p. 11; Paul B. Baltes/Margret M. Baltes, *Gerontologie. Begriff, Herausforderung und Brennpunkte*, in: id./Jürgen Mittelstraß (Eds.), *Zukunft des Alterns und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung*, Berlin 1992 (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Forschungsberichte 5), pp. 1–34, at p. 2.

6 Kruse/Wahl, *Zukunft Altern* (see note 3).

7 Backes/Clemens, *Lebensphase Alter* (see note 3), pp. 83–92; Martin Kohli, *Altern in soziologischer Perspektive*, in: Baltes/Mittelstraß (Eds.), *Zukunft des Alterns* (see note 5), pp. 231–259, at p. 232.

8 Kowaleski, *Medieval People* (see note 3), p. 589; Peter J. P. Goldberg, *Life and Death. The Ages of Man*, in: Rosemary Horrox/W. Mark Ormrod (Eds.), *A Social History of England. 1200–1500*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 413–434, at pp. 432–433; Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe. C. 1300–C. 1500*, Manchester et al. 2006 (*Manchester Medieval Studies*), p. 26.

9 Laslett, *Das Dritte Alter* (see note 3), pp. 76–77.

of the population.<sup>10</sup> For the reasons mentioned, premodern populations were structurally young.<sup>11</sup> Despite the difficulties of performing accurate calculations due to the lack of sufficient and representative source material, estimates for premodern times indicate a percentage of the elderly of between 2 and 10 % relative to the overall population.<sup>12</sup> With regard to such general numbers, regional, periodical, generational, social and gender differences must be taken into account.<sup>13</sup> This means that demographic structures for the period in question cannot be precisely determined and that, under certain circumstances, the percentage of elderly people was above the given range.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of their exact number, it becomes evident that the elderly were also an integral part of past societies.<sup>15</sup>

10 José Miguel Andrade Cernadas, *Las edades del hombre en los monasterios benedictinos y cistercienses. De la infancia a la vejez*, in: José-Ángel García de Cortázar / Ramón Teja (Eds.), *El ritmo cotidiano de la vida en el monasterio medieval*, Aguilar de Campoo (Palencia) 2015, pp. 111–142, at p. 138; Pat Thane, *The Long History of Old Age*, in: Heiner Fangerau / Monika Gomille / Henriette Herwig / Christoph auf der Horst / Andrea von Hülsen-Esch / Hans-Georg Pott / Johannes Siegrist / Jörg Vögele (Eds.), *Alterskulturen und Potentiale des Alter(n)s*, Berlin 2007, pp. 191–199, at p. 191; Martin Illi, *Lebenserwartung und Lebensqualität aus der Sicht des Historikers*, in: Elisabeth Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Wien 2008 (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte 780), pp. 59–74, at p. 61; Susi Ulrich-Bochsler, *Lebenserwartung und Lebensqualität aus anthropologischer Sicht*, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see above), pp. 75–90, at p. 80.

11 Winfried Schmitz / Hans-Hoyer von Prittwitz, *Einführung und Demographie*, in: Landschaftsverband Rheinland (Ed.), *Alter in der Antike. Die Blüte des Alters aber ist die Weisheit*, Mainz 2009, pp. 19–22, at p. 20; Raquel Homet, *Los viejos y la vejez en la Edad Media. Sociedad y imaginario*, Rosario 1997, p. 46.

12 Josef Ehmer, *Das Alter in Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: Heinz Häfner / Ursula Staudinger (Eds.), *Was ist Alter(n)? Neue Antworten auf eine scheinbar einfache Frage*, Berlin-Heidelberg-New York 2008 (Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Schriften der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Klasse 18), pp. 149–172, at p. 162; John Hatcher / Alan J. Piper / David Stone, *Monastic Mortality. Durham Priory. 1395–1529*, in: *Economic History Review* 59 (2006), pp. 667–687; Achenbaum, *Ageing and Changing* (see note 1), p. 24; Laslett, *Das Dritte Alter* (see note 3), pp. 32, 115–116; John Hatcher, *Mortality in the Fifteenth Century. Some New Evidence*, in: *Economic History Review* 1 (1986), pp. 19–38.

13 Kowaleski, *Medieval People* (see note 3), pp. 589, 591; Josiah C. Russell, *How Many of the Population Were Aged?*, in: Michael Sheehan (Ed.), *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, Toronto 1990 (Papers in Mediaeval Studies 11), pp. 119–127, at pp. 124–126; Georges Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse en Occident de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris 1987 (Nouvelles études historiques), pp. 122–123, 251–252.

14 Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages. 'Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain'*, London-New York 1997, pp. 32–33; Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 13), pp. 291–304.

15 Ehmer, *Das Alter* (see note 12), p. 162; Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 13), p. 249.

Furthermore, one can observe that old age was an essential element of past cultures and the individual and collective consciousness at any time in history.<sup>16</sup>

## 2 Historically Orientated Humanistic Research on Old Age, the Ages of Man and Generations

Historical research started to analyse old age more intensively from the 1980s onwards. Since the turn of the millennium, investigations on the subject have rapidly increased in number, which coincides with a significant rise in the number of gerontological and cultural-historical publications.<sup>17</sup> Historical studies have primarily been undertaken from the perspective of the history of culture and mentalities and, to a minor degree, from the viewpoint of social history and historical demography.<sup>18</sup> The latter two approaches also make use of archaeological and osteoarchaeological methods, which are employed to analyse human skeletal remains.<sup>19</sup> Archaeology and osteoarchaeology are highly relevant

16 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 13), pp. 212, 228, 239–242.

17 Wahl/Heyl, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), pp. 30–31.

18 David G. Troyansky, *Aging in World History*, New York-London 2016 (Themes in World History), pp. 3–8; Ehmer, *Das Alter* (see note 12), pp. 149–172; Albrecht Classen, *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Also an Introduction, in: id. (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Berlin-Boston 2007 (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 2), pp. 1–84, at pp. 1–15, 40–47.

19 Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life. Archaeology and the Life Course*, Woodbridge 2018; Lidia Vitale, *Lo spazio degli infanti nei cimiteri medievali. Analisi topografica e ritualità funeraria*, in: Alberto Luongo/Marco Paperini (Eds.), *Medioevo in formazione. Studi storici e multidisciplinarietà*, Livorno 2015 (Confronti 8), pp. 80–89; Kowaleski, *Medieval People* (see note 3), pp. 573–600; Joanna Appleby, *Why We Need an Archaeology of Old Age, and a Suggested Approach*, in: *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 43 (2010), pp. 145–168; Illi, *Lebenserwartung und Lebensqualität* (see note 10), pp. 59–74; Ulrich-Bochsler, *Lebenserwartung* (see note 10), pp. 75–90; Marianne A. Jonker, *Estimation of Life Expectancy in the Middle Ages*, in: *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)* 166 (2003), pp. 105–117; Hartmut Kugler, *Generation und Lebenserwartung im Mittelalter*, in: Eckart Liebau (Ed.), *Das Generationenverhältnis. Über das Zusammenleben in Familie und Gesellschaft*, Weinheim et al. 1997 (Beiträge zur pädagogischen Grundlagenforschung 1997), pp. 39–52; Russell, *How Many* (see note 13), pp. 119–127. On historical demography for England in particular: Pamela Nightingale, *Some New Evidence of Crises and Trends in Mortality in Late Medieval England*, in: *Past and Present* 187 (2005), pp. 33–68; John Hatcher, *Understanding the Population History of England. 1450–1750*, in: *Past and Present* 180 (2003), pp. 83–130; Russell, *British Medieval Population* (see note 3); also see the contribution by Lidia Vitale in this volume.

to the study of old age, the stages of life, and demographic structures, particularly when no written sources are available. Material and skeletal finds may support the validity of written information, or rather disprove it. Statements on demographic developments and life expectancy may indicate overall trends, but also have to be viewed with some caution, as regional and social differences can be significant.

Despite the availability of a not inconsiderable number of studies, old age has not yet been treated equally and sufficiently for all periods of history. In comparison with Antiquity<sup>20</sup> and (Early) Modernity<sup>21</sup>, the Middle Ages have received less attention. Future investigations can build on the results of the preceding research and especially on the theoretical and methodological insights that have already been gained. For the medieval period, the studies by Georges Minois (he also treats Antiquity and the 16<sup>th</sup> century) and Shulamith Shahar have been influential and can by now be considered as being classic

20 The state of research until 2005 is described by Christian Laes: Christian Laes, *À la recherche de la vieillesse dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine*, in: *L'Antiquité Classique* 74 (2005), pp. 243–255. On old age in Antiquity: Mary Harlow/Ray Laurence, *Augustus Senex*. Old Age and the Remaking of the Principate, in: *Greece and Rome* 64 (2017), pp. 115–131; Kornelia Kressirer, *Das Greisenalter in der griechischen Antike. Untersuchung der Vasenbilder und Schriftquellen der archaischen und klassischen Zeit*, 2 vols., Hamburg 2016 (Schriftenreihe Antiquitates 65); Hartwin Brandt, *Am Ende des Lebens. Alter, Tod und Suizid in der Antike*, München 2010 (Zetemata 136); Mary Harlow/Ray Laurence (Eds.), *Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire*, Portsmouth 2007 (Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplementary Series 65); Andrée Catrysse, *Les Grecs et la vieillesse. D'Homère à Épictète*, Paris 2003; Karen Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome*, London et al. 2003 (Routledge Classical Monographs); Andreas Gutsfeld/Winfried Schmitz (Eds.), *Am schlimmen Rand des Lebens. Altersbilder in der Antike*, Köln et al. 2003; Hartwin Brandt, *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*, München 2002 (Beck's archäologische Bibliothek); Tim G. Parkin, *Age and the Aged in Roman Society*, Oxford 1992. On the councils of old men, the *gerousies*, *γερονσίες*, and especially Sparta: Ennio Bauer, *Gerusien in den Poleis Kleinasiens in hellenistischer Zeit und der römischen Kaiserzeit*, München 2014 (Münchner Studien zur alten Welt 11); Fabian Schulz, *Die homerischen Räte und die spartanische Gerusie*, Düsseldorf 2011; Jan M. Timmer, *Altersgrenzen politischer Partizipation in antiken Gesellschaften*, Berlin 2008 (Studien zur alten Geschichte 8); Ephraim David, *Old Age in Sparta*, Amsterdam 1991; also see the contribution by Mary Harlow in this volume.

21 Cynthia Skenazi, *Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance. Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne*, Leiden-Boston 2013 (Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts 11); Erin J. Campbell (Ed.), *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe. Cultural Representations*, Ashgate 2006; Peter Borscheid, *Geschichte des Alters. 16.–18. Jahrhundert*, Münster 1987 (Studien zur Geschichte des Alltags 7); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land. The American Experience since 1790*, Baltimore 1978; Keith Thomas, *Age and Authority in Early Modern England*, in: *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976), pp. 205–248; Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost. England Before the Industrial Age*, London 1965 (The Scribner Library 149. Lyceum Editions).

reference works.<sup>22</sup> However, although they impress with the wealth of sources used and the wide range of topics covered, they contain only a few theoretical and methodological reflections.

In addition to the highlighted monographs, a few others are mentioned here in the chronological order of their publication because they also offer a comprehensive view on old age in the Middle Ages (although in some cases, a longer period is under investigation): A focus on England in the Late Middle Ages is given by Joel Rosenthal,<sup>23</sup> while Raquel Homet concentrates on the history of ideas and the social history of old age by using numerous examples from the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>24</sup> Josephine Cummins' book is mainly concerned with medicine, the body, theology and literature.<sup>25</sup> Pat Thane examines a period from pre-modernity to the present day, with a particular emphasis on the period after 1800.<sup>26</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller treats old age with reference to the history of the Holy Roman Empire in the Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup> David Troyansky's monograph offers a cross-cultural perspective over a long period, from prehistory to the present day.<sup>28</sup> Thijs Porck analyses old age in Anglo-Saxon England, for example with regard to warfare, rulership and gender.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from these monographs, especially in the last 15 years, a number of collective volumes have been published, some of which cross the borders between historical periods.<sup>30</sup>

22 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 13); Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 14). Overviews are given in the following articles: Sarah M. Anderson, *Old Age*, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Handbook of Medieval Culture*, 3 vols., Berlin 2015, vol. 2, pp. 1281–1323; Josef Ehmer, *Das Alter* (see note 12), pp. 149–172; Hans-Werner Goetz, *Alt sein und alt werden in der Vorstellungswelt des frühen und hohen Mittelalters*, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see note 10), pp. 17–58.

23 Joel T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England*, Philadelphia 1996.

24 Homet, *Los viejos* (see note 11).

25 Josephine M. Cummins, *Attitudes to Old Age and Ageing in Medieval Society*, Glasgow 2000.

26 Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History. Past Experiences, Present Issues*, Oxford et al. 2000.

27 Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, „Die Kindlein spotten meiner schier“. Quellen und Reflexionen zu den Alten und zum Vergreisungsprozeß im Mittelalter, Hamburg 2006 (Hergemöllers historiographische Libelli 4).

28 Troyansky, *Aging in World History* (see note 18).

29 Thijs Porck, *Old Age in Early Medieval England. A Cultural History*, Woodbridge 2019 (*Anglo-Saxon Studies* 33).

30 Christian Krötzel / Katariina Mustakallio (Eds.), *On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2011 (*The History of Daily Life* 2); Dorothee Elm von der Osten / Thorsten Fitzon / Kathrin Liess / Sandra Linden (Eds.), *Alterstopoi. Das Wissen von den Lebensaltern in Literatur, Kunst und Theologie*, Berlin-Boston 2009; Ines Heiser / Andreas Meyer (Eds.), *Aufblühen und Verwelken. Mediävistische Forschungen zu Kindheit und Alter*, Leipzig 2009;

The research topics and the societal groups that are mainly taken into consideration comprise, above all, the following: medicine, illness and the body,<sup>31</sup> the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers and other theological works,<sup>32</sup> the clergy and monastic communities,<sup>33</sup>

Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see note 10); Pat Thane (Ed.), *A History of Old Age*, Los Angeles 2005; Margaret Pelling / Richard M. Smith (Eds.), *Life, Death, and the Elderly*, London et al. 1991 (*Studies in the Social History of Medicine*); Sheehan (Ed.), *Aging and the Aged* (see note 13).

31 Hartwin Brandt, *Schmerzende Gliedmaßen und tropfende Nasen. Moderne Überlegungen zur antiken Geriatrie*, in: *Gymnasium* 125 (2018), pp. 1–16; Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Ed.), *Longevity and Immortality. Europe – Islam – Asia*, Firenze 2018 (*Micrologus* 26); Sabine Kalfß, *Politische Medizin der Frühen Neuzeit. Die Figur des Arztes in Italien und England im frühen 17. Jahrhundert*, Boston-Berlin 2014 (*Frühe Neuzeit* 189); Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Ed.), *Le corps du prince*, Florenz 2014 (*Micrologus* 22); Daniela Santoro, *Salute dei re, salute del popolo. Mangiare e curarsi nella Sicilia tardomedievale*, in: *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 43 (2013), pp. 259–289; Annette Kehnel, *Altersforschung im Mittelalter. Strategien der Altersvermeidung vom Jungbrunnen in Indien bis zur Kurie in Rom*, in: Christoph O. Mayer / Alexandra-Kathrin Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen. Alter(n) in romanischem Mittelalter und Renaissance*, München 2012 (*Mittelalter und Renaissance in der Romania* 5), pp. 27–58; Claudia Märkl, *Körper-Kult. Die Sorge um das leibliche Wohl am päpstlichen Hof*, in: Thomas Ertl (Ed.), *Pompa sacra. Lusso e cultura materiale alla corte papale nel basso Medioevo (1420–1527)*, Roma 2010 (*Nuovi studi storici* 86), pp. 15–35; Chiara Crisciani / Luciana Repici / Pietro Rossi (Eds.), *Vita longa. Vecchiaia e durata della vita nella tradizione medica e aristotelica antica e medievale*, Firenze 2009 (*Micrologus' Library* 33); Daniel Schäfer, *Alter und Krankheit in der Frühen Neuzeit. Der ärztliche Blick auf die letzte Lebensphase*, Frankfurt am Main 2004 (*Kultur der Medizin* 10); Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Der Leib des Papstes. Eine Theologie der Hinfalligkeit*, München 1997 (*C. H. Beck Kulturwissenschaft*); also see the contributions by Daniel Schäfer and Daniela Santoro in this volume.

32 Joseph Ziegler, *Why Did the Patriarchs Live so Long? On the Role of the Bible in the Discourse on Longevity Around 1300*, in: Paravicini Bagliani (Ed.), *Longevity and Immortality* (see note 31), pp. 79–112; Kathrin Liess, „Jung bin ich gewesen und alt geworden“. *Lebenszeit und Alter in den Psalmen*, in: Thorsten Fitton / Sandra Linden / ead. / Dorothee Elm von der Osten (Eds.), *Alterszäsuren. Zeit und Lebensalter in Literatur, Theologie und Geschichte*, Berlin-Boston 2012, pp. 131–170; Umberto Martioli (Ed.), *Senectus. La vecchiaia nel mondo classico*, vol. 3: *Ebraismo e cristianesimo*, Bologna 2007; Gerd Doenni, *Der Alte Mensch in der Antike. Ein Vergleich zwischen christlicher und paganer Welt anhand der Aussagen von Hieronymus, Augustinus, Ambrosius und Cicero*, Bamberg 1996; Marilena Amerise, *Girolamo e la senectus. Età della vita e morte nell'epistolario*, Roma 2008 (*Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum* 109); Rolf Sprandel, *Altersschicksal und Altersmoral. Die Geschichte der Einstellungen zum Altern nach der Pariser Bibelexegese des 12.–16. Jh.*, Stuttgart 1981 (*Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 22); Josef Scharbert, *Das Alter und die Alten in der Bibel*, in: *Saeculum* 30 (1979), pp. 338–354; Christian Gnilka, *Aetas spiritalis. Die Überwindung der natürlichen Altersstufen als Ideal frühchristlichen Lebens*, Bonn 1972 (*Theophaneia* 24); also see the contribution by Kathrin Liess in this volume.

33 José Miguel Andrade Cernadas, *Asilos monásticos. Vejez y mundo cenobítico en el noroeste hispánico entre los siglos IX al XI*, in: Beatriz Arízaga Bolumburu (Ed.), *Mundos medievales*.

the nobility<sup>34</sup> and the care of the elderly<sup>35</sup>. It can be noted that the focus lay on the more affluent groups – some of which were characterised by a conspicuous number of elderly people – and also on some old age-related issues. This social bias can certainly be explained by the available sources that provide much more information on the life of the elites.

Independently of medieval and historical studies, historically oriented English, German and Romance language and literature studies dedicated themselves to the topic of old age at an even earlier stage and have produced a considerable number of collective volumes and articles on specific topics.<sup>36</sup> Research from this disciplinary angle concern-

Espacios, sociedades y poder. Homenaje José Ángel García de Cortázar y Ruiz de Aguirre, 2 vols., Santander 2012, vol. 1, pp. 311–324; Kerstin Hitzbleck, *Senilitate confactus* – Zum Umgang mit alten Klerikern im 14. Jahrhundert, in: Mayer/Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen* (see note 31), pp. 197–214; Kirsi Salonen, What Happened to Aged Priests in the Late Middle Ages?, in: Krötzl/Mustakallio (Ed.), *On Old Age* (see note 30), pp. 183–196; Annette Kehnel/Sabine von Heusinger (Eds.), *Generations in the Cloister. Youth and Age in Medieval Religious Life*, Münster 2008 (*Vita regularis. Abhandlungen* 36), pp. 123–143; Nicholas I. Orme, *Sufferings of the Clergy. Illness and Old Age in Exeter Diocese. 1300–1540*, in: Pelling/Smith (Eds.), *Life, Death, and the Elderly* (see note 30), pp. 62–73. In print: Christian Alexander Neumann, “Propter eius senium ac debilitatem oculorum atque visus suas horas canonicas persolvere non potest.” Alter und Altersbilder im RG und RPG aus gerontomediävistischer Perspektive, in: Irmgard Fees/Claudia Märkl/Andreas Rehberg/Jörg Voigt (Eds.), *Kirche und Kurie des Spätmittelalters im Brennpunkt des Repertorium Germanicum (1378–1484)*; also see the contribution by José Miguel Andrade Cernadas in this volume.

34 Jonathan R. Lyon, *The Withdrawal of Aged Noblemen into Monastic Communities. Interpreting the Sources from Twelfth-Century Germany*, in: Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages* (see note 18), pp. 143–169; Rosenthal, *Old Age* (see note 23), pp. 81–89, 115–134; id., *Mediaeval Longevity and the Secular Peerage. 1350–1500*, in: *Population Studies* 27 (1973), pp. 287–293; John S. Roskell, *The Problem of Attendance of the Lords in Medieval Parliament*, in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 29 (1956), pp. 153–204; also see the contribution by Christian Alexander Neumann in this volume.

35 Angela Groppi, *Il welfare prima del welfare. Assistenza alla vecchiaia e solidarietà tra generazioni a Roma in età moderna*, Roma 2010 (*Studi di Storia* 3); Emanuel Braun, *Das Spital – Eine Institution auch der Altersversorgung*, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see note 10), pp. 343–360; Dirk Multrus, *Voraussetzungen und Möglichkeiten der Versorgung alter Menschen in den deutschen Landen im späten Mittelalter*, in: Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto/Georg Wöhrle (Eds.), *Die Kultur des Alterns von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, St. Ingbert 2004, pp. 33–62; David Thomson, *The Welfare of the Elderly in the Past. A Family or Community Responsibility?*, in: Pelling/Smith (Eds.), *Life, Death, and the Elderly* (see note 30), pp. 194–221.

36 Jürgen Wiener (Ed.), *Altersphantasien im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Düsseldorf 2015 (*Studia humaniora* 49); Henriette Herwig (Ed.), *Merkwürdige Alte. Zu einer literarischen und bildlichen Kultur des Alter(n)s*, Bielefeld 2014 (*Alter(n)skulturen* 2); Mayer/Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen* (see note 31); Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages* (see

ing the medieval period gained a more prominent position than it did in the historical field. Despite this flourishing area of research, historical studies and historical studies in language and literature have largely been pursued separately despite showing many commonalities. Since the turn of the millennium, old age has also become increasingly important in art history.<sup>37</sup>

note 18); Henri Dubois (Ed.), *Les âges de la vie au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1992 (Cultures et civilisations médiévales 7); *Viellisse et vieillissement au Moyen Âge*, Aix-en-Provence 1987 (Senefiance 19). Some relevant monographs and articles not included in the above-mentioned volumes: Sonja Kerth, “myn heubt daz ist mir worden gra / myn ruck hat sich gebogen” – Alter(n) in der Sangspruchdichtung von Reinmar von Zweter bis Michel Beheim, in: *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein-Gesellschaft* 21 (2016–2017), pp. 58–71; ead., Wolframs Greise. Alter(n) im “Parzival”, “Titurel” und “Willehalm”, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und Literatur* 144 (2015), pp. 48–76; Detlef Goller, “die jungen zir geliehen, die alten zuo den alten”. Der Platz alter Menschen in der höfischen Literatur, in: Cordula Nolte (Ed.), *Homo debilis*. Behinderte – Kranke – Versehrte in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters, Korb 2009 (Studien und Texte zur Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters 3), pp. 149–164; Dorothee Elm von der Osten, Die Entgrenzung des Alter(n)s. Zur Kaiserpanegyrik in der Dichtung des Statius und Martial, in: Fitzon et al. (Eds.), *Alterszäsuren* (see note 32), pp. 237–257; Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, Junge Alte – alte Junge. Signale und paradoxe Verschränkungen des Alter(n)s in höfischer Epik, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see note 10), pp. 141–156; Peter Rusterholz, Liebe, Tod und Lebensalter. Wandlungen in der Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Fangerau (Ed.), *Alterskulturen und Potentiale des Alter(n)s* (see note 10), pp. 37–58; Nina Taunton, Fictions of Old Age in Early Modern Literature and Culture (Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 8), New York-London 2007; Bernard Ribémont, Femme, vieillesse et sexualité dans la littérature médiévale française (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> s.). De la nostalgie à la lubricité, in: Alain Montandon (Ed.), *Éros, blessures et folie. Détresses du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand 2006 (Littératures), pp. 57–77; Dieter Mehl, Old Age in Middle English Literature. Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Gawain-Poet, in: Christa Jansohn (Ed.), *Old Age and Ageing in British and American Culture and Literature*, Münster 2004 (Studien zur englischen Literatur 16), pp. 29–38; Marcus Sigismund, Über das Alter. Eine historisch-kritische Analyse der Schriften “Über das Alter”/Peri gērōs von Musonius, Favorinus und Iuncus, Berlin et al. 2003 (Prismata 14); Judith De Luce / Thomas M. Falkner (Eds.), *Old Age in Greek and Latin Literature*, New York 1989 (SUNY Series in Classical Studies); also see the contributions by Bernard Ribémont and Sonja Kerth in this volume.

37 For Antiquity, cf. for example Paul Zanker, *Bilder alter Menschen in der antiken Kunst*, in: Peter Graf Kielmansegg; Heinz Häfner (Eds.), *Alter und Altern. Wirklichkeiten und Deutungen*, Berlin-Heidelberg 2012 (Mathematisch-naturwissenschaftliche Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften 22), pp. 37–53; Susanne Willer, Altersdarstellungen auf römischen Grabdenkmälern, in: *Landschaftsverband Rheinland* (Ed.), *Alter in der Antike* (see note 11), pp. 151–161. For the Middle Ages and Renaissance, cf. for example Welleda Muller, *Representations of Elderly People in the Scenes of Jesus’ Childhood in Tuscan Paintings. 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Images of Intergeneration Relationships*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2016; Andrea von Hülsen-Esch, *Armut und Alter in der Renaissance*, in: Klaus Bergdolt / Andreas Tönnemann / Lothar Schmitt (Eds.), *Armut in der Renaissance*, Wiesbaden 2013 (Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaissanceforschung 30), pp. 15–50; ead., Fal-

For historical studies, a decisive impetus to address old age was provided by the research done on the conceptions of the ages of man, in which old age represents a fundamental component. This line of research has a long-established tradition going back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and even further) when one also considers historical works from Antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> The analyses are mainly based on written sources of various genres, but also on artistic representations, thereby integrating art history. By putting old age in relation to the other stages of life, its multiple facets and specificities – both in terms of contrast and complementarity – can be identified more clearly. Although it has been said that the idea of reflecting on and dealing with human development is old, one can state that – despite the criticism it provoked – Philippe Ariès' work "L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime", contributed to increasing research on the history of culture and mentalities, and on many societal groups that had been

ten, Sehnen, Knochen. Zur Materialisierung des Alters in der Kunst um 1500, in: Henriette Herwig (Ed.), *Altern in der Literatur, im Film, in der Kunst und in der Medizin*, Freiburg i. Br.-Berlin-Wien 2009 (Rombach *Litterae* 152), pp. 13–43; Klaus Bergdolt/Berndt Hamm/Andreas Tönnemann (Eds.), *Das Kind in der Renaissance*, Köln 2008 (Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaissanceforschung 25); Eva Schlothuber, *Die Bewertung von Kindheit und die Rolle von Erziehung in den biographischen und autobiographischen Quellen des Spätmittelalters*, in: Bergdolt/Hamm/Tönnemann (Eds.), *Das Kind in der Renaissance* (see above), pp. 43–70; Thomas Bein, *Lebensalter und Säfte. Aspekte der antik-mittelalterlichen Humoralpathologie und ihre Reflexe in Dichtung und Kunst*, in: Dubois (Ed.), *Les âges de la vie* (see note 36), pp. 85–106. Works that treat several periods: Mark G. D'Apuzzo, *I segni del tempo. Metamorfosi della vecchiaia nell'arte dell'Occidente*, Bologna 2006 (Biblioteca di storia dell'arte); Andrea von Hülsen-Esch/Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen (Eds.), *Zum Sterben schön. Alter, Totentanz und Sterbekunst von 1500 bis heute*, Regensburg 2006.

38 Hartwin Brandt, *Der Tod als Gradmesser des Lebens. Inschriften, Papyri und die Bedeutung von antiken Lebenslaufkonzepten*, in: *Hermes* 147,2 (2019), pp. 176–189; Isabelle Cochelin/Karen Smyth (Eds.), *Medieval Life Cycles. Continuity and Change*, Turnhout 2013 (International Medieval Research 18); Youngs, *The Life Cycle* (see note 8); Michael E. Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age. The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought. 1250–1350*, New York 1989; Keith Thomas, *Vergangenheit, Zukunft, Lebensalter. Zeitvorstellungen im England der frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 1988 (Kleine kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek 10); Manfred Welti, *Das Altern im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 37 (1987), pp. 1–32; John A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man. A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought*, Oxford 1986; Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man. Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle*, Princeton 1986; Emiel Eyben, *Die Einteilung des menschlichen Lebens im römischen Altertum*, in: *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 116 (1973); Ulrich Helfenstein, *Beiträge zur Problematik der Lebensalter in der mittleren Geschichte*, Zürich 1952 (Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Staat 6); pp. 150–190; Franz Boll, *Die Lebensalter*, in: *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur und für Pädagogik* 31 (1913), pp. 88–145; Wilhelm Wackernagel, *Die Lebensalter. Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Sitten- und Rechtsgeschichte*, Berlin 1862.

neglected before.<sup>39</sup> Old age, however, remained rather marginal in the work of Ariès, which is why it can be concluded that the ages of man, as well as childhood and youth, are comparatively better studied.<sup>40</sup>

The conceptions of the ages of man vary diachronically and are culturally constructed.<sup>41</sup> However, they are based on empirical observations of basic human biological development and are therefore not entirely theoretical. The medieval models incorporated the Greco-Roman ones to a very large extent.<sup>42</sup> They represent the course of life as being linear-progressive. Different stages – between two and twelve – are defined, and their climax is seen in the middle years of adulthood. The classifications are only partially provided with precise age limits.<sup>43</sup> Old age is either conceived as a single phase or is divided into two (or even three) subphases. Together with childhood, whose bi-

39 Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris 1960 (Civilisations d'hier et d'aujourd'hui). For the criticism on Ariès, cf. for example Classen (Ed.), *Old Age* (see note 18), pp. 2–3; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Medievalists and the Study of Childhood*, in: *Speculum* 77 (2002), pp. 440–460, at pp. 440–441; also see the contribution by Monica Ferrari in this volume. “Ariès’s dismissal of a medieval concept of childhood ultimately led to a much more comprehensive consideration of the question. It inspired scholars to reexamine the sources they already knew ... It also pushed historians of the period to look for other sources ...”; Hanawalt, *Medievalists* (see above), p. 441.

40 Despoina Ariantzi (Ed.), *Coming of Age in Byzantium. Adolescence and Society*, Berlin-Boston 2018 (Millenium-Studien 69); Isa Lori Sanfilippo / Antonio Rigon (Eds.), *I giovani nel Medioevo. Ideali e pratiche di vita*, Roma 2014 (Atti del Premio internazionale Ascoli Piceno. 3. Serie); Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood. Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*, Cambridge-New York 2013; Paula S. Fass (Ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, London-New York 2013 (The Routledge Histories); Monica Ferrari (Ed.), *Costumi educativi nelle corti europee (XIV–XVIII secolo)*, Pavia 2010 (Editoria scientifica); Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, Berlin-Boston 2005; Hanawalt, *Medievalists* (see note 39), pp. 440–460; Becchi Egle / Dominique Julia (Eds.), *Storia dell'infanzia*, 2 vols., Roma 1996 (Storia e società); Monica Ferrari, *La paideia del sovrano. Ideologie, strategie e materialità nell'educazione principesca del Seicento*, Firenze 1996 (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'Università di Pavia 80); Nicholas I. Orme, *Children and the Church in Medieval England*, in: *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45 (1994), pp. 563–587; Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, New York 1990.

41 Jaber F. Gubrium / James A. Holstein, *Constructing the Life Course*, New York 2000 (The Reynolds Series in Sociology), pp. 34–40; Michael Mitterauer, *Problemfelder einer Sozialgeschichte des Alters*, in: Helmut Konrad (Ed.), *Der alte Mensch in der Geschichte*, Wien 1982 (Österreichische Texte zur Gesellschaftskritik 11), pp. 9–61, at p. 16.

42 See the contribution by Luciana Repici in this volume.

43 Burrow, *The Ages of Man* (see note 38), pp. 92–93; Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age* (see note 38), p. 15.

ological changes are easier to observe and determine over time, it can be asserted that old age is the most reflected and contoured phase. The extent of the positive, negative, or rather neutral evaluations and meanings that are attributed to old age depends on various aspects, including the author, the genre, the sources used, the context, and the intention of writing.

At what chronological age a person living in premodern times was considered to be 'old' cannot be precisely defined. Making a generalised statement with regard to a given society as a whole is impossible because different social contexts were characterised by specific norms, some of which were only partially laid down in writing. For Greco-Roman antiquity, it has been estimated that old age started at around 60 years.<sup>44</sup> Georges Minois and Raquel Homet speak of 50 years for the Middle Ages.<sup>45</sup> Minois considers the current chronological age limit of 65 to not be transferable to the period in question. In premodernity, it was probably the so-called "functional age" that was decisive for the onset of old age.<sup>46</sup> This concept refers to an individual's ability to physically and mentally fulfil expected roles and tasks.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the perception of the visible signs of old age – such as grey or white hair, wrinkled skin and a bent posture – surely played an important role.<sup>48</sup> In spite of these difficulties, in premodernity old age seems not to have started before the age of 50, even if there is a certain range.<sup>49</sup> Rigid chronological limits should therefore be avoided, and one should regard old age as being a much more relative concept than it is today.

The medieval Latin terms to designate old age are often ambiguous, vague, inconsistent and can also vary, for example depending on the source genre and the writer's

44 Bauer, *Gerusien in den Poleis Kleinasiens* (see note 20), p. 13; Elisabeth Hermann-Otto, *Die Ambivalenz des Alters. Gesellschaftliche Stellung und politischer Einfluß der Alten in der Antike*, ead./Wöhrle (Eds.), *Die Kultur des Alterns* (see note 35), pp. 3–17, at pp. 5–6, 8; Jean-Nicolas Corvisier, *La vieillesse en Grèce ancienne. D'Homère à l'époque hellénistique*, in: *Annales de démographie historique* 1985, pp. 53–70, at p. 56.

45 Homet, *Los viejos* (see note 11), p. 59; Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 13), p. 226.

46 Thane, *The Long History of Old Age* (see note 10), p. 196; Youngs, *The Life Cycle* (see note 8), p. 33; Homet, *Los viejos* (see note 11), pp. 10–11; Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 14), pp. 24, 31.

47 Backes/Clemens, *Lebensphase Alter* (see note 3), pp. 21–22; Silke van Dyk, *Soziologie des Alters*, Bielefeld 2015, pp. 13, 22–23.

48 Appleby, *Why We Need* (see note 19), p. 149; Thane, *Old Age in English History* (see note 26), p. 19.

49 Cummins, *Attitudes to Old Age* (see note 25), pp. 26, 41; Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 14), p. 17.

intentions, which makes it impossible to fully solve this ambiguity.<sup>50</sup> According to Joseph de Ghellinck, the Late Middle Ages in particular are characterised by great variability in the use of age-designating terms.<sup>51</sup> Careful attention must therefore be paid to their actual use, and their meaning has to rather be evaluated on a case-by-case basis than on fixed notions.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, one can observe and stick to some tendencies that help to deal with the related terminology: “senectus” was probably the most common notion, and quite a neutral one as well.<sup>53</sup> If old age is subdivided into up to three parts, the following terms were generally employed: “senectus” refers to the third age, “senium” to the fourth age, and, finally, “decrepitas” to the fifth age.<sup>54</sup> The modern gerontological denominations given as an explanation here can indeed be used, as notably their meanings correspond well to those of the premodern expressions.<sup>55</sup> The third age, i. e. the ‘young old age’, is predominantly characterised by continued activity, agency, and even new freedoms and gains, as well as the successful application of compensation strategies. In contrast to this, the fourth age, i. e. the ‘old old age’, is marked by increasing and noticeable physical and mental decline, the coexistence of multiple health problems, decreasing mobility, and

50 Dan Służanski, *Le vocabulaire latin des gradus aetatum*, in: *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 19 (1974), pp. 103–121, 267–296, 345–369, 437–451, 563–578; Joseph de Ghellinck, *Iuventus, gravitas, senectus*, in: *Studia Mediaevalia in honorem admodum reverendi patris Raymundi Josephi Martin*, Bruxelles 1948, pp. 39–59; Adolf Hofmeister, *Puer, iuuenis, senex. Zum Verständnis der mittelalterlichen Altersbezeichnungen*, in: Albert Brackmann (Ed.), *Papsttum und Kaisertum*, München 1926, pp. 287–316.

51 Ghellinck, *Iuventus* (see note 50), p. 59.

52 Hans-Werner Goetz, *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Mittelalterliche Wahrnehmungs- und Deutungsmuster am Beispiel der Vorstellungen der Zeiten in der früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Historiographie*, in: Hartmut Bleumer et al. (Eds.), *Zwischen Wort und Bild. Wahrnehmungen und Deutungen im Mittelalter*, Köln-Wien 2010, pp. 157–202, at p. 194; Hofmeister, *Puer, iuuenis, senex* (see note 50), pp. 294, 304.

53 Służanski, *Le vocabulaire latin* (see note 50), pp. 568–569.

54 Isabelle Cochelin, *Introduction. Pre-Thirteenth-Century Definitions of the Life Cycle*, in: ead./Smyth (Eds.), *Medieval Life Cycles* (see note 38), pp. 1–54, at pp. 5–6, 14, 17; Ghellinck, *Iuventus* (see note 50), pp. 44, 54; Hofmeister, *Puer, iuuenis, senex* (see note 50), pp. 289, 293–294.

55 Chris Gilleard/Paul Higgs, *The Third Age. Class, Cohort or Generation?*, in: *Ageing and Society* 22 (2002), pp. 369–382; Paul B. Baltes/Jacqui Smith, *Multilevel and Systematic Analyses of Old Age. Theoretical and Empirical Evidence for a Fourth Age*, in: Bengtson/Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Aging* (see note 2), pp. 153–173; Bernice L. Neugarten, *Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old*, in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 415 (1974), pp. 187–198; also see the contributions by Paul Higgs and François Höpflinger in this volume.

growing passivity. In the case of particularly old people, ‘the oldest old’, the category of a fifth age, being a period of high dependency and dysfunctionality, may be added.<sup>56</sup> The last phase of life comprises the years immediately before death and is characterised by irreversible decline. Like all classifications, the two- or threefold division of old age – both the historical and the modern versions – has to be regarded as an ideal type and model. It can serve as a heuristic means to structure a long phase of old age of both individuals and groups and to draw attention to the specific problems and possibilities of the distinct subphases.

“Gravitas” and “maturitas”, meaning ‘seriousness’ and ‘maturity’, can be understood as positive attributes of old age, but also as a phase of transition into old age starting after the middle years of life.<sup>57</sup> “Vetus”, “antiquus” and “priscus” all refer to a preceding time and not automatically to someone or something who or which is old in the sense of having a certain chronological age.<sup>58</sup> Because of this, the choice of age-designating terms can also be based on criteria independent of chronology.<sup>59</sup> ‘Old’ in contrast to ‘young’ or ‘new’ can thus be a relative term that must be considered in this context as well.<sup>60</sup> In terms of people, an older man was usually called a “senior”, an old man a “senex”.<sup>61</sup> To describe an old woman, the terms “vetula” and “anus” were applied.<sup>62</sup> Regardless of the actual chronological age, “seniores” and “senes” could also be used to express social distinction.<sup>63</sup>

As the previous paragraphs have shown, old age can be examined in its own right, disconnected from the other stages of life. However, it has also become evident, that

56 Wahl/Heyl, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), pp. 98–99; Paul B. Baltes/Jacqui Smith, *New Frontiers in the Future of Aging. From Successful Aging of the Young Old to the Dilemmas of the Fourth Age*, in: *Gerontology* 49 (2003), pp. 123–135, at p. 124.

57 Cochelin, *Introduction* (see note 54), pp. 5–6, 18; Goetz, *Alt sein* (see note 22), pp. 22–24, 52; Sears, *The Ages of Man* (see note 38), p. 21.

58 Goetz, *Alt sein* (see note 22), p. 25; Homet, *Los viejos* (see note 11), p. 15.

59 Cummins, *Attitudes to Old Age* (see note 25), p. 40; Służanski, *Le vocabulaire latin* (see note 50), p. 441.

60 Goetz, *Alt sein* (see note 22), pp. 26–27.

61 Goetz, *Alt sein* (see note 22), pp. 23–24, 32; Służanski, *Le vocabulaire latin* (see note 50), pp. 563–566; Hofmeister, *Puer, iuvenis, senex* (see note 50), p. 316.

62 Goetz, *Alt sein* (see note 22), pp. 24, 31; Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 14), p. 18.

63 Giles Constable, *Seniores et pueri à Cluny aux X<sup>e</sup>, XI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in: id., *Cluny from the Tenth to the Twelfth Centuries, Aldershot 2000* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 678), pp. 17–24, at pp. 17, 21; Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 14), p. 1; Służanski, *Le vocabulaire latin* (see note 50), pp. 440, 565, 572–573.

*senectus* is not rarely defined and characterised in relation to them. Furthermore, past societies – just like those of modern times – were made up of people of all age groups, so that it appears necessary to also analyse old age in the context of intergenerational relationships.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, age is a key element and one can ask how important it is for constituting groups or generations. Historical research on generations has received considerable attention in recent years, both on a theoretical and on an empirical level.<sup>65</sup> In these studies, old age was not the centre of attention but was treated when necessary and as an important aspect as well. Therefore, it seems fruitful to intertwine these two perspectives and approaches more intricately because they both are interested in the relevance of age as a factor for human behaviour, and both deal with basic and variable anthropological phenomena. Such a combination could also help to more thoroughly evaluate observable changes occurring during old age, as not all of these need to be specific to old age itself, but can rather turn out to be cohort-, generation- or period-specific, i. e. they can be influenced by the historical context.<sup>66</sup> This means that not

64 Generational issues play an important role today in the face of an ageing society (Lina Maria Ellegård, Making Gerontocracy Work. Population Aging and the Generosity of Public Long-term Care, in: Applied Economic Perspectives & Policy 34 [2012], pp. 300–315; Winfried Schmähel, Leben die „Alten“ auf Kosten der „Jungen“? Anmerkungen zur Belastungsverteilung zwischen „Generationen“ in einer alternden Bevölkerung aus ökonomischer Perspektive, in: Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie 35 [2002], pp. 304–314).

65 Hartwin Brandt et al. (Eds.), *Genus & generatio*. Rollenerwartungen und Rollenerfüllungen im Spannungsfeld der Geschlechter und Generationen in Antike und Mittelalter, Bamberg 2011 (Bamberger historische Studien 6); Mark Häberlein/Christian Kuhn/Lina Hörl (Eds.), Generationen in spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Städten (ca. 1250–1750), Konstanz 2011 (Konflikte und Kultur – Historische Perspektiven 20); Hartwin Brandt/Maximilian Schuh/Ulrike Siewert (Eds.), Familie, Generation, Institution. Generationenkonzepte in der Vormoderne, Bamberg 2008 (Bamberger historische Studien 2); Orhad Parnes/Ulrike Vedder/Stefan Willer, Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte, Frankfurt a. M. 2008 (Suhrkamp Taschenbücher Wissenschaft 1855); Sigrid Weigel, Generation, Genealogie, Geschlecht. Zur Geschichte des Generationenkonzepts und seiner wissenschaftlichen Konzeptionalisierung seit Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: Lutz Musner/Gotthart Wunberg (Eds.), Kulturwissenschaften. Forschung – Praxis – Positionen, Wien 2002 (Edition Parabasen 1), pp. 161–190; David Herlihy, The Generation in Medieval History, in: *Viator* 5 (1974), pp. 347–364; also see the contribution by Hartwin Brandt in this volume. Fundamental – and still valid – considerations and concepts go back to Karl Mannheim: Karl Mannheim, Das Problem der Generationen, in: Kurt Wolff (Ed.), *Wissenssoziologie*. Auswahl aus dem Werk, Berlin et al. 1964 (Soziologische Texte 28), pp. 509–565. For a more recent treatment in sociology: Ulrike Jureit, *Generationenforschung*, Göttingen 2006 (UTB 2856. Geschichte).

66 Van Dyk, *Soziologie des Alters* (see note 47), pp. 26, 46; Gilleard/Higgs, *The Third Age* (see note 55), pp. 372–373; Paul B. Baltes, *Entwicklungspsychologie der Lebensspanne*. Theoretische Leitsätze, in: *Psychologische Rundschau* 41 (1990), pp. 1–24, at pp. 14–18. A common understanding

only do different age groups or generations live together at the same time, but also that considerable differences might be noted within a single age group or generation. The terms discussed above to designate old(er) and young(er) people can also be used to constitute age groups or generations.<sup>67</sup> However, this way of constructing both coherence and opposition does not necessarily correspond to the actual conditions or ‘reality’.

To date, philosophical, medical, theological, and literary works were preferentially studied in historical research. In contrast, narrative sources and administrative documents were examined much less frequently. Although there are very few works from premodern times specifically dedicated to old age – for example, Cicero’s “Cato Maior de Senectute” (44 BC),<sup>68</sup> Boncompagno da Signa’s “De malo senectutis et senii” (around 1240),<sup>69</sup> (pseudo) Roger Bacon’s “Liber (Epistola) de retardatione accidentium senectutis” (most probably around 1240)<sup>70</sup> and, finally, Gabriele Zerbi’s “Gerontocomia” (1489)<sup>71</sup> – one can also find information on ageing and old age in works that have a different focus. Indeed, many types of sources can provide information on old age, although they certainly differ in terms of their quality and quantity.<sup>72</sup> The oftentimes

of the term “cohort” is that of a group of people born in the same year. On this concept in particular, see: Norman B. Ryder, *The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change*, in: *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965), pp. 843–861; also see the contribution by Hans-Werner Wahl in this volume.

67 Goetz, *Alt sein* (see note 22), p. 31; Homet, *Los viejos* (see note 11), p. 15; Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 14), p. 1; Troyansky, *Aging in World History* (see note 18), p. 48.

68 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cato maior de senectute*, in: *M. Tulli Ciceronis De re publica. De legibus. Cato maior de senectute. Laelius de amicitia*, ed. by Jonathan G. F. Powell, Oxford 2006 (*Scriptorum classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*), pp. 267–315.

69 Boncompagno da Signa, *De malo senectutis et senii. Un manuale duecentesco sulla vecchiaia*, ed. by Paolo Garbini, Florenz 2004 (*Edizione nazionale dei testi mediolatini* 10).

70 Roger Bacon, *Liber (Epistola) de retardatione accidentium senectutis*, in: *De retardatione accidentium senectutis (cum aliis opusculis de rebus medicinalibus)*, ed. by Andrew G. Little / Eleanor Withington, Oxford 1928 (*British Society of Franciscan Studies* 14), pp. 1–83. For the question regarding the authorship of the work, cf. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Indagine codicologica e edizione critica dei testi scientifici medievali. Intorno al De retardatione accidentium senectutis e allo Speculum astronomiae*, in: *Filologia Mediolatina* 14 (2007), pp. 43–56.

71 Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerontocomia*, Roma 1489; Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerontocomia. On the Care of the Aged and Maximianus, Elegies on Old Age and Love*, transl. by Levi R. Lind, Philadelphia 1988 (*Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society* 182).

72 Otfried Höffe, *Bilder des Alters und des Alterns im Wandel*, in: Häfner / Staudinger (Eds.), *Was ist Alter(n)?* (see note 12), pp. 189–197, p. 189; Homet, *Los viejos* (see note 11), p. 12.

dispersed findings within these sources, therefore, have to be put together to derive a comprehensive picture.

### 3 Modern Gerontology as the Field of Research Dedicated to the Study of Old Age

Gerontology is a scientific field that encompasses a wide range of disciplines. Its genesis was mainly motivated by the radical demographic changes described earlier on. As the societal ageing process will continue to intensify in the coming decades, gerontology is an area of research of continuously growing importance. Since 1945, US-American gerontology served as a model for German gerontology, because the field was institutionalised much earlier in the US. In addition to the pioneering role of the US, gerontological research in Great Britain is also worth mentioning regarding its importance, which may be one reason why English-speaking historical research took up the topic relatively early on, and to a greater extent than in continental Europe.<sup>73</sup> By now, for several decades, gerontology is an internationally established field.

The term – composed of “γέρων” ‘old man’ and “λόγος” ‘teaching’ – goes back to the physician and bacteriologist Élie Metchnikoff, who defined it as the “scientific investigation of old age”, “étude scientifique de la vieillesse”, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>74</sup> At about the same time, the term “geriatrics” was coined by Ignatz L. Nascher and was understood as the branch of medicine that is specifically dedicated to the care of the elderly.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, geriatrics only became a dedicated field of medicine after World War II. The terms “gerocomia” and “gerontocomia” (and variants) can be traced back to the Renaissance and the Early Modern period. The so-called “gerocomies”, written between the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and early 17<sup>th</sup> century, are specialised treatises on the cure of the diseases of old age and on remedies and ways of conduct to preserve health and delay

73 Ursula Lehr, *Psychologie des Alterns*, Wiebelsheim 2000 (UTB 55. Psychologie), pp. 19–26; Baltes/Baltes, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), pp. 4–7.

74 Élie Metchnikoff, *Études sur la nature humaine. Essai de philosophie optimiste*, Paris 2003, p. 390.

75 Ignatz L. Nascher, *Geriatrics, the Diseases of Old Age and their Treatment, Including Physiological Old Age, Home and Institution Care, and Medico-Legal Relations*, Philadelphia 1914.

the ailments of old age.<sup>76</sup> They integrated the knowledge of their medieval predecessors, above all of the “regimens of health”, the “regimina sanitatis”.<sup>77</sup>

Due to its historical development, gerontology has a strong medico-biological,<sup>78</sup> psychological<sup>79</sup> and sociological<sup>80</sup> orientation. Although these disciplines are fundamentally separate from one another and investigate old age with their theories and methods, they have tended towards becoming increasingly interlinked in recent times. From a medico-biological perspective, which heavily influenced research up to the 1960s, old age was primarily understood as a post-reproductive process of decline and loss. In contrast, the behavioural sciences and humanities portrayed (and still portray) an ambivalent picture of both losses and gains by underlining positive aspects that come about as well. For this reason, the term development is used with reference not only to childhood and adolescence but also to adulthood and old age.<sup>81</sup>

76 Daniel Schäfer, *Gerokomien – eine vergessene Fachliteratur der frühen Neuzeit* in: *Würzburger medizinhistorische Mitteilungen* 22 (2003), pp. 7–17.

77 Elisa Andretta/Marilyn Nicoud (Eds.), *Être médecin à la cour* (Italie, France, Espagne, XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle), Firenze 2013 (Micrologus’ Library 52); Marilyn Nicoud, *Les régimes de santé au Moyen Âge. Naissance et diffusion d’une écriture médicale* (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle), 2 vols., Rome 2007 (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 333); also see the contribution by Daniela Santoro in this volume.

78 Contributions in Häfner/Staudinger (Eds.), *Was ist Alter(n)?* (see note 12), pp. 9–65; contributions in Wolf D. Oswald/Ursula Lehr/Cornel Sieber/Johannes Kornhuber (Eds.), *Gerontologie. Medizinische, psychologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 20–31, 47–103, 131–148, 165–170, 189–193, 327–241; contributions in Bengtson/Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Aging* (see note 2), pp. 81–150.

79 James E. Birren/K. Warner Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Aging*, Amsterdam et al. 2016; Hans-Werner Wahl/Andreas Kruse (Eds.), *Lebensläufe im Wandel. Entwicklung über die Lebensspanne aus Sicht verschiedener Disziplinen*, Stuttgart 2014; Matthias Kliegel/Mike Martin, *Psychologische Grundlagen der Gerontologie*, Stuttgart 2010 (Grundriss Gerontologie 3); contributions in Oswald et al., *Gerontologie* (see note 78), pp. 31–36, 178–182, 205–214, 231–236, 242–247, 291–301, 322–327; Lehr, *Psychologie des Alterns* (see note 73).

80 Dale Dannefer/Chris Phillipson (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Social Gerontology*, London et al. 2013; Richard A. Settersten; Jacqueline L. Angel (Eds.), *Handbook of Sociology of Aging*, New York 2011; contributions in Oswald et al., *Gerontologie* (see note 78), pp. 36–46, 183–188, 215–219, 280–284, 339–334; Backes/Clemens, *Lebensphase Alter* (see note 3); Karl (Ed.): *Sozial- und verhaltenswissenschaftliche Gerontologie* (see note 2); François Höpflinger/Astrid Stuckelberger, *Alter und Altersforschung in der Schweiz*, Zürich 1992.

81 Ursula Staudinger, *Was ist das Alter(n) der Persönlichkeit? Eine Antwort aus verhaltenswissenschaftlicher Sicht*, in: Häfner/ead. (Eds.), *Was ist Alter(n)?* (see note 12), pp. 83–94, at p. 83; Baltes, *Entwicklungspsychologie* (see note 66), pp. 2–4.

Until the 1980s, gerontology was mainly empirical, quantitative, and application-oriented, but this gradually changed afterwards through the development of new approaches. Since the mid-1970s, gerontology has become more interdisciplinary with regard to its fundamental disciplines and has been opening up to the humanities, while from their side the humanities have also opened up to gerontology.<sup>82</sup> This trend is still ongoing and the present volume intends to continue and deepen it. Despite the advances made, gerontology and history – and other historically oriented humanistic disciplines – are still largely disjointed concerning the period before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i. e. the time before the great demographic shift initially described.<sup>83</sup> Historical retrospectives and considerations from a gerontological point of view seldom reach back into premodernity. If the premodern period is made the subject of discussion, descriptions are often rather cursory.<sup>84</sup> Some exceptions from this state of research concern gerontological contributions regarding the history of medicine and the history of gerontology (above all concepts of ageing and old age, anti-ageing measures and the prolongation of life).<sup>85</sup> The premodern works studied were regarded as being precursors of the scientific field of gerontology. An intensified and reflected integration of the predominantly qualitative methods of the humanities could certainly further enrich gerontology. Especially cultural gerontology,<sup>86</sup>

82 For references on this, see the next footnotes, especially those on Cultural Gerontology, Humanistic Gerontology and Critical Gerontology.

83 Andrea von Hülsen-Esch/Miriam Seidler/Christian Tagsold, Methoden der Alter(n)sforschung. Disziplinäre Positionen – transdisziplinäre Perspektiven, in: ead./ead./id. (Eds.), Methoden der Alter(n)sforschung. Disziplinäre Positionen und transdisziplinäre Perspektiven, Bielefeld 2013 (Alter(n)skulturen 1), pp. 7–33, at p. 17.

84 Laslett, Das Dritte Alter (see note 3), p. 24. “Aber es gibt ... noch kaum Arbeiten, die diese Perspektive mit einem tiefen Blick in die Geschichte verknüpfen” (ibid.). “But there are ... still hardly any works that link this perspective with a profound insight into history” (own translation).

85 Chris Gilleard, Ageing and the Galenic Tradition. A Brief Overview, in: Ageing and Society 35 (2015), pp. 489–511; Chris Gilleard, Renaissance Treatises on ‘Successful Ageing’, in: Ageing and Society 33 (2013), pp. 1–27; Carole Haber, Anti-Aging Medicine. The History. Life Extension and History. The Continual Search for the Fountain of Youth, in: The Journals of Gerontology. Series A 59 (2004), pp. 515–522; Gerald J. Gruman, A History of Ideas about the Prolongation of Life. The Evolution of Pro-Longevity Hypotheses to 1800, in: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 56 (1966), pp. 1–102.

86 Paul Higgs/Chris Gilleard, Ageing, Dementia and the Social Mind, New York 2017 (Sociology of Health and Illness Monograph Series); Julia Twigg/Martin Wendy (Eds.), Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology, London-New York 2015 (Routledge International Handbooks); Lars Andersson (Ed.), Cultural Gerontology, West Port 2002; Chris Gilleard/Paul Higgs, Cultures of Ageing. Self, Citizen and the Body, Harlow-New York 2000; also see the contribution by

as well as humanistic gerontology<sup>87</sup> and critical gerontology,<sup>88</sup> have already integrated such approaches, mainly with respect to our times and the more recent past. These currents show a considerable affinity to the humanities through their interest in questions concerning, for example, the attribution of meanings, representations, subjectivism, and constructivism.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to the earlier functionalist theories of gerontology,<sup>90</sup> the more recent theories conceive old age as a variable, multidimensional and comprehensive phenomenon. The current definitions of gerontology thus generally include the humanities, and historical sciences in particular.<sup>91</sup> The definition given by Paul B. and Margret M. Baltes

Paul Higgs in this volume. Cultural Gerontology was inspired by the cultural turn and arose around the middle of the 2000s.

87 Thomas R. Cole/Ruth E. Ray/Robert Kastenbaum (Eds.), *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging. What Does It Mean to Grow Old?*, Baltimore 2010; Thomas R. Cole/David D. Van Tassel/Robert Kastenbaum (Eds.), *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging*, New York 1992; L. Eugene Thomas (Ed.), *Research on Adulthood and Aging. The Human Sciences Approach*, Albany 1988. Humanistic Gerontology strives for a close connection between gerontology and the humanities. A historical perspective has only been considered here to a lesser extent, in particular with regard to the premodern era.

88 Anton Amann/Franz Kolland (Eds.), *Das erzwungene Paradies des Alters? Weitere Fragen an eine kritische Gerontologie*, Wiesbaden 2014 (Alter(n) und Gesellschaft); Thomas Cole/W. Andrew Achenbaum/Patricia L. Jakobi/Robert Kastenbaum (Eds.), *Voices and Visions of Aging. Toward a Critical Gerontology*, New York 1993; John Baars, *The Challenge of Critical Gerontology. The Problems of Social Constitution*, in: *Journal of Aging Studies* 5 (1991), pp. 219–243. Critical theories primarily examine political and economic power structures, social inequalities and discrimination, methods of acquiring and disseminating knowledge, and science as a system.

89 Van Dyk, *Soziologie des Alters* (see note 47).

90 Robert C. Atchley, *A Continuity Theory of Normal Aging*, in: *The Gerontologist* 29 (1989), pp. 183–190; Bruce W. Lemon/Vern L. Bengtson/James A. Peterson, *An Exploration of the Activity Theory of Aging. Activity Types and Life Satisfaction among In-Movers to a Retirement Community*, in: *Journal of Gerontology* 27 (1972), pp. 511–523; Elaine Cumming/William Henry, *Growing Old. The Process of Disengagement*, New York 1961. The three theories of disengagement, activity and continuity interrelate with each other and are based on Talcott Parson's structural functionalism; Talcott Parsons/Edward Shils (Eds.), *Toward a General Theory of Action*, New York 1962. These concepts and theories are still relevant today because they are precursors of current models. All three approaches generalise to a great degree and disregard social and structural conditions or individual characteristics, despite their focus on individuals; Van Dyk, *Soziologie des Alters* (see note 47), pp. 36–39; Backes/Clemens, *Lebensphase Alter* (see note 3), pp. 122–123, 134–135.

91 Robert Kastenbaum, *Gerontology*, in: George L. Maddox (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gerontology a Comprehensive Resource in Gerontology and Geriatrics*, New York 1995, pp. 416–418, at p. 416; Baltes/Baltes, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), p. 8.

can be quoted here: “Gerontology is concerned with the description, explanation and modification of physical, psychological, social, historical and cultural aspects of ageing and old age, including the analysis of age-relevant and age-constituting environments and social institutions”.<sup>92</sup> In this way, gerontology can be regarded as the transdisciplinary analysis of processes, ideas and concepts of ageing and old age.

Accordingly, today gerontology presents itself as a field of many disciplines that offers a multitude of theories and concepts.<sup>93</sup> One can observe that research on old age has become increasingly multidisciplinary and, to some degree, inter- and transdisciplinary as well. However, the latter inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives have only been developed rather unsystematically so far.<sup>94</sup> Disciplinary approaches and theories are still largely followed separately from one another, although they lend themselves to being combined in order to consider fully the complexity of the phenomenon of old age. This applies to several levels: to the relationships between the different disciplines that gerontology comprises in a stricter sense, to the relationships between gerontology and the humanities, and to the relationships among the different humanistic disciplines. Furthermore, debates on theories and methods should also be pursued within the individual humanistic disciplines.<sup>95</sup> These discussions could serve as a basis and an important

92 Own translation of “Gerontologie beschäftigt sich mit der Beschreibung, Erklärung und Modifikation von körperlichen, psychischen, sozialen, historischen und kulturellen Aspekten des Alterns und des Alters, einschließlich der Analyse von altersrelevanten und alternskonstituierenden Umwelten und sozialen Institutionen”; Baltés/Baltés, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), p. 8.

93 Gertrud Backes, *Soziologie und sozialwissenschaftliche Gerontologie*, in: Karl (Ed.), *Sozial- und verhaltenswissenschaftliche Gerontologie* (see note 2), pp. 45–58, at pp. 45–48; Wahl/Heyl, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), pp. 25–69.

94 Anton Amann, *Sozialgerontologie. Ein multiparadigmatisches Forschungsprogramm?*, in: id./Kolland (Eds.), *Das erzwungene Paradies* (see note 88), pp. 29–50, at pp. 35–39; Hülsen-Esch/Seidler/Tagsold, *Methoden der Alter(n)sforschung* (see note 83), pp. 12–15. “... wird damit auch das Bestreben deutlich, in der Gerontologie einen Ausgleich zwischen eher biologischen und eher psychosozialen und kulturellen Sichtweisen zum Altern zu erzielen, eine Aufgabe, die wohl bis heute noch nicht abschließend gelöst werden ist und zu den zentralen Herausforderungen einer interdisziplinären Gerontologie in der Zukunft gehört”; Wahl/Heyl, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), p. 79. “... this also makes clear the endeavour to achieve a balance in gerontology between more biological and more psychosocial and cultural views of ageing, a task that has probably not yet been conclusively fulfilled and will be one of the central challenges of an interdisciplinary gerontology in the future” (own translation).

95 Hülsen-Esch/Seidler/Tagsold, *Methoden der Alter(n)sforschung* (see note 83), pp. 15–16. “Indem sich die Disziplinen zunächst ihres eigenen methodischen Zugangs im Rahmen der Alter(n)sforschung bewusst werden und diesen offenlegen, wird überhaupt erst deutlich, wo die kritischen Schnittstellen einer Übersetzung zwischen den verschiedenen >Eigenlogiken< liegen” (ibid.,

prerequisite for further reflections on how a stronger interdisciplinary entanglement may be realised. The comparatively larger gap between the humanities and gerontology has not yet been fully overcome.<sup>96</sup> The consideration of a historical dimension would allow gerontological research to prove if its theories, concepts and findings referring to contemporary times are valid overall or rather only time-bound.<sup>97</sup> The fruitfulness of a more profound entanglement between history and gerontology is underlined by Antje Kampf: “Historical scholarship can offer a contextual grounding for the recurrent sociological, anthropological, political and economic questions arising from the contingent and ambivalent meanings of ageing”.<sup>98</sup>

Seen from the point of view of the humanities, intensified interdisciplinary connections with gerontology through the application of gerontological theories, approaches, concepts and questions to historical topics and premodern sources could serve both as a heuristic means to open new perspectives and to unveil commonalities that might have remained unrecognised otherwise.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, a higher level of theoretical understanding of empirical findings could be achieved. Without a doubt, such interdisciplinarity

p. 15). “By first becoming aware of and revealing their own methodological approach within the framework of age(ing) research, it becomes clear where the critical intersections of a translation between the different ‘own logics’ exist” (own translation).

96 Antje Kampf, *Historians of Ageing and the “Cultural Turn”*, in: Twigg/Wendy (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology* (see note 86), pp. 45–52, at p. 45.

97 Wahl/Heyl, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), pp. 27–28; Gerd Göckenjan, *Die Bedeutung der Geschichte des Alters in der Soziologie des Alters*, in: Gertrud Backes/Wolfgang Clemens (Eds.), *Die Zukunft der Soziologie des Alter(n)s*, Opladen 2002 (*Alter(n) und Gesellschaft* 8), pp. 47–94, at p. 48. “... kann das Verstehen dessen, was in der Gerontologie theoretisch, methodisch und empirisch heute der Fall ist, auch von einer historischen Perspektive profitieren”; Wahl/Heyl, *Gerontologie* (see note 5), p. 27. “... the understanding of what is theoretically, methodologically and empirically going on in gerontology today can also benefit from a historical perspective” (own translation). “Überprüfungen am historischen Material finden sich in der Soziologie des Alters selten”; Göckenjan, *Die Bedeutung der Geschichte des Alters* (see above), p. 48. “Verifications using historical material are rarely found in the sociology of old age” (own translation).

98 Kampf, *Historians of Ageing* (see note 96), p. 45.

99 Some possible perspectives of an interdisciplinary entanglement between gerontology and historical research, particularly with medieval studies, are indicated by Christian Alexander Neumann. As for fundamental anthropological phenomena that can be studied throughout history and up to the present day, one can enumerate concepts of age and ageing (a chronological, biological, psychical, social, functional and subjective age), a life course or life span perspective and the concept of wisdom; Christian Alexander Neumann, *Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik*, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2018), pp. 387–405; see also the contributions by Hans-Werner Wahl, François Höpflinger and Paul Higgs in this volume.

has to deal with certain limitations. The premodern material that has been transmitted to us does not allow some well-established lines of investigation in contemporary gerontology. For several reasons, when applying theories, concepts and questions, some modifications seem necessary. What seems well applicable are theories and concepts which refer to fundamental anthropological phenomena that can be observed throughout time. Old age and age can serve as autonomous and fruitful categories of analysis, not only for gerontology but also for the humanities, in order to learn about their influence on human behaviour. Moreover, this approach encourages and invites one to explicate and reflect on implicit views about old age and the ideas and norms associated with it. Examining age and human development stresses the *conditio humana* in history so that historical actors would thus no longer appear ageless and therefore much too abstract in this regard.

#### 4 Structure and Contents of the Present Volume

The structure of this volume was conceived against the backdrop of the preceding remarks. This book is mainly based on the papers read at the conference “Gerontology and the Humanities – Perspectives for Historical Ageing Studies and Approaches to Gerontological Medievalistics” which was held at the German Historical Institute in Rome/ Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom (DHI Rom) from 4 to 6 November 2019 and promoted by the mentioned institute and the German Research Foundation (DFG). Building on the DHI’s tradition of fostering academic exchange between Germany and Italy, most of the participants came from these two countries and they were joined by speakers from other (Western) European countries. Special attention was paid to Italy, not only because of this established tradition but also to provide impulses for historical research on old age in Italy.

The meeting aimed at transcending usual patterns in two directions. On the one hand, the conference opened up a forum for both specialists in gerontology and researchers from the humanities to discuss theories, methods and findings concerning a shared topic. On the other hand, a broad range of historically oriented humanistic disciplines was brought together. Less unusual, although still a not too commonly taken perspective, was the intention to consider a large chronological frame that extended from Antiquity to the Early Modern period, with a special emphasis placed on the Middle Ages. Since discourses and representations of old age are often based on transmitted (and adapted) ‘old’ knowledge, aspects of their development, in the long run, could thus be discerned in the conference’s setting.

The articles of this volume are assigned to three sections: (I) representations, (II) social interactions and (III) corporeality. Each section is opened by a mainly theory-based article from gerontology. The gerontologists from the three fundamental gerontological disciplines of psychology of ageing, social gerontology and cultural gerontology present theories, concepts, approaches, and findings that are also relevant for the humanities in general, and for historical studies in particular. The theory-guided articles share their specific perspective on a field of inquiry for which the subsequent articles, almost exclusively from the humanities, intend to offer historical empirical evidence. Furthermore, questions of generational relationships are treated in particular articles in every section. These approaches to old age are crucial to the study of the topic and complement each other because each perspective has its potentials and limits which another one can balance.

This structure might be instrumental in showing new connections between theory and case studies and consequently sharpening methodological approaches on both sides. This seems advantageous in comparison to an exclusively chronological order or a division into certain topics. Accordingly, the various case studies have been assigned to the different sections with regard to the major focus of their approach. Following a guiding perspective, the articles above all apply theories and methods of the disciplines they originate from that have been adapted to the topic and the specific cases in question. As for the sections' internal structure, the contributions are arranged chronologically in order to highlight diachronic developments.

Because of the complexity of ageing and old age, this volume does not aim at being exhaustive. Nevertheless, it intends to offer theoretical and methodical reflections as well as current empirical findings that are of general importance when studying ageing and old age. All collected articles aim to contribute to an even more intensive interdisciplinary entanglement between gerontology and the humanities, and among the various humanistic disciplines in the future. More interdisciplinarity is highly desirable on several levels and should be based on an intensification of research on ageing and old age within the disciplines. Additionally, transcultural perspectives should also be further developed in the future.

In the first section, representations of ageing and old age are analysed. The representations show a fundamental ambivalence of positive and negative attributions to old age and are in accordance or in contrast to physiological, psychological, and social realities. Hans-Werner Wahl, representing the field of the psychology of ageing, deals with three longings that humankind had at every time in history: eternal youth, immortality, and wisdom. Historical examples are compared to fundamental results and issues of contemporary gerontology. With regard to the first aspect, a relatively high cognitive and bodily functioning continues even in old age. As for immortality, the speed of ageing can indeed be reduced by interventions. Finally, wisdom does not automatically develop

(or increase while ageing), but intellectual abilities related to wisdom do not show age-related decline. Wahl concludes that none of the three longings has been achieved yet. However, they are more within reach than ever before.

Luciana Repici analyses Aristotle's conception of old age. In the Middle Ages, the translation and reception of his work gave strong incentives for studying ageing processes and old age. Taken together, the Aristotelian corpus provides a multifaceted picture of *senectus*, which is comprised of bio-physiological, psychological, social, political, and ethical aspects. For Aristotle, ageing is a 'natural illness' that affects all living beings. The body gradually loses its vital inner heat and its humidity so that it becomes colder and drier. Therefore, death occurs at the complete extinction of both. The physiological changes cause psychological ones and thereby influence behaviour because body and soul are closely intertwined. Showing neither deficits nor decline, the middle years are held to be the prime of life and thus the most adequate stage of life for exercising political power and fulfilling social roles.

Mary Harlow treats attitudes to growing old with regard to Ancient Rome, pointing out both positive and negative stereotypes and tropes. While the wisdom, experience and *gravitas* of the elderly were praised; the physical and mental decline was feared, and litigiousness and sexual activity were ridiculed. The authors and protagonists of the sources are mostly men. In contrast, one can find only a few traces of elderly women beyond childbearing age. Harlow goes beyond the mentioned stereotypes by also asking what a number of selected case studies of written and material sources can reveal about the social reality of ageing and old age, and what these stereotypes tell us about the society where they were formed, used, repeated and passed down to subsequent generations. As it is still the case today, factors such as social status and gender both influenced representations and lived conditions.

Sonja Kerth deals with old age in medieval German courtly romances from the angle of literary disability studies. The analysis is based on the three romances "Eneas" by Heinrich von Veldeke and "Erec" and "Iwein" by Hartmann von Aue and their Old French sources. Among other things, Kerth asks the questions regarding whether old age functions as a disabling factor, if elderly characters participate actively in the plot, and if they are given names and a personal history. When considering various genres of medieval literature, it seems that elderly characters are in an ambivalent situation between the positive and negative facets of old age, for example between wisdom and experience and impairment and weakness. Despite their usually rather marginal roles, the elderly appear in connection to relevant topics such as intergenerational relationships, succession, warfare, and counsel.

Bernard Ribémont studies old age with respect to French medieval literature. The representation of old age in literary texts is also shaped by ancient role models that show

considerable continuity. Furthermore, one has to consider biblical and patristic influences and those of non-fictional texts such as encyclopaedias and medical treatises. Both a more comprehensive and a gender-focused treatment of old age in French literature are desirable. Therefore, the article proposes an overview and integrates various types of works, e. g. epics, courtly romances, satires, and allegorical poetry to portray how old age was perceived and represented. It is associated with a range of positive and negative attributes and topoi: on the one hand, the wisdom and the prowess of the old hero, on the other hand, the decline in mental abilities, infirmity, and even extreme ugliness. Two central questions pursued are whether the old age of men and women is portrayed differently, and how ambivalent each gender-specific representation is in itself.

The second section is dedicated to ageing and old age in the context of social interactions. The focus here is on actual social contexts which are nonetheless in a reciprocal relationship with representations and constructions. François Höpflinger examines old age and ageing from the point of social gerontology, which takes the analytic perspective concerning our contemporary societies that are characterised by stately retirement systems and high life expectancies for very large parts of the population. As he shows, some theories and concepts, as well as research topics, could well be applied to history as well. First, concepts of age and old age could be transferred. Particularly in the past, chronological age was no reliable indicator for being considered old, because ageing is a multidimensional process also determined by individual factors such as life experiences and personal health behaviour. Second, social inequalities that entail various consequences and intergenerational relationships within family contexts exerted considerable influence on the ageing process, the societal positions and the behaviour of elderly men and women throughout history.

The theologian Kathrin Liess examines ageing and old age with respect to the Old Testament. In the Middle Ages, the Bible represented perhaps the most important model text for all contemporary scholars. The Old Testament (OT) offers a wide spectrum of ambivalent images and concepts of old age, ranging from wisdom and dignity to weakness and sorrow. The manifold text genres comprise, for example, narrative texts, wisdom literature, poetic literature, or legal texts. However, there are no comprehensive treatises on old age in the OT. In order to categorise and examine the diversity of the findings, common categorisations taken from gerontology can be worthwhile. Old age is therefore studied in relation to chronological, biological, social, and theological aspects. Methodologically the investigation is guided by historical-critical exegesis. Each of the four topics mentioned is treated exemplarily based on a selection of meaningful texts of the OT.

Hartwin Brandt focuses on the question of whether the crisis of the late Roman Republic can be seen as the manifestation of generational conflicts between the old(er)

and the young(er). Before entering into the case study, he expounds on some key theoretical concepts of modern generational research that are relevant and applicable to historical studies. Texts and letters of Sallustius and Cicero are examined for evidence of generational consciousness, attributions, and self-concepts. Important questions dealt with are: To what degree can the crisis of the late Roman Republic be viewed as the consequence of generation-based tensions and irreconcilable interests? Why was the situation described by some protagonists in terms of generational patterns?

The medievalist José Miguel Andrade Cernadas studies old age concerning the monasteries of Galicia (North-West Spain) from the Early to the Late Middle Ages, addressing questions of intergenerational relationships, demography, and also gender. For the analysis, monastic rules, documentation produced by the monasteries themselves, and hagiographic texts are used. People of different generations used to live together which resulted in rather heterogeneous communities. Monastic rules provide normative information on behaviour containing alleviations for children and elderly people. As a rule, old monks and nuns claimed the role of teachers and supervisors. For lay elderly people with certain economic means, it was a widespread practice to enter a monastery later in their lives in order to be cared for. Reliable information on life expectancy is available for the Later Middle Ages which allows for a comparison of male and female life expectancy and the length of the terms of office of abbots and abbesses.

Christian Alexander Neumann examines old age and rulership through the comparative analysis of two case studies: a hereditary monarchy – King James I of Aragon (1208–1276, r. 1213–1276, death at the age of 68) – and a republic using electoral procedures – the Venetian Doge Marin(o) Falier(o) (1280 or 1285–1355, r. 1354–1355, death at the age of 70 or 75). Due to the fundamental difference between the two political regimes, the social contexts resulting from them were also different. So far, certain aspects related to the old age of sovereigns have been dealt with in a number of studies that link political history with the history of culture and medicine. The two examples studied here allow for the analysis of numerous aspects of ageing and old age. Some are common to both cases, whereas some are specific to the individual case in question. The different evaluations of old age that become evident from the sources are highly influenced by the specific social and temporal contexts, the genres and the writers' intentions.

Starting from the idea of the social construction of childhood, Monica Ferrari bases her study on mirrors for princes, reports, and diaries from courts in Renaissance Italy and Early Modern France, taking a comparative perspective. Analysing childhood is important for investigating old age because the stages of life are often modelled on each other. Childhood and old age complement each other and are opposed to each other at the same time. The tutors of royal and noble children had the task of taming the 'ferociousness' of their pupils of whom, still lacking sound judgement, obedience was

expected. Children were supposed to deny their childhood and to reach adulthood, at least mentally, as early as possible. The ideal to follow was the *puer senex*, an already ancient topos, and various educational measures were employed to achieve this aim.

In the third section, the bodily dimension of ageing and old age is analysed, both in its very physicalness and as a social-discursive construction. The description, treatment, and perception of changes of body and mind occurring during the ageing process, of health and illness and of the preservation of health are particularly relevant here. Paul Higgs represents the field of cultural gerontology, which underlines the social constructivism of old age. Higgs outlines the origins and the development of cultural gerontology that treats topics such as the body, fashion, consumption, sexuality, and performativity. Having emerged in our present society, theories and topics of cultural gerontology can also be studied in a historical perspective, as they show significant overlaps with theories, concepts, and topics relevant to the humanities, especially since the cultural turn. Corporeality and self-conception are important aspects of one's own identity. Therefore, the paper's focus is the ageing and old body between constructivism and factuality, which has remained somewhat overlooked in cultural gerontological research. Studying the bodily dimension of old age could serve to better understand the position and performativity of the elderly in different historical-cultural contexts.

Lidia Vitale analyses the human life cycle from the perspective of human osteoarchaeology. While ageing, the human skeleton changes, showing some characteristic differences between the stages of life. Old age is marked by degenerative processes. The principal analytical methods for determining the age-at-death of historical populations and the multitude of factors that leave their marks on the skeletal remains, such as the environment, lifestyle, and activity, are pointed out. The age-at-death can be assessed with a much higher degree of certainty for children and young people, since the stages of physical development until adulthood produce quite regular changes, whereas deformations of the skeletons of elderly individuals are much more individual. Osteoarchaeology can offer important information on life expectancy, social roles, living conditions and the health of the elderly in the past. These findings can either complement or contradict the written sources historians and other historical oriented humanistic disciplines are used to dealing with.

From the perspective of the history of medicine, Daniel Schäfer investigates to what degree high and late medieval medicine was concerned with matters of ageing and old age. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, medicine in the Latin West made substantial progress, bringing forth some monograph treatises and specialised writings on the topic. One could characterise this gathered and enhanced knowledge as (proto-)geriatric. Its roots, however, go much further back into Greek and Roman antiquity. To explain the development of (proto-)geriatrics, first of all, relevant sources and authors are identified

and studied, before selected examples of non-medical texts are discussed in which this knowledge was employed. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, (proto-)geriatric knowledge became much more systematic, which is best represented by the comprehensive works written by Marsilio Ficino and Gabriele Zerbi, both published in 1489. In this context, the question of whether these can be regarded as the starting point of a fundamentally new development that would finally lead to the rise of the specialised gerocomies at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century are addressed.

Medicine and physicians at the Sicilian royal court under the different dynasties that ruled the island in the Middle Ages are the focus of Daniela Santoro's contribution. Through an analysis of both written and material sources, she expounds on the strategies that were employed to preserve the rulers' health, which was also relevant to the stability of their realm. She concentrates on those kings who reached old age. In order to achieve a healthy old age, the appropriate conduct had to start much earlier in life. The *regimina sanitatis*, containing dietetic advice underline, among other things, the role of psychological health and environmental factors. Many of the physicians that served the Sicilian kings, especially the Catalan Arnau de Vilanova, were eager to find ways and means to achieve the coveted *prolongatio vitae*, also by making use of alchemy.

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## I Representations



# Three Key Longings of Humankind Related to Ageing Seen Through the Lenses of Contemporary Gerontology

Eternal Youth, Immortality, and Wisdom

## Abstract

Biological, behavioural, and social ageing research is well-established as an important and necessary conceptual and empirical substance in ageing science. The current work aims to transcend this now classic bio-psycho-social model by making explicit linkages with the humanities, and with history in particular. The chapter commences with input on three key longings of humankind across history as related to ageing, i. e., (1) the striving for eternal youth while getting older, (2) getting older, but having immortality, and (3) becoming wiser with age. Once these longings are described with the aid of a selection of historical examples, they are juxtaposed with key findings and enduring issues in contemporary gerontology. With respect to the longing for eternal youth, research shows that we see increasing lengths of phases characterised by relatively high cognitive and physical functioning in the later human lifespan. Additionally, successful bio-behavioural interventions can to some extent be interpreted as serious indications that ageing may be further slowed down in the future. In some contrast to this ‘controlled optimism’ the long for wisdom increasing with age does not seem to be validated by concurrent empirical research. In conclusion, the emerging – rather ambivalent – picture does not confirm any of the longings, but the existing evidence suggests that we have come closer to fulfilling such longings than ever before in history.

## 1 Introduction

Gerontology has been an interdisciplinary endeavour since its inception.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, behavioural and social ageing research will be at the centre of analysis, enriched by inputs from the bio-gerontological and cultural sciences. Both behavioural and social gerontology are well-established as needed conceptual and empirical contributions to ageing science.<sup>2</sup> Behavioural gerontology, also termed the psychology of ageing, has strong roots in psychology and addresses a broad range of domains such as cognitive abilities, personality, social-emotional functioning, and the mental health of older adults. Ageing and the social sciences, also termed social gerontology and rooted in sociology and demography, regards ageing as a process driven by social and economic forces enacted in families, communities, policies, and cultural norms. Whereas behavioural ageing research concentrates more on individual ageing, social gerontology emphasises the societal and political perspectives forces impacting on ageing. However, behavioural, and social gerontology have a considerable overlap in terms of major themes, methods, and interdisciplinary orientations. For example, they share a deep common interest in key issues of ageing well such as social relations, quality of life, well-being, and health. Both also prioritise the assessment of large samples of older adults with a strong focus on structured questionnaire-based approaches for quantitative analysis. Additionally, both disciplines operate with close connections to the medical, health, and biological sciences concerned with ageing and echo the importance of the humanities and cultural sciences for understanding human ageing.<sup>3</sup>

An example of the latter can be seen in work on cognitive ageing that takes a historical-cultural perspective by using historical material to address the development of adult intellectual functioning. The research by Williams and her colleagues contributes to this tradition by building on the robust assumption anchored in cognitive science that a decrease in language complexity occurs as a result of ageing due to a lowered

1 Edmund V. Cowdry (Ed.), *Problems of Ageing. Biological and Medical Aspects*, Baltimore 1939; Donald O. Cowgill/Lowell D. Holmes (Eds.), *Ageing and Modernization*, New York 1972 (Sociology Series).

2 Manfred Diehl/Hans-Werner Wahl, *The Psychology of Later Life. A Contextual Perspective*, Washington D. C. 2020; Kenneth Ferraro/Deborah Carr (Eds.), *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, 9<sup>th</sup> New York 2021 (The Handbooks of Aging).

3 Christian Alexander Neumann, *Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik*, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2019), pp. 387–405.

working memory capacity and rate of information processing.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, age-related stability in terms of vocabulary and life knowledge has repeatedly been shown in empirical ageing research.<sup>5</sup> The former is treated under the heading of fluid intelligence or the mechanics of intellectual functioning, whereas the latter is subsumed under the umbrella of crystallised intelligence or the pragmatics of mental performance. A linguistic analysis of 57 letters of King James VI/I (1566–1625), written from the years 1604 to 1624, was conducted by Williams and her colleagues. As shown in figure 1, the data modelling reveals a quadratic pattern of decline in written language complexity (left panel), but simultaneously an increase of richness of the vocabulary in King James's letters written between the ages of 38 and 58 (see fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> Such empirical analysis embedded in historical contexts may provide valuable insight for understanding historical figures, the actions throughout the course of their lifespan development, and ageing as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, historical-cultural perspectives play a role in a behavioural ageing research study targeting negative-positive age stereotypes across historical time. Reuben Ng and his colleagues found a linear *increase* of negative stereotypes relating to age from 1810 to 2010 based on a linguistic analysis of the “Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)”, a U.S. database of 400 million words that includes a range of printed sources from 1810 to 2009.<sup>8</sup> Additional data covering a period of 21 decades until 2019 and based on a similar research approach have confirmed these findings.<sup>9</sup>

4 Kristine Williams / Frederick Holmes / Susan Kemper / Janet Marquis, *Written Language Clues to Cognitive Changes of Aging. An Analysis of the Letters of King James VI/I*, in: *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B* 58 (2003), pp. 42–44.

5 Paul B. Baltes / Ulman Lindenberger / Ursula M. Staudinger, *Life-Span Theory in Developmental Psychology*, in: William Damon / Richard M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, 4 vols., New York 2006, vol. 1: *Theoretical Models of Human Development*, pp. 569–664.

6 On the figure, note: MLU = Mean length of sentences in words, indicating language complexity; Type Token Ratio = Index of words with different word roots indicating vocabulary variation.

7 Martin Wagensdorfer, *Die Schrift des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini, Città del Vaticano* 2008 (*Studi e testi. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana* 441).

8 Reuben Ng / Heather G. Allore / Mark Trentalange / Joan K. Monin / Becca R. Levy, *Increasing Negativity of Age Stereotypes Across 200 Years. Evidence from a Database of 400 Million Words*, in: *PLoS ONE* 10 (2015), pp. 1–6.

9 Reuben Ng / Ting Yu J. Chow, *Ageing Narratives over 210 Years (1810–2019)*, in: *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B* (2020) (DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbaa222).

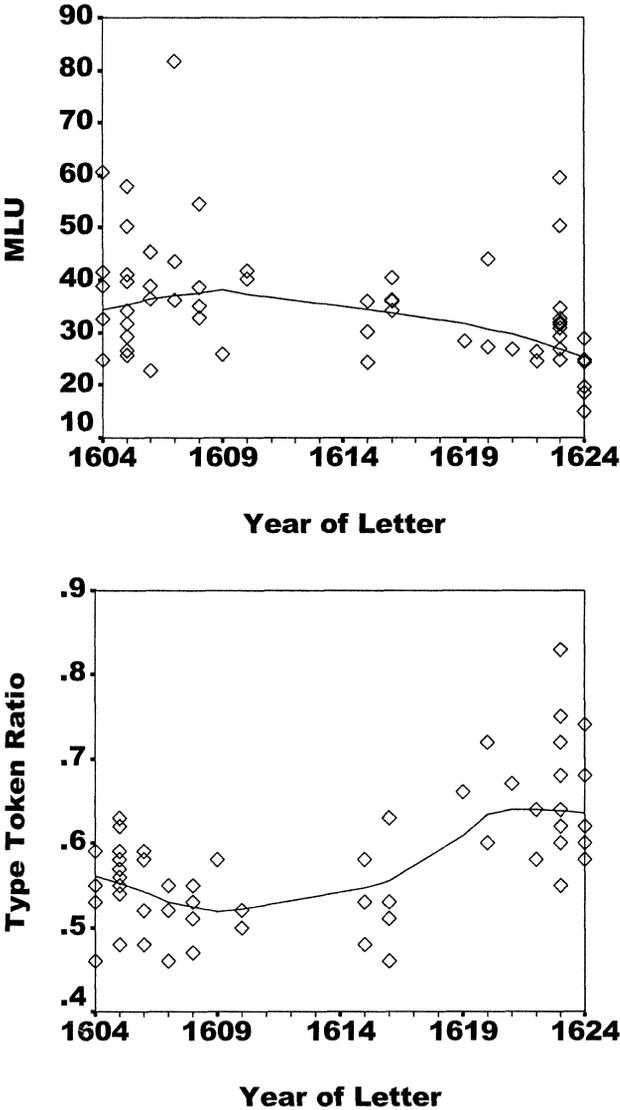


Fig. 1: Findings of a language-based analysis of fifty-seven letters written by King James VI/I (1566–1625); MLU = Mean length of sentences in words, indicating language complexity; Type Token Ratio = Index of words with different word roots indicating vocabulary variation. Source: Kristine Williams et al., Written Language Clues to Cognitive Changes of Aging. An Analysis of the Letters of King James VI/I, in: *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B* 58 (2003), pp. 42–44, at p. 43.

Finally, a special issue on “The Role of Historical Change for Adult Development and Aging” in the flagship journal of behavioural ageing, “Psychology and Aging”, published in 2019, provided a full scope of empirical work on how recent historical-cultural change has shaped a range of psychological and social variables important for ageing well such as cognitive functioning, control beliefs, loneliness, and friendship (for an overview of findings, see the guest editorial to the Special Issue).<sup>10</sup> Most of these cohort-flow based studies reported gains in various indicators of ageing well in more recent cohorts of older adults as compared to previous cohorts of similar chronological age. This body of historical and societal change-driven evidence therefore largely supports the impression of the ‘improvement of old age’ across historical time, except for the aspect of increased negative age stereotyping of older adults. The emerging paradox<sup>11</sup> may be explained by the “Modernisation Theory of Ageing”<sup>12</sup> that argues that increasing modernisation / industrialisation of societies correlates with an increasing loss of status of older adults. Some of the most significant reasons for such a status decline of older adults could be related to their decreasing capability to cope with technological innovations, combined with a general perception of older adults as being less competent to deal with modernisation. The devaluation of elderly people as being competitors for limited societal resources also plays an important role.

Against this – to a large extent – ambivalent picture of the unfolding of ageing, both individually and societally in modern times, the objective of this chapter is to start from three key longings of humankind that can be found across cultures since antiquity and that have neither lost their actuality nor their nature of being formidable scientific challenges right up to the present day: (1) the longing for eternal youth, (2) the longing for significantly increased longevity (if not immortality), and (3) the longing for wisdom to grow with age. Subsequently, these three fundamental longings are confronted with established evidence based on contemporary behavioural and social gerontology research with cross-linkages to biogerontology.

10 Johanna Drewelies/Oliver Huxhold/Denis Gerstorff, The Role of Historical Change for Adult Development and Aging. Towards a Theoretical Framework about the How and the Why, in: *Psychology and Aging* 34 (2019), pp. 1021–1039.

11 Becca R. Levy, Age-Stereotype Paradox. Opportunity for Social Change, in: *The Gerontologist* 57 (2017), pp. 118–126.

12 Cowgill/Holmes (Eds.), *Ageing and Modernization* (see note 1).

## 2 Three Key Longings of Humankind regarding Ageing throughout History. Eternal Youth, Immortality, and Wisdom

First, there is the idea of eternal youth that prompts the search for effective measures to combat ageing, which is regarded as being an undesirable aspect of the human condition.<sup>13</sup> The idea resonates across historical periods as can be observed in efforts that include all kinds of alchemic recommendations (e. g., drinking gold water),<sup>14</sup> searching for the fountain of youth and bathing in vitalising and rejuvenating waters dating back to the Hindu legend of Cyavana (ca. 700 BC). Alexander the Great's (356–323 BC) intensive, but ultimately unsuccessful, quest to find the "source of the living water"<sup>15</sup> also falls under this category. In the Middle Ages, the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon's (ca. 1214–1292) treatise "De retardatione accidentium senectutis" ("On the Retardation of the Effects of Old Age") gained much resonance as an attempt to explain that the rate of ageing can be retarded. Contemporary 'anti-ageing medicine' may be seen as the modern expression of the striving for eternal youth.<sup>16</sup> The climax of searching for rejuvenation in water can be seen in Ponce de León's (1460–1521) expeditions that were well-staffed by the Spanish crown. Although these enterprises resulted in the discovery of Florida in 1513, they unfortunately did not enable a definite localisation of the fountain of youth.<sup>17</sup> It appears that youth was valued above old age across cultures and societies and that, even in the modern context of 'greying societies', most older adults do not like to be referred to as 'old'. Interestingly, the majority of older

13 Georges Minois, *History of Old Age*, New York 2012; Pat Thane (Ed.), *A Long History of Old Age*, Los Angeles 2005; David G. Troyansky, *Ageing in World History*, New York 2016 (*Themes in World History*).

14 Philippe Charlier/Joël Poupon/Isabelle Huynh-Charlier/Jean-François Saliège/Dominique Favier/Christine Keyser/Bertrand Ludes, *A Gold Elixir of Youth in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century French Court*, in: *BMJ* 339 (2009), pp. 1402–1403; Michela Pereira, *Projecting Perfection. Remarks on the Origin of the "Alchemy of the Elixir"*, in: Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Ed.), *The Impact of Arabic Sciences in Europe and Asia*, Firenze 2016 (*Micrologus* 24), pp. 73–94.

15 Tommaso Tesei, *Survival and Christianization of the Gilgamesh Quest for Immortality in the Tale of Alexander and the Fountain of Life*, in: *Rivista degli Studi Orientali. Nuova Serie* 83 (2010), pp. 417–440, at p. 420.

16 Carole Haber, *Anti-Aging Medicine. The History. Life Extension and History. The Continual Search for the Fountain of Youth*, in: *The Journals of Gerontology. Series A* 59 (2004), pp. 515–522.

17 W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers. Gerontology Emerges as a Science*, New York 1995.

adults claim to feel about 20 % younger than their chronological age.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary research on subjective age and its premise that feeling younger is both good and desirable<sup>19</sup> has led to a debate in gerontology regarding whether this perspective reflects an ageistic attitude.<sup>20</sup> Given the apparent ambivalence related to eternal youth, one feels reminded of the Greek myth of Selene, the goddess of the moon, who asked Zeus to grant eternal youth to her lover, Endymion. Zeus granted her wish and put Endymion into eternal sleep. Every night, Selene visits the sleeping Endymion.<sup>21</sup>

A second and related idea prevalent throughout history, and still very much alive in contemporary gerontology, is the idea to greatly increase longevity, if not to achieve immortality.<sup>22</sup> Probably the most famous source on the concept of immortality is the “Gilgamesh Epic” (about 1800 BC, possibly much older), particularly its tablets IX, X, and XI. Similar to what happened to Alexander the Great or, much later, Ponce de León, the hero Gilgamesh already has the plant promising immortality in his hand, but then a serpent steals it, immediately loses its old skin, and then goes away forever, thus fulfilling the will of the divine.<sup>23</sup> According to Gruman, the hope for immortality survived until modern times through myths stating there are territories on earth where immortality is a reality.<sup>24</sup> Francis Bacon’s (1561–1626) famous fable on the “Nova Atlantis” (“New Atlantis”) (published in 1627, one year after his death) has been an important milestone for making the idea of immortality survive to contemporary

18 Martin Pinquart / Hans-Werner Wahl, Subjective Age from Childhood to Advanced Old Age. A Meta-Analysis, in: *Psychology and Aging* 36 (2021), pp. 394–406; David C. Rubin / Dorthe Berntsen: People over Forty Feel 20 % Younger than their Age. Subjective Age across the Lifespan, in: *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 13 (2006), pp. 776–780.

19 Felicia Alonso Debreczeni / Phoebe E. Bailey, A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Subjective Age and the Association with Cognition, Subjective Well-Being, and Depression, in: *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B. Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* (2020) (DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbaa069).

20 Tracey L. Gendron / Jennifer Inker / Ayn Welleford, “How Old Do You Feel?” The Difficulties and Ethics of Operationalizing Subjective Age, in: *The Gerontologist* 58 (2018), pp. 618–624.

21 Richard L. Gordon, Selene, in: *Der Neue Pauly (DNP)*, vol. 11, Stuttgart 2001, cc. 353–354.

22 Chris Gilleard, Renaissance Treatises on ‘Successful Ageing’, in: *Ageing and Society* 33,2 (2013), pp. 189–215; Chris Gilleard, Ageing and the Galenic Tradition. A Brief Overview, in: *Ageing and Society* 35,3 (2015), pp. 489–511.

23 Tesei, Survival and Christianization (see note 15), pp. 417–440.

24 Gerald J. Gruman, A History of Ideas about the Prolongation of Life. The Evolution of Pro-longevity Hypotheses to 1800, Philadelphia 1966 (*Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 56,9).

scientific enterprises.<sup>25</sup> Already in 1999, the president of the “American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine” announced that “immortality is within our grasp”.<sup>26</sup>

Thirdly, a further recurring perspective on human ageing is that wisdom comes with old age and that extraordinary life knowledge and expertise can only be found in older persons. A major echo of this perspective can be traced in Platon’s writings such as in his “Politeia”,<sup>27</sup> where the argument is presented that bodily decline can be compensated, and even optimised, by the accumulation of life experiences.<sup>28</sup> A similar way of thinking can be observed for the Middle Ages. As long as the office existed between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the doges of Venice were mostly very old in comparison to the average life expectancy of that time, not seldom above the age of 80 years. Simone de Beauvoir<sup>29</sup> interpreted this tradition as a strategy of the Venetian political system to limit the power of the holders of the highest office by installing frail older men who could not rule for too long. Moreover, this strategy of selection ensured a regular transition-making in the Venetian system of governance. On the other hand, it may also be interpreted as acknowledgement of the competence and skills related to advanced old age on the part of Venetian society and there is evidence supporting a rather positive view of ageing at the time. As Finlay resumed in his in-depth analysis of the Venetian gerontocracy:

“Stability and harmony were virtues to be placed before the uncertain attractions of novelty and contention. Those virtues, along with the qualities that were seen to typify the patrician character, found expression in the “myth of Venice”. In effect, the “myth” proclaimed what the political system promoted: it was wise for a patrician

25 Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers* (see note 17), pp. 5–6.

26 URL: <https://www.thepharmaletter.com/article/immortality-is-within-our-grasp-claims-medical-futurist-and-a4m-president/>; 7. 6. 2022.

27 Maria Nühlen-Graab, *Philosophische Grundlagen der Gerontologie*, Heidelberg-Wiesbaden 1990; Fabian Schulz, *Gerontokratie avant la lettre? Platon und Aristoteles über die Herrschaft der Alten*, in: Monika Schuol/Christian Wendt/Julia Wilker (Eds.), *Exempla imitanda*. Mit der Vergangenheit die Gegenwart bewältigen? Festschrift für Ernst Baltrusch zum 60. Geburtstag, Göttingen 2016, pp. 173–186.

28 Hartwin Brandt, *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*, München 2002 (Beck’s Archäologische Bibliothek); Tim G. Parkin, *Age and the Aged in Roman Society*, Oxford 1992.

29 Simone de Beauvoir, *La veillesse*, Paris 1970.

to be deferential, conventional, self-sacrificing, and anonymous. Venice's governors enjoyed a justified reputation for being temperate, prudent, and unimaginative".<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, biological decline may be regarded being a requirement for intellectual sharpness (Platon, *Symposium* 219 a). This view has been incorporated in modern lifespan conceptualizations, particularly in the work of Erik H. Erikson<sup>31</sup> on "ego-integrity", which he regards as only being possible when a number of psychosocial crises have been solved during previous life stages. Similarly, "Gerotranscendence Theory" argues for a new existential experience, which is possible only late in life and that builds on the bodily limitations and constraints connected with old age.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, according to Platon's "Nomoi" ("Laws"), only old age allows for certain difficult decisions; for instance, only old age qualifies one to pass a judgment regarding the death penalty. The Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero,<sup>33</sup> author of one of the most famous treatises on old age ever written ("*Cato maior de senectute*", 44 BC) made the following statement on wisdom in his "*Tusculanae Disputationes*" ("*Tusculan Disputations*", 45 BC): "For there is assuredly nothing dearer to a man than wisdom, and though age takes away all else, it undoubtedly brings us that".<sup>34</sup> And in Cicero's "*De Officiis*" ("*On Duties*", 44 BC) it says: "The old ... should have their physical labours reduced; their mental activities should be actually increased. They should endeavor too, by means of their counsel and practical wisdom to be of as much service as possible to their friends and to the young, and above all to the state".<sup>35</sup> Could it thus be that old age's obvious disadvantages in terms of physical and mental decline are irrelevant given the wisdom-related potentials that unfold during that life stage? As Cicero also stated in his "*De Senectute*", becoming slower could even be a requirement for deep thinking and for

30 Robert Finlay, *The Venetian Republic as a Gerontocracy. Age and Politics in the Renaissance*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1978), pp. 157–178, at p. 178.

31 Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, New York 1950.

32 Lars Tornstam, *Gerotranscendence. A Developmental Theory of Positive Aging*, New York 2005.

33 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cato maior de senectute*, in: *M. Tulli Ciceronis De re publica. De legibus. Cato maior de senectute. Laelius de amicitia*, ed. by Jonathan G. F. Powell, Oxford 2006 (*Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoni-ensis*), pp. 267–315.

34 Quoted from Karen Cockayn, *Experiencing Aging in Ancient Rome*, London 2003 (*Routledge Classical Monographs*), p. 92.

35 Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 96.

juxtaposing different points of view, and should thus not be regarded as a weakness but rather a strength of old age.<sup>36</sup>

### 3 Eternal Youth, Immortality, and Wisdom in the Light of Contemporary Gerontology's Evidence

#### 3.1 Longing for Eternal Youth in the Light of Contemporary Gerontology's Evidence

Although the prospect of eternal youth continues to remain unrealistic, it still informs and drives gerontology and its research programmes as well as several enduring societal questions. We address three major variations of contemporary gerontology that can shed new light on the 'old' hope for eternal youth: (1) Historical/cohort-related improvements in cognitive ageing, (2) Historical/cohort-related improvements in healthy ageing, and (3) interventions to slow ageing.

##### 3.1.1 Historical/Cohort-Related Improvements in Cognitive Ageing

Old age as we witnessed it during the past 70 years is increasingly becoming 'younger' at various levels, particularly in terms of cognitive functionality. A major empirical study was conducted by the cognitive ageing researcher Klaus W. Schaie in the "Seattle Longitudinal Study". This study commenced in 1956 and included 500 randomly selected participants who ranged in age from their early 20s to their late 60s.<sup>37</sup> The ground-breaking idea by Schaie, in conjunction with an early seminal conceptual article, was to not only re-assess the original sample on later measurement occasions as is typical in longitudinal research, but to also add a new group of randomly selected people of the same age range every seven years.<sup>38</sup> To date, over 6 000 people have participated in this study at some time point, thereby enabling cohort-sequential analyses

36 Thorsten Burkard, *Der alte Mann und die Macht. Zum Lob des Alters in Ciceros 'Cato major' und seinen kulturellen und sozialen Voraussetzungen*, in: Angelika C. Messner/Andreas Bihrer/Harm-Peer Zimmermann (Eds.), *Alter und Selbstbeschränkung. Beiträge aus der Historischen Anthropologie*, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2017 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Historische Anthropologie e. V. 14), pp. 201–234.

37 Klaus Warner Schaie, *Developmental Influences on Adult Intelligence. The Seattle Longitudinal Study*, New York 2013.

38 Id., *A General Model for the Study of Development Problems*, in: *Psychological Bulletin* 64 (1965), pp. 92–107.

and multiple comparisons of later-born and same-age cohorts of adults with earlier-born cohorts. The reasoning behind has been that different birth years / cohorts and early lifespan socialisation are significantly associated with factors such as the amount and quality of education, health literacy, and quality of medical treatment. In general, later-born cohorts are expected to have benefitted from higher levels of education, better health literacy, and improved medical treatment. Gender issues also deserve attention. For example, older women from earlier-born cohorts received less education compared with men of the same cohort, which affected how their cognitive abilities developed over the course of adulthood. Additionally, older women from later-born cohorts are more likely to have had a professional career or to have spent long periods in the labour force, which can be seen as a cognitive training that previous cohorts of women did not experience.<sup>39</sup>

Schaie reported substantial positive developments from earlier to later cohorts for crystallised abilities (verbal meaning) and fluid abilities (spatial orientation and inductive reasoning).<sup>40</sup> Other studies also indicate that today's 75-year-olds are cognitively much fitter than the 75-year-olds of 20 years ago.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note that Christensen and his colleagues even found increased cognitive functioning in large samples of Danish adults aged 93 and 95 years that were only ten years apart in their birth years (1905 vs. 1915).<sup>42</sup>

### 3.1.2 Historical / Cohort-Related Improvements in Healthy Ageing

Alvar Svanborg was a forerunner in this area with his study in Finland that started in the 1970s.<sup>43</sup> What Svanborg and his colleagues showed for the first time was cohort-

39 Gizem Hülür/Jelena Sophie Siebert/Hans-Werner Wahl, The Role of Perceived Work Environment and Work Activities in Midlife Cognitive Change, in: *Developmental Psychology* 56 (2020), pp. 2345–2357.

40 Schaie, *Developmental Influences* (see note 37).

41 Denis Gerstorff/Gizem Hülür/Johanna Drewelies/Sherry L. Willis/Klaus Warner Schaie/Nilam Ram, Adult Development and Aging in Historical Context, in: *American Psychologist* 75 (2020), pp. 525–539.

42 Kaare Christensen/Mikael Thinggaard/Anna Oksuzyan/Troels Steenstrup/Karen Andersen-Ranberg/Bernard Jeune/Matt McGue/James W. Vaupel, Physical and Cognitive Functioning of People Older than 90 Years. A Comparison of two Danish Cohorts Born 10 Years Apart, in: *The Lancet* 382 (2013), pp. 1507–1513.

43 Alvar Svanborg/Stig Berg/Dan Mellström/Lars-Göran Nilsson/Göran Persson, Possibilities of Preserving Physical and Mental Fitness and Autonomy in Old Age, in: Heinz Häfner/Günther

comparative data that revealed a decrease in the number of occurrences of strokes in later born cohorts as well as an overall better physical condition. Later on, the portfolio of such positive cohort-related trends found enrichment based on a range of health indicators. For example, cohort-driven research now shows that rates of dementia<sup>44</sup> as well as heart disease and stroke<sup>45</sup> have declined over the last decades. There are also data suggesting that functional health, which is defined as the ability to function well in everyday life and to conduct daily activities successfully and independently, has improved particularly among those who are in “young-old age” category.<sup>46</sup> There are also findings indicating that functional health increases in later born cohorts can be observed in very old adults.<sup>47</sup>

At the demographic and epidemiological level, the relative portion of healthy life expectancy (i. e., years of life characterised by high levels of daily functioning and independence) of total life expectancy has been shown to increase from earlier to later cohorts of older adults.<sup>48</sup> However, the data shows that the proportion of unhealthy older adults of the total cohort enjoying an increase in life expectancy is also growing.<sup>49</sup> A major reason for this can certainly be attributed to the growing proportion of very old individuals, a significant number of whom have survived a “terminal” illness earlier in their lives, which they would no doubt have died from around 30 years ago. Such survivorship of “terminal” illness early in the lifespan appears to come with increased vulnerability late in life.<sup>50</sup>

Moschel/Norman Sartorius (Eds.), *Mental Health in the Elderly*, Berlin-Heidelberg 1986, pp. 195–202.

44 Kenneth M. Langa, *Is the Risk of Alzheimer’s Disease and Dementia Declining?*, in: *Alzheimers Research and Therapy* 7 (2015), pp. 34–38.

45 Jung Ki Kim/Jennifer A. Ailshire/Eileen M. Crimmins, *Twenty-Year Trends in Cardiovascular Risk among Men and Women in the United States*, in: *Aging Clin Exp Res* 31 (2019), pp. 135–143.

46 Anna Zajacova/Jennifer Karas Montez, *Explaining the Increasing Disability Prevalence among Mid-Life US Adults, 2002 to 2016*, in: *Social Science & Medicine* 211 (2018), pp. 1–8.

47 Christensen et al., *Physical and Cognitive Functioning* (see note 42).

48 Sarah Harper, *Economic and Social Implications of Aging Societies*, in: *Science* 346 (2014), pp. 587–591.

49 Joshua A. Salomon/Haidong Wang/Michael K. Freeman/Theo Vos/Abraham D. Flaxman/Alan D. Lopez/Christopher J. L. Murray, *Healthy Life Expectancy for 187 Countries, 1990–2010. A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden Disease Study 2010*, in: *The Lancet* 380 (2012), pp. 2144–2162; Clemens Tesch-Römer/Hans-Werner Wahl, *Successful Aging and Aging with Care Needs. Arguments for a Comprehensive Concept of Successful Aging*, in: *Journal of Gerontology. Social Sciences* 72 (2017), pp. 310–318.

50 Eileen M. Crimmins/Yuan S. Zhang, *Aging Populations, Mortality, and Life Expectancy*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 45 (2019), pp. 69–89.

### 3.1.3 Interventions to Slow Ageing

Slowing the course of ageing is the primary ambition of all current gero-interventions that attempt to shape the ‘normal’ flow of ageing. A major assumption of all such gero-interventions is that there is plasticity in ageing organisms that needs unfolding by means of systematic external input ranging from direct gene and cell manipulations to intensive behavioural training.<sup>51</sup> Another fundamental idea is that ageing is a process taking place on multiple levels, indicating that there is not just one single pathway for slowing it, but possibly many. One such mechanism of ageing, for example, is the accumulation of cell damage due to free radical release that increases the rate of the ageing process. It has been proposed that measures that are able to reduce the release of free radicals could help to slow ageing at the biological level. From an evolutionary viewpoint, the disposable “Soma Theory of Ageing” argues that the investment in biological repair mechanisms decreases after the end of the reproductive phase of an organism, leading to ageing.<sup>52</sup> In other words, evolutionary dynamics seems to value investments and adaptive gene selectivity more highly during the reproductive phase than in the post-reproductive part of the lifespan. On the other hand, manipulating such dynamics as part of bio-cultural co-evolution may be possible.

The methods that are currently available, and have to some extent been tested, have resulted in enthusiasm on the part of some bio-gerontologists,<sup>53</sup> and scepticism on the part of others.<sup>54</sup> For example, there is emerging evidence that the drug Metformin, which was originally used to treat diabetes, may help to prevent cellular senescence.<sup>55</sup> There is also hope and some evidence that stem cell therapy might be able to secure prolonged youthfulness.<sup>56</sup> The use of growth hormones has been considered and tested as a means to

51 Diehl/Wahl, *The Psychology of Later Life* (see note 2); Ferraro/Carr (Eds.), *Handbook of Aging* (see note 2).

52 Thomas B. L. Kirkwood, *Evolution of Ageing*, in: *Nature* 270 (1970), pp. 301–304.

53 David A. Sinclair/Matthew D. LaPlante, *Lifespan. Why We Age – and Why We Don’t Have*, New York 2019.

54 Suresh I. S. Rattan, *Naive Extrapolations, Overhyped Claims and Empty Promises in Ageing Research and Interventions Need Avoidance*, in: *Biogerontology* 21 (2019), pp. 415–421.

55 Nir Barzilai/Jill P. Crandall/Stephen B. Kritchevsky/Mark A. Espeland, *Metformin as a Tool to Target Aging*, in: *Cell Metabolism* 23 (2016), pp. 1060–1065.

56 Abu Shufian Ishtiaq Ahmed/Matilda H.-C. Sheng/Samiksha Wasnik/David J. Baylink/Kin-Hing William Lau, *Effect of Aging on Stem Cells*, in: *World J Exp Med.* 7 (2017), pp. 1–10.

slow ageing, but adverse side effects were also found in the studies performed.<sup>57</sup> Finally, treatment with antioxidants such as vitamins A, C, and E could result in an age-slowng effect, although the high doses needed to see such effects might go along with adverse side effects such as a decrease of bone density.<sup>58</sup>

At the behavioural level, training-oriented trials aimed at enhancing cognitive and physical function have resulted in a substantial body of promising evidence.<sup>59</sup> The key learnings from this data portfolio can be summarised under the aspects outlined here. First, in one of the largest cognitive training projects ever, the “Advanced Cognitive Training for Independent and Vital Elderly (ACTIVE)” study with older adults aged between 65 and 94 years and based on rigorous randomised control study methodology,<sup>60</sup> the training gain observed in the 2-year follow-up interval after training completion was of a magnitude that corresponds with the natural decline in cognitive functioning across a 7 to 14 year period, depending on the cognitive outcome targeted. To put this in another way, the cognitive training resulted in those being trained becoming 7 to 14 years ‘younger’. Importantly, at least some of the training gain along with better day-to-day functioning could still be observed in the 10-year follow-up compared to the control group.<sup>61</sup> Second, when regarding limitations, it can be observed that intensive training of only one aspect of cognitive functioning (such as, for example, focused memory) also results in a gain over rather long periods of time of up to several years, but the gain in one aspect does not necessarily generalise to other functions. In other words, the participants of such measures become ‘younger’ in one cognitive function, but not automatically in

57 Marc R. Blackman et al., Growth Hormone and Sex Steroid Administration in Healthy Aged Women and Men. A Randomized Controlled Trial, in: *JAMA. Journal of the American Medical Association* 288 (2002), pp. 2282–2292.

58 Goran Bjelakovic/Christian Gluud, Surviving Antioxidant Supplements, in: *JNCI. Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 99 (2007), pp. 742–743.

59 Diehl/Wahl, *The Psychology of Later Life* (see note 2); Ferraro/Carr (Eds.), *Handbook of Aging* (see note 2).

60 Karlene Ball/Daniel B. Berch/Karin F. Helmers/Jared B. Jobe/Mary D. Leveck/Michael Marsiske/John N. Morris/George W. Rebok/David M. Smith/Sharon L. Tennstedt/Frederick W. Unverzagt/Sherry L. Willis, Effects of Cognitive Training Interventions with Older Adults. A Randomized Controlled Trial, in: *JAMA. Journal of the American Medical Association* 288 (2002), pp. 2271–2281.

61 George W. Rebok/Karlene Ball/Lin T. Guey/Richard N. Jones/Hae-Young Kim/Jonathan W. King/Michael Marsiske/John N. Morris/Sharon L. Tennstedt/Frederick W. Unverzagt/Sherry L. Willis, Ten-Year Effects of the ACTIVE Cognitive Training Trial on Cognition and Everyday Functioning in Older Adults, in: *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 62 (2014), pp. 16–24.

another. Third, it must be pointed out that although high-dose training and what has been labelled as “testing-the-cognitive-limits” is generally successful – and in some rare older adults indeed does produce large gain effects not too far from a mnemonist – it does not appear to be possible to restore the performance of younger years, even after a year-long intensive training exposure.<sup>62</sup>

From the above it is clear that the prospect of eternal youth continues to drive contemporary behavioural and social ageing research as well as biogerontology. In a sense, ageing research still is in the middle of an ongoing process to fully understand the potentials and limits of plasticity in the ageing process and how such plasticity is related to historical, societal, scientific, and cultural change. That said, one may argue that the ageing process has never in history been under such dramatic transition as has been seen in the last 100 years.

### 3.2 The Longing for Greatly Increased Longevity (If Not Immortality) in the Light of Contemporary Gerontology’s Evidence

To achieve symbolic immortality seems not to be a problem for humankind. In lifespan theory and gerontology, the concept of generativity introduced by Erik H. Erikson in his theory of psychosocial development describes “the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation”<sup>63</sup> and “everything that is generated from generation to generation: children, products, ideas, and works of art”<sup>64</sup>. However, such symbolic ‘eternal life’ seems to not be fully convincing for humankind or for gerontological research.

Considering unlimited lifespans or significant increases of life expectancy, at least the latter appears ever more achievable. In particular, “hydra” is an animal system that seems in a sense to live forever.<sup>65</sup> Human life expectancy has been significantly and rather consistently increasing since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a marked jump after

62 Paul B. Baltes / Ulman Lindenberger / Ursula M. Staudinger, *Life-Span Theory* (see note 5), pp. 569–664; Diehl / Wahl, *The Psychology of Later Life* (see note 2); Ferraro / Carr (Eds.), *Handbook of Aging* (see note 2).

63 Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, New York 1963, p. 276.

64 Richard I. Evans, *Dialogue with Erik Erikson*, New York 1967 (*Dialogues with Notable Contributors to Personality Theory* 3), p. 51.

65 Ralf Schaible / Alexander Scheuerlein / Maciej J. Dańko / Jutta Gampe / Daniel E. Martínez / James W. Vaupel, Constant Mortality and Fertility over Age in *Hydra*, in: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112 (2015), pp. 15701–15706.

World War II. When we consider the fact that the life expectancy at birth has nearly doubled from about 43 years at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 83 years for women and 79 years for men in Germany in the present day,<sup>66</sup> the prospect that this dynamic may even triple in the next 100 years, given the current scientific medical progress, no longer seems illusory. Other countries such as South Korea have seen a similar increase in life expectancy (and decrease in reproduction rate) in half the time than in European countries. Certainly, the rate at which life expectancy increases varies across the different regions of the globe, but the trend towards an increase is consistent.<sup>67</sup> For example, life expectancy in one of the poorest countries both in Africa and in the world, Burkina Faso, has increased from 34.4 years in 1960 to 61.2 years in 2018.<sup>68</sup>

However, simply waiting for what is happening in naturally evolving life expectancy due to medical progress and socio-economic growth does not seem to fit with the scientific ambitions of gerontology, particularly of biogerontology. In the following section, we will explore (1) contemporary biogerontological findings on increasing the human lifespan and (2) contemporary behavioural and social gerontology insights related to longevity respectively to mortality in somewhat more detail.

### 3.2.1 Contemporary Biogerontological Findings on Increasing the Human Lifespan

The now classic and most established area here is the role played by caloric restriction for living longer lives. The repeatedly reported major finding is that a reduction of calorie availability by about 20–50 % (not to the point of undergoing undernutrition) can extend the maximum lifespan in short-lived species such as rodents by up to about 50 %. A key mechanism for this ‘success’ in the animal model discussed is that caloric restriction is also linked to general health improvement and a decrease in age-related diseases.<sup>69</sup> However,

66 German Federal Statistical Office/Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019 (URL: [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressekonferenzen/2019/Bevoelkerung/pressebroschuere-bevoelkerung.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressekonferenzen/2019/Bevoelkerung/pressebroschuere-bevoelkerung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile); 7. 6. 2022).

67 Vasilis Kontis/James E. Bennett/Colin D. Mathers/Guangquan Li/Kyle Foreman, Future Life Expectancy in 35 Industrialised Countries. Projections with a Bayesian Model Ensemble, in: *The Lancet* 389 (2017), pp. 1323–1335; Joshua A. Salomon et al., Healthy Life Expectancy for 187 countries (see note 49), pp. 2144–2162.

68 URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?end=2018&locations=BF&start=1960>; 7. 6. 2022.

69 Fabien Pifferi/Jérémy Terrien/Julia Marchal et al., Caloric Restriction Increases Lifespan but Affects Brain Integrity in Grey Mouse Lemur Primates, in: *Communications Biology* 1 (2018), p. 30 (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-018-0024-8>).

although there is some evidence that the effect can also be found in long-lived species such as rhesus monkeys, a transfer of the concept to humans seems challenging especially in light of the fact that research suggests that caloric restriction progressively loses its impact for extending lifespan in more complex organisms.<sup>70</sup> However, the most recent findings based on a rat model are promising and may stimulate new trials also involving human participants.<sup>71</sup> Indirect evidence supporting the role of caloric restriction also at the human level comes from the Japanese island of Okinawa, where calories intake of indigenous islanders is by eating tradition significantly lower than to other largely comparable Japanese regions. This difference seems to go along with an increase in life expectancy and a decrease in major age-related diseases; Okinawans who move away from the island and presumably lost their protective lifestyle showed mortality rates higher than those Okinawans who remain on the island.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, genetic evidence supports the assumption that only about 20 % of the variation in longevity in humans can be explained by genetic differences.<sup>73</sup> Hence, the greater number of influences relevant for longevity are derived from environmental and lifestyle factors, e. g., avoiding risk behaviour such as smoking, low levels of physical activity and high levels of sedentary behaviour, obesity, and alcohol consumption. All these factors are, at least in principle, subject to human control. Barbi and her colleagues reported that established quantitative mortality prediction models (the “Gompertz Mathematical Model”, in particular) no longer work in this extreme of the human lifespan and that they are no longer more effective than random prognoses of death.<sup>74</sup> This could be interpreted as an indication that – starting from an extreme time window of the human lifespan – death becomes totally unpredictable and, in a sense, may happen or not in principle terms.

70 Arthur V. Everitt / David G. LeCouteur, Life Extension by Calorie Restriction in Humans, in: *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1114 (2007), pp. 428–433.

71 Shuai Ma et al., Caloric Restriction Reprograms the Single-Cell Transcriptional Landscape of *Rattus Norvegicus* Aging, in: *Cell* 180 (2020), pp. 984–1001.

72 Leonie K. Heilbronn / Eric Ravussin, Caloric Restriction and Aging. Review of the Literature and Implications for Studies in Humans, in: *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 78 (2003), pp. 361–369.

73 James W. Vaupel et al., Biodemographic Trajectories of Longevity, in: *Science* 280 (1998), pp. 855–860.

74 Elisabetta Barbi / Francesco Lagona / Marco Marsili / James W. Vaupel / Kenneth W. Wachter, The Plateau of Human Mortality. Demography of Longevity Pioneers. A Study of Centenarians in Italy Suggests that Human Mortality is Approximately Constant in Extreme Old Age, in: *Science* 360 (2018), pp. 1459–1461.

### 3.2.2 Contemporary Behavioural and Social Gerontology Insights Related to Longevity and Mortality

It seems trivial to argue that genetic make-up and environmental factors are interacting as we age and in how long we live. The interaction is nevertheless poorly understood and most research in the area is not able to offer a balanced picture in terms of considering genetic *and* environmental data as well as the best aspects in terms of research design such as the twin study format and the more sophisticated ways to analyse genetic-behaviour interactions.<sup>75</sup> For example, personality factors as shown in having a high score for neuroticism have a strong genetic basis, but certainly also lead to risky behaviours such as smoking or provoke more stressful events that have a negative impact on longevity. Against this complexity, it seems clear in terms of accumulated evidence in the behavioural and social sciences that external factors play a significant role in longevity, although the interlinkage with genetic factors is never lost.

A primary observation is that differences in longevity have been found to depend on socio-economic factors throughout the course of history. At present, and at the more macro-level, for instance, life expectancy in the U. S. varies with approximately 7 years between states – with West Virginians having an life expectancy of 74.8 years while those in Hawaii generally live to an age of 82.3 years.<sup>76</sup> At the micro-level, women from a poor socio-economic background in Germany have a life expectancy that is 8 years lower compared to that of women from backgrounds with good to excellent socio-economic conditions.<sup>77</sup> Socio-economic differences, such as differences in levels of education, have consistently been found to be a major predictor of mortality across the full lifespan in that higher socio-economic status (SES) is aligned with better health and functional ability, as well as lower incidences of chronic diseases and all-cause mortality. For example, in their study covering deaths in the UK, Lewer and his colleagues found that about 36 % of premature deaths were attributable to SES inequality.<sup>78</sup> The main causes of death in which SES inequality was

75 Rocio Fernández-Ballesteros/Macarena Sánchez-Izquierdo, Are Psycho-Behavioral Factors Accounting for Longevity?, in: *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), p. 2516.

76 URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_U.S.\\_states\\_and\\_territories\\_by\\_life\\_expectancy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_life_expectancy); 7. 6. 2022.

77 Robert-Koch-Institute, Zahlen und Trends aus der Gesundheitsberichterstattung des Bundes (GBE Kompakt, 5/2010) (URL: [https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Gesundheitsmonitoring/Gesundheitsberichterstattung/GBEDownloadsK/2010\\_5\\_Armut.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Gesundheitsmonitoring/Gesundheitsberichterstattung/GBEDownloadsK/2010_5_Armut.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)); 7. 6. 2022).

78 Dan Lewer/Wikum Jayatunga/Robert W. Aldridge/Chantal Edge/Michael Marmot/Alistair Story/Andrew Hayward, Premature Mortality Attributable to Socioeconomic Inequality

implicated included tuberculosis, opioid use, infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), psychoactive drug use, viral hepatitis, and obesity, each with more than two-thirds of cases being attributable to SES inequality – a frightening magnitude.

Looking back in history, the Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo<sup>79</sup> made it to 98 years of age and lived through nearly the entire 12<sup>th</sup> century and still 5 years more (1107–1205), which is not that different from the longest lifespan ever confirmed, namely that of Jeanne Calment, who passed away in 1997 at the age of 122.4 years.<sup>80</sup> That is, Dandolo exceeded the estimated average life expectancy at birth at the time in Italy of approximately 30 years by nearly 70 years, while Calment's age at death exceeded the life expectancy of around 40 years for her 1875 birth cohort in France with over 80 years. Carrieri and Serraino, in their state-of-the-art demographic analysis of ancient data, found that between 1200–1599 and 1600–1900, the median age of the popes when starting their pontificate increased from 60.0 to 65.5 years, while the median duration of their pontificate increased from 6.5 to 11.0 years, respectively.<sup>81</sup> The median age at death for the popes increased, on average, from 66 to 77 years in the study period between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup> Borscheid showed that the life expectancy of Hessian priests during the time of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was rather high, with about 30 % reaching an age of over 60 years, roughly 21 % an age of about 70 years, and 9 % even living to the age of 80 years. This was likely due to higher SES in terms of better nutrition, living arrangements, and a low levels of manual labour.<sup>83</sup> As can be seen in figure 2, life expectancy at the age of 25 years, disregarding all the methodological problems that come with such an analysis, roughly varied between 25 and 34 years in the three selected monasteries between 1395 and 1430, then declined considerably before recovering again, albeit to a lower level than

in England between 2003 and 2018. An Observational Study, in: *The Lancet Public Health*. Open Access (2019), pp. 33–41.

79 Thomas F. Madden, *Enrico Dandolo and the Rise of Venice*, Baltimore 2007.

80 Jean-Marie Robine/Michel Allard/François R. Herrmann/Bernard Jeune, *The Real Facts Supporting Jeanne Calment as the Oldest Ever Human*, in: *Journal of Gerontology. Medical Sciences* 74 (2019), pp. 13–20.

81 Maria Patrizia Carrieri/Diego Serraino, *Longevity of Popes and Artists Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, in: *International Journal of Epidemiology* 34 (2005), pp. 1435–1436.

82 W. Andrew Achenbaum, *(When) Did the Papacy Become a Gerontocracy?* in: Klaus Warner Schaie/id. (Eds.), *Societal Impact on Aging. Historical Perspectives*, New York 1993, pp. 204–231.

83 Peter Borscheid, *Geschichte des Alters. Vom Spätmittelalter zum 18. Jahrhundert*, München 1989.

80 years prior (see fig. 2).<sup>84</sup> The now famous German ‘longevity expert’ and reviver of the historical approach of *Makrobiotik*, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762–1836), gave clear advice in his 1797 book “Die Kunst das menschliche Leben zu verlängern” (“The Art of Prolonging Human Life”), which cumulated in his somewhat sanctimonious recommendation of “Die goldene Mittelstraße in allen Stücken” (free translation: “The Golden Middle Path in All Involvements”).<sup>85</sup>

In addition, at the psychological level, major predictors of longevity that are supported by robust empirical evidence include higher intelligence, higher satisfaction with life, better subjective health, and more positive attitudes toward own ageing.<sup>86</sup> Data now available and spanning about 80 years of observed lifetime indicate that differences in intelligence even at the age of 11 years are able to predict differences in late-life mortality.<sup>87</sup> Regarding personality, higher conscientiousness has been identified as a key factor able to predict lowered all-cause mortality.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, higher levels of positive affect and life satisfaction correlate with a decrease in mortality.<sup>89</sup> Finally, convergent longitudinal evidence shows that negative self-stereotyping and views on ageing are associated with shortened longevity when controlling for other factors important for longevity such as sex, education, and health status.<sup>90</sup> Although there is no room in this chapter also to go into the details of how such linkages might be explained (these range from risky

84 John Hatcher/Alan J. Piper/David Stone, Monastic Mortality. Durham Priory. 1395–1529, in: *Economic History Review* 59 (2006), pp. 667–687, at p. 674.

85 Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, *Makrobiotik oder die Kunst, das menschliche Leben zu verlängern* (1796/1798), Berlin-Boston <sup>8</sup>2017.

86 Rocío Fernández-Ballesteros/Macarena Sánchez-Izquierdo, Are Psycho-Behavioral Factors Accounting for Longevity?, in: *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), p. 2516.

87 Ian J. Deary/Martha C. Whiteman/John M. Starr/Lawrence J. Whalley/Helen C. Fox, The Impact of Childhood Intelligence on Later Life. Following up the Scottish Mental Surveys of 1932 and 1947, in: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86 (2004), pp. 130–147.

88 Leslie R. Martin/Howard S. Friedman/Joseph E. Schwartz, Personality and Mortality Risk across the Life Span. The Importance of Conscientiousness as a Biopsychosocial Attribute, in: *Health Psychology* 26 (2007), pp. 428–438.

89 Natalia Martín-María/Marta Miret/Francisco Félix Caballero/Laura Alejandra Rico-Uribe/Andrew Steptoe/Somnath Chatterji/José Luis Ayuso-Mateos, The Impact of Subjective Well-Being on Mortality. A Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies in the General Population, in: *Psychosomatic Medicine* 79 (2017), pp. 565–575.

90 Gerben J. Westerhof/Martina Mische/Allyson F. Brothers/Anne E. Barrett/Manfred Diehl/Joann M. Montepare/Hans-Werner Wahl/Susanne Wurm, The Influence of Subjective Aging on Health and Longevity. A Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Data, in: *Psychology and Aging* 29 (2014), pp. 793–802.

health behaviour to adverse biological, physiological, inflammatory, and immunological processes),<sup>91</sup> it now seems clear that mortality is also driven by behavioural factors; in some studies, they have even been found to operate in the same effect size magnitude as other well-established risk factors such as smoking.<sup>92</sup>

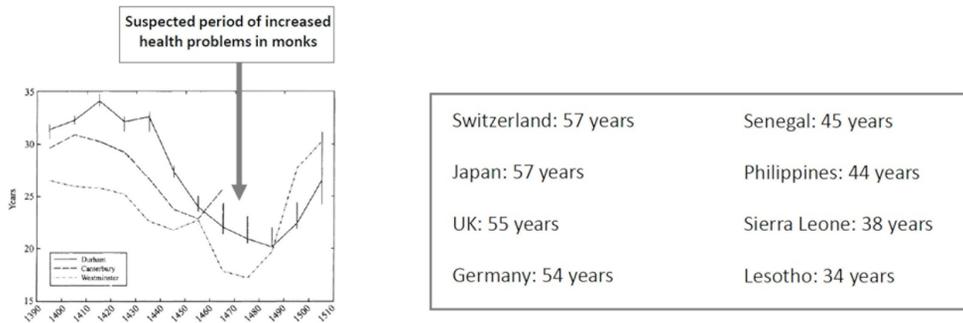


Fig. 2: Life expectancy at the age of 25 years in three British monasteries from 1395–1529 (left) and contrast with life expectancy at the age of 25 in various countries in 2018 (right). Sources: John Hatcher/Alan J. Piper/David Stone, *Monastic Mortality. Durham Priory. 1395–1529*, in: *Economic History Review* 59 (2006), pp. 667–687, at p. 674; URL: [https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/your-life-expectancy-by-age-male](https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/your-life-expectancy-by-age-male;); 7.6.2022.

### 3.3 Longing for Wisdom in Old Age in the Light of Contemporary Gerontology's Evidence

To address this topic in the light of contemporary behavioural and social gerontology, we (1) consider overall trends in cognitive ageing research, followed by (2) the description of existing empirical wisdom and ageing research.

91 Becca R. Levy, *Stereotype Embodiment. A Psychosocial Approach to Aging*, in: *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18 (2009), pp. 332–336.

92 Becca R. Levy/Martin D. Slade/Stanişlav V. Kasl, *Longitudinal Benefit of Positive Self-Perceptions of Aging on Functional Health*, in: *The Journals of Gerontology Series B. Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 57:5 (2002), pp. 409–417.

### 3.3.1 Overall Trends in Cognitive Ageing Research

Since its inception, cognitive ageing research oscillates between a deficit model of ageing versus, in a broad sense, a wisdom-oriented model. The deficit model has for decades been driven by the fundamental idea that ageing goes hand in hand with a continuous age-related slowing of the brain's information processing capacity.<sup>93</sup> In its strongest variant, the "Slowing Hypothesis of Ageing" argues that age-related decline in information processing speed is to a large extent the cause of the overall cognitive decline seen in processes such as working and episodic memory, inductive reasoning, and problem-solving deficits. On average and particularly in the natural sciences, great inventors and Nobel prize winners made their cutting-edge interventions / scientific discoveries before the age of 40, although a wide age distribution from 19 to well beyond 70 years of age can be observed. Also of interest in terms of 'age improvement' is the finding that the mean age of such great achievements increased by about 6 years from the period before 1935 to the period after 1965.<sup>94</sup>

Additional support for the ageing and wisdom model comes at least indirectly from the observation that many political leaders throughout history have been rather old, which is a trend that continues to the present day.<sup>95</sup> As Förstl shows, no significant increase in average age can be observed across the recent decades as the mean age of political leaders has generally been high and continues to be, with the current (2022) 'championship' being led by Queen Elizabeth II (passed away in 2022 at the age of 96 years), the Emir of Kuwait Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah (passed away in 2020 at the age of 91 years), and the first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party Raul Castro (resigned at the age of 90 years in 2021).<sup>96</sup> As also noted by Förstl, though solely based on anecdotal evidence, the estimated Body Mass Index (BMI), an established risk factor

93 David Madden/Philip A. Allen, History of Cognitive Slowing Theory and Research, in: Nancy A. Pachana (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Geropsychology*, 3 vols., New York 2017, vol. 2, pp. 1086–1084; Timothy A. Salthouse, The Processing-Speed Theory of Adult Age Differences in Cognition, in: *Psychological Review* 103 (1996), pp. 403–428.

94 Benjamin F. Jones, Age and Great Invention, in: *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 92 (2010), pp. 1–14; Dean Keith Simonton, Age and Outstanding Achievement. What Do We Know after a Century of Research?, in: *Psychological Bulletin* 104 (1998), pp. 251–267.

95 Manuel Eisner, Killing Kings. Patterns of Regicide in Europe. AD 600–1800, in: *The British Journal of Criminology* 51 (2011), pp. 556–577.

96 Hans Förstl, Aging Heads of State. The Politics of Dementia and Geriatric Cognitive Disorders, in: *Dementia and Geriatric Cognitive Disorders* 49 (2020), pp. 121–128.

for late life illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and mortality,<sup>97</sup> has been far over what currently is considered as a ‘normal’ BMI (18–24) in a number of outstanding political leaders, namely Henry VIII, King of England (1491–1547, BMI: 39.6), Augustus II, the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (1670–1733; BMI: 35.5), Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany (1815–1898; BMI: 40.7), William H. Taft, President of the United States (1857–1930; BMI: 42.3), and Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1874–1965; BMI: 38.6). Less publicly considered, but meanwhile an established finding in cognitive ageing research, is also that what has been labeled as crystallised / pragmatic intelligence (see also above) does not decrease in old age as long as a minimum of overall information processing capacity is available.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.3.2 Empirical Wisdom-Related Research: The Berlin Wisdom Model

Since the 1990s, wisdom in a narrow and philosophical sense also became the target of empirical ageing research. One model that has received a great deal of attention in the psychological literature is the wisdom “Berlin Wisdom Model” developed by Paul B. Baltes and Ursula Staudinger.<sup>99</sup> The authors suggest five defining criteria for the concept of wisdom, namely that wise individuals: (a) possess rich, well-organised, and differentiated knowledge (i. e., factual knowledge), (b) know very well how the world works (i. e., procedural knowledge), (c) have lifespan contextualism, insights into the specifics of different life stages and the understanding that a life stage is embedded in and shaped by other life stages, (d) think and act in a non-dogmatic way (value relativism) and do not assume only one view is seen as correct, and (e) they have a profound understanding of and appreciation for the uncertainties of life.

In these studies, the participants, who were typically of a broad age range of between 20 to 80 years of age, were presented with vignettes describing a challenging life situation. Examples of such situations included a complex life planning task, an evaluation of difficult past life experiences (i. e., life review), or an existential situation (e. g.,

97 Herman A. Taylor, jr./Sean A. Coady/Daniel Levy/Evelyn R. Walker/Ramachandran S. Vasani/Jiankang Liu/Ermege L. Akylbekova/Robert J. Garrison/Caroline Fox, Relationships of BMI to Cardiovascular Risk Factors Differ by Ethnicity, in: *Obesity* 18 (2010), pp. 1638–1645.

98 Denise C. Park/Patricia Reuter-Lorenz, The Adaptive Brain. Aging and Neurocognitive Scaffolding, in: *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009), pp. 173–196.

99 Paul B. Baltes/Ursula M. Staudinger, Wisdom. A Metaheuristic to Orchestrate Mind and Virtue toward Excellence, in: *American Psychologist* 55 (2000), pp. 122–136; Ute Kunzmann, Wisdom. Berlin Model, in: Susan K. Whitbourne (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Adulthood and Aging*, 3 vols., Hoboken 2015, vol. 3, pp. 1437–1440.

an adolescent girl talks to her parents about her thoughts of committing suicide). The participants were asked to provide detailed descriptions of their view on how best to deal with these situations. Next, several raters who had been trained to achieve high interrater reliability provided assessments of the answers based on the five wisdom criteria. Finally, ratings were merged into one composite wisdom score, and the distribution of the score was examined in relation to chronological age. The findings showed that a correlation between chronological age and the composite ratings of wisdom are close to zero. Hence, in contrast to a widely held assumption and stereotype of people becoming 'older and wiser', old age of itself was not associated with a higher score. In conclusion, growing older is far from being a guarantee for becoming wiser.

#### 4 Conclusions and Outlook

In Shakespeare's "King Lear", written around 1605, the Earl of Gloucester says: "Oh let me kiss that hand!" to which Lear replies: "Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality". Against this pessimistic self-perception of an aged ruler, the longings as focused on in this chapter represent fundamental hopes of humankind, albeit in a certain hierarchy of pragmatism. The best scenario might be eternal youth, but if this cannot be attained then living for as long as possible (regardless of the condition in which one does) would be a second-best option. If this also does not happen, at least becoming wiser as we age would be still a good option. But if wisdom is also not an option of living a long life onto advanced old age, then what remains? The answers might be provided by the anti-ageing movement that we currently see around the globe. It was already anticipated in Prentice Mulford's (1885–1890)<sup>100</sup> essay series "Your Forces and how to Use Them", which urged consideration of the power of thought over bodily function and was translated into German under the catchy title "Unfug des Lebens und des Sterbens" ("Nonsense of Living and Dying", 1977): Yet, is the neglect of ageing as the anti-ageing movement does a promising way out?

This chapter asked what happens if we contrast major longings of humankind related to ageing with a 'reality check' informed by contemporary gerontology. Several insights emerge from this exercise. Although the fulfilment of the longings described still seems unrealistic at present, humankind has come much closer to reaching this goal in light of the progress made in scientific lifespan and ageing research. As Scheibe and her colleagues argue, "life-longing" ("Sehnsucht") means the continuous quest towards

100 Prentice Mulford, *Your Forces and how to Use Them*. Essay Series, London 2008.

collective and individual progress and innovation to make life more complete and to move it to its greatest heights in principle terms.<sup>101</sup> Although remaining utopia by definition, life longings may fulfil important functions at the individual but also at the scientific level and continue to motivate expensive research programmes in gerontology.

That said, on the one hand it is amazing how far the omnibus construct of “plasticity” and the exploitation of a large degree of available reserve capacity has brought gerontology in terms of the development of training, intervention, and rehabilitation efforts. On the other hand, even excessive amounts of behavioural training cannot provide complete ‘cognitive rejuvenation’ to that of the level of young adulthood. Biogerontology might become more successful in the future based on the premise that attacking fundamental ageing processes at the cellular and genetic level could help to maintain or regain younger phenotypes overall. However, it seems that current achievements are still far from any robust and safe application in humans. In other words, the step-in rejuvenation from the ‘wet lab’ to the ‘dry lab’ on a larger scale still seems difficult to achieve.

Similarly, humankind has seen – in a relatively short historical timespan – an approximate doubling of its average life expectancy at birth, which might have been regarded as coming close to immortality, if this were told to someone in medieval times. Although the striving for the prolongation of life seems to be as old as mankind itself and can be traced back to the 4000 year-old “Smith Papyrus” and later to the “Dead-Sea-Scrolls” around 250 BC,<sup>102</sup> Francis Bacon’s rational striving for immortality recently has been transformed to a formidable research programme. Further impetus came from cases of extreme longevity based on valid birth certificates such as Jeanne Calment, which contradicted the previously widely held assumption that the maximum lifespan cannot be longer than 120 years. It is however worth noting that, so far (2022), no other human being has surpassed this threshold. Still, extrapolating from what has been achieved in the recent 100 years in the ‘natural’ extension of the human lifespan, as well as what recent biogerontology has to offer in terms of established life prolongation, significant

101 Susanne Scheibe / Alexandra M. Freund / Paul B. Baltes, Toward a Developmental Psychology of Sehnsucht (Life-Longings). The Optimal (Utopian) Life, in: *Developmental Psychology* 43 (2007), pp. 778–795.

102 Gordon F. Streib / Harold L. Orbach, Aging, in: Paul Lazarsfeld (Ed.), *The Uses of Sociology*, New York 1967, pp. 612–640.

lifespan increases may be achieved in a not too far future.<sup>103</sup> Eventually, such a scenario may even be more likely than that of ‘automatically’ growing wiser as we get older and older in the future.

We close with a citation from Olshansky and Carnes, who already wrote in 2009: “... it is impossible to know with certainty whether anticipated advances in the biomedical sciences will yield an intervention that slows ageing in people and if it does how much it might influence life expectancy. What is known is that there is a concerted effort to find the means to slow ageing in people and now there is reason to be optimistic that such developments will occur in this century”.<sup>104</sup> Let’s see.<sup>105</sup>

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103 S. Jay Olshansky / Bruce A. Carnes, *The Future of Human Longevity*, in: Peter Uhlenberg (Ed.), *International Handbook of Population Aging*, Heidelberg 2009 (*International Handbooks of Population* 1), pp. 731–745.

104 *Ibid.*, pp. 743–744.

105 I would like to thank Dr. Christian Alexander Neumann for very helpful comments and suggestions.

# Aristotle's Reflections on Old Age

## Abstract

Old age in Aristotle's view is a 'natural illness', that is to say a non-pathological condition through which human beings gradually but inexorably lose their vital powers. In such a process, body and soul are jointly involved: as the cognate vital heat slowly decreases and extinguishes in the body, so the mental faculties correspondingly weaken and decline. Based on these premises, the analysis shows if and in what terms the above 'uneasy' psycho-physiological condition affects elderly people in their moral habits and behaviours, influencing their social life and conditioning the possibility for them to exercise functions in the institutional apparatus of the *polis*.

## 1 Introduction

In the ancient world, old age was a topic of significant interest for both physicians and philosophers. Both investigated the physical and mental characteristics of the elderly and identified similar causes of the phenomenon. Yet, generally speaking, physicians from the Hippocratic doctors down to Galen look at it mainly from the viewpoint of sanitary conditions and 'proto-gerontology', hence as a problem of medical therapy.<sup>1</sup>

1 Cf. in the Hippocratic Collection, for instance, Aphorismi III. 31, II. 39 Littré IV (Hippocrate, Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate, vol. 4, ed. by Émile Littré, Paris 1844); De victu I. 32–33 Joly (Hippocrate, Du régime, ed. by Robert Joly, Paris 1972 [Collection des universités de France. Série grecque]); De octimestri partu 9.6 Grensemann (Hippocrates, Hippocratis De octimestri partu, De septimestri partu (spurium), ed. by Hermann Grensemann, Berlin 1968 [Corpus medicorum Graecorum I. 2.1]); De natura muliebri I Littré VII (Hippocrate, Oeuvres complètes [see above], vol. 7, ed. by Littré, Paris 1851); De mulierum affectibus I. 7, II. 111, II. 137 Littré VIII (Hippocrate, Oeuvres complètes [see above], vol. 8, ed. by Littré, Paris 1853). As for Galen, cf. for instance De temperamentis II. 2, p. 580 Helmreich (Galenus, Galeni De temperamentis libri III, ed. by Georg Helmreich, Stuttgart 1969 [Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana]); De sanitate tuenda VI. 2 p. 171, 6–21 Koch (Galenus, Galeni De sanitate tuenda, ed. by Karl Koch, Leipzig-Berlin 1923 [Corpus medicorum Graecorum V. 4.2]); De marcore 3–4, Kühn VII (Galenus, Claudii Galeni opera omnia, vol. 7, ed. by Karl Gottlob Kühn, Leipzig 1821–1833 [Medicorum Graecorum opera quae exstant], Leipzig 1821). For an analysis of the medical viewpoint cf. Maria Michela

Philosophers, on the other hand, while sharing the basic themes of ageing with doctors, frame the phenomenon with a more global vision: the aetiological investigation of man in his physical dimension, in his relationship with nature and as a moral and political subject.<sup>2</sup>

To my knowledge, neither in modern studies on ancient philosophy nor in modern Aristotelian studies old age is a topic investigated as a whole in its complexity. Among the ancient Greek philosophers, Aristotle is not the only one dealing with old age and reflecting on the characteristics of this condition. Democritus, for example, wondered about the most convenient way for the elderly to speak or about the identification of strength and beauty as characteristics of young people and wisdom as a trait of the old. At the same time, he believed that wisdom is not a gift of the years, but rather the fruit of education and nature and that there is a need to take advantage of what is good in youth, given the uncertainty of being able to reach old age in the future. He also wrote about the negative features of old age as being a kind of impairment and lack of vitality.<sup>3</sup> For his part, Hippon of Metapontus, counted among the Pythagoreans, focused

Sassi, Normalità e patologia della vecchiaia nella medicina antica, in: Chiara Crisciani/Luciana Repici/Pietro B. Rossi (Eds.), *Vita longa. Vecchiaia e durata della vita nella tradizione medica e aristotelica antica e medievale*, Firenze 2009 (Micrologus' Library 33), pp. 3–18. For a comparative analysis of the medical and philosophical viewpoints, cf. ead., *Giovane e Vecchio, umido e secco, caldo e freddo. Giochi di polarità nel sapere antico*, in: Simone Beta/Francesca Focaroli (Eds.), *Vecchiaia, gioventù, immortalità fra natura e cultura*, Fiesole (Firenze) 2009 (I quaderni del ramo d'oro 8), pp. 11–32.

2 Against the background of the topic there is therefore the broader problem of the relationship between medicine and philosophy in antiquity, the intersections of which are such as to justify the question of whether health is a medical or philosophical concern. This question is discussed by Sabina Grimaudo: Sabina Grimaudo, *Difendere la salute. Igiene e disciplina del soggetto nel "De sanitate tuenda" di Galeno*, Napoli 2008 (Elenchos 49), pp. 25–33. For his part, Aristotle hoped that medicine and philosophy could cooperate: "But it behoves the natural scientist to obtain also a clear view of the first principles of health and disease, inasmuch as neither health nor disease can exist in lifeless things. Indeed, we may say of most physical inquirers, and of those physicians who study their art more philosophically, that while the former complete their works with a disquisition on medicine, the latter start from a consideration of nature" (*De sensu* 1, 436 a17–b1, transl. by John I. Beare, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton 1984 [Bollingen Series 71,2], pp. 693–713, at p. 693. Cf. also Aristotle, *De vita et morte* 5, 480 b20–30).

3 These different issues are the subject of maxims or sentences. Cf. Democritus (68), B 104 Diels-Kranz: "Amiable is an old man who knows how to entertain and speak seriously"; B 294: "Strength and beauty are the goods of youth, but wisdom is the flower of old age"; B 183: "There can be intelligence in young people and no intelligence in the old, because time does not teach wisdom, but timely education and nature"; B 295: "The old man was young; but there is no security that the

in particular on characteristics of old age such as dryness on the physical level and a lack of perceptual faculties on the mental level.<sup>4</sup> When Plato deals with the phenomenon, many different aspects are highlighted. To briefly name but a few, old age is not, in his opinion, an unsuitable age for making philosophy, but rather is also the age at which freedom from desires can be achieved, provided that the soul is arranged in the best way and governed by reason; from the latter point of view, however, there is no distinction between old and young, even if in the soul of young people reason commands.<sup>5</sup> From the physiological point of view, moreover, old age for Plato is a condition characterized by a progressive decrease in the process of assimilation of nutrition, which continuously loosens the bonds in the body and reduces its strength until death. And finally, from the political viewpoint, Plato assigns a particular leading role in the organization of symposia to the elderly in the ideal "City of the Laws".<sup>6</sup>

On the whole, it can be said that many of the themes present in the Platonic reflection on the phenomenon of ageing were taken up by Aristotle and it is therefore reasonable to ask whether Plato and Aristotle said the same things about old age.<sup>7</sup> It seems to me, however, that the case can be part of the usual strategy that Aristotle adopts when comparing himself with his predecessors and with Plato in particular: the topics dealt with are common, but reservations are advanced about the depth and consistency of the investigations already carried out and, nine times out of ten, his solutions challenge the results obtained. What is more, Aristotle's approach to the phenomenon under scrutiny is the most complete and comprehensive analysis of it. For, in his treatment, previously dispersed or not integrated aspects are conflated into a more systematic unitarian perspective and into an original synthesis. As a result, old age is, so to say, the central focus of different conceptual lines ranging from macro- to microcosm, from the natural world to the living beings.

young man will reach old age; therefore the past good is better than the future and uncertainty"; B 296: "Old age is a complete mutilation, because it has everything but lacks everything".

4 Hippon (38), A 11 Diels-Kranz: "The old ones are dry and lack sensation, because they do not have moisture. Similarly, even the plants of the feet lack sensation."

5 On these issues cf. Gorgias 484 c–485 c, in the context in which Socrates is criticized by the sophist Callicles precisely because he does philosophy, despite being old; *Respublica* I, 329 c6.

6 *Timaeus* 81 d4–e5; *Leges* II, 671 a–672 a.

7 Simon Byl, *Platon et Aristote ont-ils professé des vues contradictoires sur la vieillesse?*, in: *Les Études Classiques* 42 (1974), pp. 113–126 and, for a more general investigation into the problem: id., *Vieillir et être vieux dans l'antiquité*, in: *Les Études Classiques* 64 (1996), pp. 261–271.

## 2 Aristotle and the Ageing of All Things

In his view, therefore, old age in men and its relative anthropological dimension must be placed within the natural scenario to which they necessarily belong. That means that growing old is a state of affairs congenial by nature to human beings but not only pertaining to them. In fact, everything in the world that is prone to generation and corruption ages. For Aristotle, the world as a whole is in and for itself eternal, because it is not born and does not perish, while everything that is born is bound to do so sooner or later. Generation and corruption also do not concern the upper region of the world, that of celestial bodies, where only eternal entities dwell.<sup>8</sup> Rather, it is in the lower or terrestrial region of the world that movements of generation and corruption and all related changes and alterations take place. It is in this context that, with due differences, all things, including living beings and men no less than animals and plants, are born, grow old and die. With this attempt to correlate old age in men with similar processes in the natural sphere, Aristotle perhaps intended to show that ageing is an inevitable necessity for beings subjected to generation and corruption and, at the same time, remind them that this inevitable necessity is not only about them. Ageing therefore falls within the natural order of things and cannot be avoided. But in Aristotle's view of nature, there is no order prearranged once and for all, and a certain event may thus accidentally not take place. Nature, in his view, amounts to teleologically oriented processes, where, however, the end is realized if the conditions are in place for it to happen. Aristotle in fact sees what he called "conditional necessity" at work in nature, by which an event such as old age in men takes place if, and only if, nothing greater prevents it.<sup>9</sup> It is possible (or rather, not impossible) therefore not to become old, if an unexpected obstacle, such as a deadly disease or some other accident, get in the way.

8 *De caelo* I. 10, 280 a11–23 and, on the impossibility of celestial bodies being subject to generation and corruption, II. 6, 288 b7–18, where the proof is based on the simplicity of the material constitution of stars in comparison with the complexity of animals' constitution. For further details cf. Luciana Repici, "Tutto invecchia per opera del tempo". Senilità e senescenza in Aristotele, in: Crisciani/Repici/Rossi (Eds.), *Vita longa* (see note 1), pp. 19–40, at pp. 19–22.

9 Aristotle's key texts are *Physica* II. 4–6, II. 8; *De partibus animalium* I. 1. For discussions on the topic cf. David M. Balme, *Teleology and Necessity*, in: Alan Gotthelf/James G. Lennox (Eds.), *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 275–290; John M. Cooper, *Hypothetical Necessity and Natural Teleology*, in: Gotthelf/Lennox (Eds.), *Philosophical Issues* (see above), pp. 243–274; Wolfgang Wieland, *La fisica di Aristotele*, Bologna 1993 (Italian translation), particularly pp. 293–351. For a comparative study of the problem, cf. Julius Rocca (Ed.), *Teleology in the Ancient World. Philosophical and Medical Approaches*, Cambridge 2017.

Aristotle also recalls, on the other hand, that an indefinite prolongation of life is impossible. No living being as an individual, he claims, can “take part with continuity in what is eternal and divine”. Mortal as an individual, a living being nevertheless survives as a species and it is in this form that each (man, animal or plant) can participate in the eternal and the divine, obviously as far as it is possible, that is, “according to the more or the less” or in different degrees.<sup>10</sup> As a rule, in fact,

“times – i. e. the lives – of the several kinds of things have a number by which they are distinguished, for there is an order for all things, and every time (i. e. every life) life are measured by a period. Not all of them, however, are measured by the same period, but some by a smaller and others by a greater one; for to some of them the period, which is their measure, is a year, while to some it is longer and to others shorter”.<sup>11</sup>

This is the theme dealt with by Aristotle in the short monographic writing of his named “On Length and Shortness of Life”, where two relevant aspects are pointed out. Firstly, in the compound of soul and body of which the nature of living beings consists, it is the body that undergoes decay and corruption, while the soul neither perishes nor decays by itself, but follows the misadventures of the body precisely by virtue of its close union with it.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, among the qualities that characterize the constitution of living beings, only humidity and heat promote life and support it; this is why “to live is to be of such a constitution, while old age is dry and cold, and so is to be dead”.<sup>13</sup> Equally decisive are the conditions of the environmental surroundings, which can affect, for better or worse, the individual natural constitutions of men, animals and plants. Comparatively, however, plants are the longest-lived beings, while men and elephants are longer-lived among blood animals, i. e. those with a higher degree of heat.<sup>14</sup>

10 De anima II. 4, 415 a25–b7, transl. by John A. Smith, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 641–692, at p. 661.

11 De generatione et corruptione II. 10, 336 b10–15, transl. by Harold H. Joachim, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 512–554, at p. 551. Cf. also De generatione animalium II. 10, 777 a31–778 a9.

12 De longitudine et brevitae vitae 1–2. For a more detailed analysis of this writing, cf. Aristotele, *La fiamma nel cuore. Lunghezza e brevità della vita, Gioventù e vecchiaia, La respirazione, La vita e la morte*, Introduzione, Traduzione, e Note, ed. by Luciana Repici, Pisa 2017 (*Testi e commenti* 20), pp. 35–49, 110–120.

13 De longitudine et brevitae vitae 5, 466 a18–20, transl. by George R. T. Ross, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 740–744, at p. 742.

14 Ibid., 4–6.

### 3 Aristotle on Old Age in Men as an Age of Decay

Heat sustains the life of living beings insofar as it ensures nutrition, i. e. it allows the assimilation of the nourishment necessary to survive and grow after birth.<sup>15</sup> But, in order to function at its best, this vital heat must be “refrigerated” (a task that Aristotle assigns to breathing), and be balanced between excess and deficiency, being neither too intense nor too weak. Youth is the period of life when heat reaches its strongest expansion, as growth progresses. Therefore, as a condition contrary to this, old age is the age at which the expansion process converts into a process of contraction and decline and decay takes over, because the heat becomes weaker and weaker. The transition is not immediate, however, for in between the two contraries there is a middle term, which constitutes the prime of life.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, on the one hand, youth and old age are opposed to each other and are characterized by opposed properties: expansive growth in youth, and decline and decay in old age. On the other hand, however, they are also both opposed, either with regard to excess or deficiency, to a median condition between them (the prime of life).

Decline and decay in old age can only have negative effects. They are already made apparent by the circumstance that the respiratory organs, which are entrusted with the task of “refrigerating” the vital heat, harden more and more and become, so to say, “earthy”, so as to make the normal movements of expansion and contraction in breathing difficult. Hence, even a small disturbance can cause death in old age as little heat remains

15 *De vita et morte* 2, 479 a29–30, transl. by George R. T. Ross, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 745–763, at p. 761: “Generation is therefore the first participation in the heat of the nutritive soul, while life is the permanence in this <participation>.” Aristotle considers nutrition a task of the soul because in his view, in the union of soul and body, the soul is responsible for bringing the functions that characterize a living being as such to a successful end, using the body as a tool in functions that take place through the body such as, first and foremost nutrition, on which the existence in life of all living beings, plants, animals and men depends entirely. Cf. *De anima* II. 1–3 on the definition of the soul and II. 4 on its specific nutritive function.

16 *De vita et morte* 2, 479 a29–30, transl. by George R. T. Ross, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 745–763, at p. 761: “Youth is the growth of the first part which brings in refrigeration, old age its decay, whilst the intermediate age between them is the maturity.” For a commentary on both this passage and the passage quoted in the preceding note, cf. *Aristotele, La fiamma nel cuore*, ed. by Repici (see note 12), pp. 150–152. The “first part which brings in refrigeration” is the heart; as it is located in the central region of the body, the vital heat that it contains is refrigerated by the movements of the respiratory organs (lungs or gills) surrounding it. On the crucial importance of balancing heat, cf. Richard A. H. King, *Aristotle on Life and Death*, London 2001, pp. 106–113.

at this stage of life and, even a minimum of stress that affects the organ in which the very principle of life resides with heat, (the heart), has death as the inevitable result. Aristotle described it as follows: "It is as though the heart contained a tiny feeble flame, which the slightest movement blows out"; in which case, "... death in old age is painless, for no violent disturbance is required to cause death, and the severance of the soul is entirely imperceptible".<sup>17</sup> Other signs also make ageing visible. The head grows bald and the hair turns grey, especially in males; the skin becomes harder and thicker; teeth fall out; the generative power decreases or fails; the sight weakens and grows dim; the voice becomes sharp.<sup>18</sup> These are, however, the inevitable consequences of the nature of old age, which is cold and dry, indeed "earthy" (*geeron*), as its own name *geras* says.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the aforementioned manifestations are natural, and not the result of diseases. However, looking at its debilitating effects, it is not unreasonable for Aristotle to say that old age is a "natural disease". The main difference is that, when health is recovered, a disease can reverse back to health, whilst a natural disease such as old age never turns back again into youth. Inevitably old age progresses towards death.<sup>20</sup> Changes resulting from the passing of time also take place in animals and plants, for plants shed their leaves and birds their feathers. For plants and animals, the seasons of the year are the turning point of their lives; so that, when the seasons change, they change accordingly and recover what they have lost. Quite differently to the situation in men, where the stages of life are defined by age; hence, since age cannot be reversed, neither can the conditions specific to each season.<sup>21</sup>

Nor do decline and decay in old age only affect the body, the soul too is involved. For, youth and old age fall within the number of the psychosomatic or "common to body and soul" properties in beings endowed with life, in men and animals no less than plants. That means that body and soul are an organic and functional unity, whose components cannot be separated in the same way as, by analogy, no function could be performed if

17 De vita et morte I, 479 a7–23, transl. by George R. T. Ross, revised in: The Complete Works of Aristotle (see note 2), pp. 745–763, at pp. 760–761, and for a commentary, Aristotele, La fiamma nel cuore, ed. by Repici (see note 12), pp. 14–34, 150–151.

18 On these occurrences cf. De generatione animalium I.18, 725 b21–22, I.19, 727 a8–10, II.6, 745 a31–33, V.1, V.7.

19 De generatione animalium V.3, 783 b2–8.

20 Ibid., V.4, 784 b23–34.

21 Ibid., V.3, 783 b8–20, 784 a11–21.

separated from its proper instrument.<sup>22</sup> Thus, since the relationship between them is of the sort that the soul is the set of functions that characterize the living being as such and the body its instrument, it is not impossible that negative conditions of the latter can affect the functioning of the former. If therefore sensory organs weaken due to the physical decline typical of old age, their ability to perceive weakens in parallel, as we have seen. “If the old man” – Aristotle argues – “could recover the proper kind of eye, he would see just as well as the young man”. But his conclusion is that “the incapacity of old age is due to an affection not of the soul but of its vehicle, as occurs in drunkenness or disease”. Similarly, even thinking can be affected by a poor condition of the body, at least to the extent that, no less than sense-perceiving, thought too belongs to flesh and blood individuals. Yet also “thinking and reflecting decline through the decay of some other inward part and are themselves impassable”. For, “thinking, loving, and hating are affections not of thought, but of that which has thought, so far as it has it”. And this is why “when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease”; they were “activities not of thought, but of the composite which has perished”.<sup>23</sup>

Memory in particular, is an instructive case. Aristotle connects this cognitive activity with sense-perception, for the objects of memory are images of things perceived in the past: it is through the sense-perception that an image of things is stamped on the soul like a picture. But, in those who are affected by an intense inner movement, such as those suffering from passions or ageing, no memory is formed, “just as no impression would be formed if the movement of the seal were to impinge on running water”. Neither is an impression stamped on those in whom the receiving surface is either “frayed, as happens to old walls” or “hard”. The allusion here is apparently to very young and very old people, that both, therefore, have a defective memory. For, both are in state of flux, the former because of their expanding growth, and the latter because of their progressive decay.<sup>24</sup> Memory, however, incidentally touches upon thinking as well; for it is able to

22 For a recent analysis of the question cf. Pierre-Marie Morel, “Common to Soul and Body” in the *Parva Naturalia* (Aristotle, *Sens.* 1, 436 b1–12), in: Richard A. H. King (Ed.), *Common to Body and Soul. Philosophical Approaches to Explaining Living Behaviour in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Berlin 2006, pp. 121–139.

23 *De anima* I. 4, 408 b11–29, transl. by John A. Smith, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 641–692, at p. 651. On the topic cf. Philip J. Van der Eijk, *The Matter of Mind. Aristotle on the Biology of ‘Psychic’ Processes and the Bodily Aspects of Thinking*, in: id., *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity. Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 206–237.

24 *De memoria* 1, 450 a25–b, transl. by John I. Beare, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 714–720, at p. 715, and, for a commentary, Aristotle, *On Memory*, ed. by Richard

represent intellectual objects through images and thought itself 'thinks' only by means of images of disembodied things.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it cannot be excluded that in the young (because of the excessive fluidity of their mind) and the old (because of the opposite cause due to hardness / dryness in their mental condition), a defective memory also affects other aspects such as learning, retention of what is learnt and the readiness to learn.

On these opposing traits, the well-known description of the different human characters that Aristotle makes in his "Rhetoric" is also founded.<sup>26</sup> Schematically, the differences can be summarized as follows (see table 1):

Tab.: Character Traits of Young and Old People according to Aristotle

Young People	Old People
Strongly passionate	Slackening passions
Changeable in desires	Uncertain and under-doing everything
Hot-tempered, sanguine	Chilly in temperament, distrustful
Confident in the future	Turned to their past
Courageous	Cowardly, suspicious of evil
Inclined to do noble rather than useful deeds	Small-minded, ungenerous
Ruled by character rather than by reasoning	Ruled by reasoning for their usefulness
Fond of their friends for their company	Fond of themselves

In this classification, the opposites are neither passionate or emotional states (*pathe*) such as anger and calm, for example, nor virtuous or vicious dispositions,<sup>27</sup> but rather the psychological states and the attitudes, the behaviours and tendencies that define a character and frame by types categories of individuals and human groups as a whole. Other types are distinguished not by age as young and old, but by social status, and the classification here includes those who are noble by birth, rich, powerful and fortunate.<sup>28</sup> In this case,

Sorabji, London 1972, pp.80–83. For a general discussion on Aristotle's theory of memory, cf. Maria Michela Sassi, *Aristotele fenomenologo della memoria*, in: ead. (Ed.), *Tracce della mente. Teorie della memoria da Platone ai moderni*, Pisa 2007 (Seminari e convegni 9), pp. 25–46.

25 De memoria I, 449 b30–450 a23. Cf. De anima III. 7, 431 a14–17.

26 Rhetorica II. 12–14 and, for a commentary, cf. Aristotele, *Rhetorica*. Introduzione, traduzione e commento, ed. by Silvia Gastaldi, Roma 2014, pp. 485–493.

27 For the analysis of these aspects cf. Rhetorica II. 2–11.

28 Ibid., II. 15–17.

however, the description more appropriately highlights similarities and dissimilarities among the types; thus, it is that the mentioned groups share traits such as arrogance, ambition, an inclination to contempt for others and ostentation. However, the powerful are, for example, more ambitious and dignified than the rich, and the fortunate less arrogant than the others because they are grateful to the divinity for their goods.<sup>29</sup> The opposite conditions (poor, powerless, unfortunate) are not examined in detail in this classification.

On the contrary, in the classification of character types by age, the different conditions are examined in detail, the oppositions are clearly delineated and, above all, in between the two opposites, youth and old age, an intermediate term is identified. These are the men in their prime. In their character they unite both confidence and timidity and are equanimous, neither trusting nor distrusting everybody. They are also brave as well as temperate and vice versa, neither brave but intemperate, like young people, nor temperate but cowardly, like the old. Their life is guided both by what is noble and what is useful, neither by parsimony nor by prodigality, but always by what is fit and proper. Briefly, men in their prime “have a character between that of the young and that of the old, free from the extremes of either” and, generally speaking, “all the valuable qualities that youth and age divide between them are united in the prime of life, while all their excesses or defects are replaced by moderation and fitness”. It takes many years to attain such a mental condition, for, if the body reaches its prime from the age of 30 to 35, the mind, however, needs much more time, namely up to the age of 49.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, old age is contrary to youth as its opposite, but on the other hand they both are opposed as extremes to what is intermediate between them. Both therefore represent negative conditions as opposites, one by excess and the other by deficit, to the middle term that is a combination of them both. Accordingly, only the latter is, properly speaking, the best condition, being as it were a state of excellence, whilst youth and old age are equally unfavourable conditions, being, as it were, ‘vices’. In this context, however, passions or emotions and characters are not analysed as themes of ethical relevance,<sup>31</sup> but

29 Ibid., II. 15, 1390 b17–24, 16, 1391 a1–6, 17, 1391 a20–28, 1391 a30–b3.

30 Ibid., II. 14, 1390 a28–29, 1390 b6–11, transl. by W. Rhys Roberts, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 2152–2269, at p. 2215.

31 Scholars wonder why the treatment of ethical issues as relevant as these is entrusted by Aristotle to a work of rhetoric, and not to the writings of ethics or the treatise on the soul, and therefore question the philosophical quality of his Rhetoric. For some approaches to the topic cf. Michael Billig, *Arguing and Thinking. A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*, Cambridge 1996 (European Monographs in Social Psychology); Thomas Conley, *Pathos and Pisteis. Aristotle Rhet. II. 2–11*, in: *Hermes* 110 (1982), pp. 300–315; John M. Cooper, *Ethical-Political Theory in Aristotle’s Rhetoric*,

rather as a repertoire of arguments that serve the speaker in his effort to elicit agreement in the audience.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the prime of life in between youth and old age can hardly mean a “right mean (*mesotes*)” in between two opposites ‘vices,’ one by excess and the other by defect, to which amounts excellence (*arete*) in human behaviours.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the intermediate prime of life between youth and old age is a state of psycho-physical maturity, where “all the valuable qualities that youth and old age divide between them are united” and “all their excesses or defects are replaced by moderation (*metrion*) and fitness (*armotton*)”.<sup>34</sup> Yet, it is precisely in terms of opposite extremes and defective states, that youth and old age are interpreted by Aristotle with reference to ethics, assuming as a middle term the status of excellence that distinguishes men in their prime and their behaviours.

in: David J. Furley / Alexander Nehamas (Eds.), *Aristotle's Rhetoric. Philosophical Essays*, Princeton 1994, pp. 193–210; John M. Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Emotions*, in: Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Berkeley 1996 (*Philosophical Traditions 6*), pp. 238–257; Troels Engberg Pedersen, *Is There an Ethical Dimension to Aristotelian Rhetoric?*, in: Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (see above), pp. 116–141; Eugene Garver, *Ethos and Argument. The Ethos of the Speaker and the Ethos of the Audience*, in: *Papers on Rhetoric 3* (2000), pp. 113–126; Silvia Gastaldi, *Aristotele e la politica delle passioni. Retorica, psicologia ed etica dei comportamenti emozionali*, Torino 1990 (*Biblioteca storico-filosofica*); Gisela Striker, *Emotion in Context. Aristotle's Treatment of the Passion in Rhetoric and His Moral Psychology*, in: Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (see above), pp. 286–302; William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle's Rhetoric on Emotions*, in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 52* (1970), pp. 40–70; id., *Aristotle on Persuasion Through Character*, in: *Rhetorica 10,3* (1992), pp. 207–244; id., *Aristotle on Emotion. A Contribution to Philosophical Psychology, Rhetoric, Poetics, Politics and Ethics*, London 2002.

32 Francesca Piazza, *La retorica di Aristotele. Introduzione alla lettura*, Roma 2008 (*Quality Paperbacks 256*), pp. 101–102, 107. In her view, therefore, there would be a specifically rhetorical viewpoint on the passions, whose aim would be to highlight the relationship between language, emotion and sociality in human beings, whilst the purpose of characters treatment would be, as Aristotle himself claims, to provide the speaker with useful information to appear, of themselves and in their speeches, as possessing a certain character. For, “... people always think well of speeches adapted to, and reflecting, their own character; and we can now see how to compose our speeches so as to adapt both them and ourselves to our audience”; *Rhetorica II. 13*, 1390a24–27, transl. by W. Rhys Roberts, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 2152–2269, at p. 2215.

33 *Ethica Nicomachea II. 6*, 1106b36–1107a8: “It [sc. excellence] is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while excellence both finds and chooses that which is intermediate”, transl. by William David Ross, revised by James O. Urmson, in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 1729–1867, at p. 1748.

34 *Rhetorica II. 14*, 1390b6–9, transl. by W. Rhys Roberts, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 2152–2269, at p. 2216.

#### 4 Old Age in Aristotle in Its Ethical-Political Aspects

As Aristotle puts it, friendship is “an excellence or implies excellence and is besides most necessary with a view to living”.<sup>35</sup> It is a basic excellence for strengthening relations between members of a polis; indeed, in Aristotle’s view, it supplements and, in a sense, replaces justice, the mother of all political excellences. For, when men are friends, they have no need of justice, whilst when they are just, they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality.<sup>36</sup> Its effects benefit both young and old, for it helps the young to keep from error and aids older people by providing for their needs and supplementing their activities that fail due to weakness. It also inspires those who are in their prime of life to noble actions.<sup>37</sup> However, only excellent men, that is, those who possess the sovereign virtue of wisdom that regulates the choice of the right mean, love their friends for themselves and dispassionately wish them well. This is why perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good and alike in excellence: they wish well (good) alike to each and they are good in themselves. Such friendships are rare because such men are rare; but this is the complete friendship both in respect of duration and in all other respects.<sup>38</sup>

On the contrary, young people seek friends in view of their pleasure. For, they live under the guidance of emotions and pursue above all what is pleasant to themselves; but, as age increases, their pleasures change. Consequently, they quickly become friends and quickly cease to be so: their friendship changes with what they find pleasant and such a pleasure swiftly changes.<sup>39</sup> For their part, old people look for friends in view of their utility, that is, for the sake of what is good for themselves. But utility changes no less quickly than pleasure, so the motive of friendship soon dissolves and, together with it, friendship itself. Hence, no less than friendship in youth, friendship in old age is only incidental and lasts until the utility, like pleasure, changes its target. There is no true friendship in advanced years, only something similar to it; indeed, it is the worse type of friendship, for men in this age are not fond of each other, but only look for profit. Nor do old people make friends easily; as is the case in ill-tempered people, there is little

35 *Ethica Nicomachea* VIII. I, 1155 a3–5, transl. by William David Ross, revised by James O. Urmson, in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 1729–1867, at p. 1825.

36 *Ibid.*, 1155 a26–28.

37 *Ibid.*, 1155 a12–15.

38 *Ibid.*, 3, 1156 b7–9, 1156 b24–25; 4, 1156 b33–34.

39 *Ibid.*, 3, 1156 a30–b1.

pleasant in the old and no one would spend his time in unpleasant company, seeing that “nature seems above all to avoid the painful and to aim at the pleasant”.<sup>40</sup>

We thus come across another ‘defect’ of the old and, given the socio-political value of an excellence such as friendship, this is not a minor one. For, what seems to be lacking in the old is the sociability that is necessary to establish relationships with friends and other members of the political community to which they belong. It is therefore not surprising that, for Aristotle, they should be excluded from performing state duties. They are certainly citizens, he argues, but not in a fully qualified sense, just as children conversely are too young to be included in the citizenship register. It is quite natural that the older are more fitted to govern and the younger to obey, just as in the biological field the male is better suited to command than the female in the family, and the father more than the children and wife. It could also be said that the elders are good men and well trained in manly virtue. But it is disputable that those who have to judge important causes should hold office for life, for “the mind grows old as well as the body”. Hence, the state duties should be entrusted according to age; for, there are duties that require strength, like in warriors, and duties that require wisdom, like in counsellors. Duties therefore will be entrusted to different persons in their prime of life and not to the same person at the same time, but in accordance with nature, which possibly endows the younger with strength and the older with wisdom.<sup>41</sup>

Besides, the legislator in charge of the well-being of future generations of citizens must take care that old age is not an obstacle or a detriment instead of a resource. He will then have to take care of the weddings and set the maximum age limit for reproduction (seventy years for men, about fifty for women). For, men who are too old or too young generate children “defective both in body and in mind”, particularly if generated by very old men. The criterion to be followed will be “the age of the prime of their intelligence”, i. e. about fifty in most men, and those who are four or five years older will be forbidden to have families.<sup>42</sup> As such, a prime is seen here as a sort of “blooming (*akme*)” like in plants, and it could be said that, for Aristotle, intelligence is in its full bloom in the prime of life and that the old, whose generative power declines in parallel with their bodily

40 Ibid., 3, 1156 a19–26; 5, 1157 a15–20; 6, 1157 b14–18.

41 *Politica* I. 12, 1259 b1–4; II. 9, 1270 b35–b1; III. 1, 1275 a15–16; VII. 9, 1329 a8–17; VII. 14, 1332 b35–41, transl. by Benjamin Jovett, revised in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (see note 2), pp. 1986–2129, at pp. 1998, 2023, 2016, 2109, 2115.

42 Ibid., VII. 16, 1334 b29–1335 a15.

strength and mental activities, can be compared to plants in the process of withering and drying out.<sup>43</sup>

## 5 Conclusions

Aristotle himself refers to the use of poets to metaphorically describe old age as “the evening” or “the sunset” of life.<sup>44</sup> In summary, we could say that, realistically, there is hardly any poetry in his portrait of old age. A state of physical and mental decline is typical of the old (§ 3). Their characters, too, are altered; a bad light surrounds them both in the common opinion which a speaker draws when elaborating his speeches aimed at eliciting persuasion in the audience, and in the analysis of excellence in man such as is required by his nature of “political animal” (§ 4). On the whole, the picture appears bleak and one can understand critical reactions such as that of Cicero in his brief treatise “De senectute”, which is a solemn defence of old age.<sup>45</sup>

It seems to me, however, that, for a more appropriate assessment of Aristotle’s approach, his treatment of the topic needs to be placed within the context of his interest in the philosophy of nature (§ 2). From this standpoint, old age can be seen as an exemplary case study in the context of research into the processes of generation and corruption in the sublunary world. Hence, the attention paid both to old age and its opposite, youth, can be seen as emblematic states of the basic opposition that marks out all bodies that can be generated and corrupted. This also explains the primacy attached to the middle term, the intermediate state between the two extremes, which, in the ages of life as in behaviours, avoids excess and defect and achieves the best condition as far as it is possible to do (§ 4).<sup>46</sup> In the history before his time, Aristotle could find

43 Ibid., VII.16, 1335 b32. In “De vita et morte”, it is the prime of life, i. e. the “intermediate (*meson*)” between youth and old age, that is introduced as a period of blooming (De vita et morte 2, 479 a32). Death is but the completion of the process of withering and drying out (ibid., 479 b2–3).

44 Poëtica 21, 1457 b23–24.

45 Aristotle appears to be challenged on key points such as the interpretation of old age as a natural disease, the decline of strength and mental activities and the vicious traits of the character: cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, Cato maior de senectute, in: M. Tulli Ciceronis De re publica. De legibus. Cato maior de senectute. Laelius de amicitia, ed. by Jonathan G. F. Powell, Oxford 2006 (Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis), pp. 267–315, at 4–5, pp. 271–272, 21–38, pp. 280–290, 65–66, pp. 304–305.

46 The primacy assigned to the middle term is frequent in the bio-physiological field. For example, the production and the generative power of semen is said to be at their height in adulthood, and

numerous medical and philosophical, and even poetical reflections on the same theme (§ 1). Those examined above were the original terms in which he dealt with it. Future research will be able to state whether or not his invitation / solicitation to address old age as a complex psycho-physical condition and in the framework of the family and social contexts to which elderly people belong has been accepted and developed by other philosophers and / or philosophical schools of antiquity and what its usefulness and applicability might be in the field of modern gerontology.

not in old age nor in childhood and youth: cf. *De generatione animalium* I. 18, 725 b19–25, 727 a2–10. The sight is the best in the eye whose constitution is neither too much nor too little liquid: cf. *De generatione animalium* V. 1, 780 a17. The well-pitched voice is in due proportion between the two extremes of deep and high: cf. *De generatione animalium* V. 7, 786 b7–9.



# Growing Old at Rome

## Abstract

This chapter presents a brief outline of attitudes to growing old as expressed in the writings of Roman men of the upper classes. These authors were often facing old age themselves and ways in which their ageing status might be viewed preoccupied their thoughts. The chapter discusses the tropes and stereotypes that appear to be part of shared Greco-Roman cultural understanding of old age. As with any stage of life, old age is presented from a myriad of perspectives. It could be philosophical, humorous, cantankerous, painful, tranquil, idealised and demonised. Men and women shared a range of emotional and physical responses to ageing: they might expect and demand respect by virtue of their age and role in the family/society while at the same time fearing dependency, being side-lined and neglected. Then, as now, how one survived or endured old age was often a reflection of social status, rank and gender.

## 1 Growing Old at Rome

“Ummidia Quadratilla is dead, having almost attained the age of seventy-nine and kept her powers unimpaired up to her last illness, along with a sound constitution and sturdy physique which are rare in a woman ... with deference to her sybaritic tastes. She kept a troupe of pantomime actors whom she treated with an indulgence unsuitable in a lady of her high position ... she told me that as a woman, with all a woman’s idle hours to fill, she was in the habit of amusing herself playing draughts or watching her mimes ...”<sup>1</sup>

1 “Ummidia Quadratilla paulo minus octogensimo aetatis anno decessit usque ad novissimam valetudinem viridis, atque etiam ultra matronalem modum compacto corpore et robusto ... aviae delicatae severissime, et tamen obsequentissime. Habebat illa pantomimos fovebatque, effusius quam principi feminae convenit ... solere se, ut feminam in illo otio sexus, laxare animum lusu calculorum, solere spectare pantomimos suos...” For the text and translation, cf. Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Pliny the Younger), *Epistulae* (Letters), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by Betty Radice, Cambridge, Mass. 1969 (Loeb Classical Library 55), ep. 7.24.1–2, 4–5. For Pliny’s “Letters” cf., for example, the following edition: Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Pliny the Younger), *Epistulae* (Letters), 2 vols.,

Ummidia was a wealthy woman who had raised her grandson after the death of his parents. She was a benefactor of her local community and commanded Pliny's respect, despite the fact that she knew how to enjoy herself in old age, passing the time playing draughts and being entertained by her own personal troupe of pantomime actors. She did not, however, allow her grandson to watch the potentially corrupting shows; this was an indulgence of her own (and I like to think perhaps a circle of women friends). We possess this privileged glimpse into the life of an independent elderly woman due to a short obituary written by Pliny, who was a friend of her grandson. Ummidia earns Pliny's praise for dividing her property correctly between her grandchildren (two-thirds going to the grandson and one-third to the granddaughter) and not being suborned by fawning actors to leave it to them, and for the upright and traditional manner in which she had raised her grandson. Pliny gives the strong impression that he did not approve of the *pantomimi*, but it is precisely this element of her life that gives us a flavour of the potential pleasures of old age for a wealthy elderly Roman woman. Unfortunately, Ummidia is almost unique in Roman history, not presumably in her behaviour, but by the fact there is a record of it. Older women tend to disappear from the sources once they are past child-bearing age.<sup>2</sup> When they do appear, it is often as conflicting stereotypes: as mothers or grandmothers of important children or as ageing prostitutes around whom a whole genre of literature developed. The former of these stereotypes produces both good and bad images, the latter almost universally grotesque representations in both literature and art (see below).

The behaviour of Ummidia provides one window into the life of the elderly, but if we look across society, we can begin to examine the many ways in which Romans responded to the ageing process. As with other aspects of the life course, we are somewhat stymied in answering social questions as our sources derive almost entirely from men of the upper-classes, usually of middle or old age themselves, so their preoccupations dominate the aspects of ageing which are visible to us. It is also this group who commissioned works of art which suited their tastes and purposes. The power of the *paterfamilias* was a great

ed. and transl. by Betty Radice, Cambridge, Mass. 1969 (Loeb Classical Library 55, 59). This chapter presents a very brief outline of the range of attitudes to old age found in Roman literature. For much fuller examinations, cf. Tim Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, Baltimore 2003 (Ancient Society and History); Karen Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome*, London 2003; Beate Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike. Eine Kulturgeschichte*, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2012; Mary Harlow/Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome*, London 2002.

2 Mary Harlow, *Blurred Visions. Male Perceptions of the Female Life Course – the Case of Aemilia Pudentilla*, in: ead./Ray Laurence (Eds.), *Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire*, Portsmouth, RI 2007 (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 65), pp. 195–208, at pp. 196–201.

safeguard against the vagaries of ageing for the Roman man. His power over the family finances and relationships, coupled with the prime Roman virtue of *pietas* should ideally ensure a *paterfamilias* a secure old age, if not a healthy one.<sup>3</sup>

The Romans inherited a number of literary/philosophical ideas of ageing which were part of the cultural background against which they operated. The erudite elite probably knew their Aristotle who saw life in three stages: youth, the prime of life, and old age. Aristotle viewed the characteristics of old age as opposite to those of the young and was quite pessimistic about growing old. In *Rhetoric* 2. 13–14, Aristotle explains old age as a process of decline from the prime of life and lists a number of characteristics he considers typical: old men are positive about nothing, show an excessive lack of energy, they are hesitant in their opinions, malicious, mistrustful and see the worst side of everything.<sup>4</sup> They are small-minded, miserly, cowardly and selfish. They are loquacious, nostalgic, always talking about the past, they are querulous and lack moral character. Aristotle does not present an image of old age that is pleasant to experience oneself. In the Roman period similar ideas are expressed by Horace:

“Many ills encompass an old man, whether because he seeks gain, and then miserably holds aloof from his store and fears to use it, or because, in all that he does, he lacks fire and courage, is dilatory and slow to form hopes, is sluggish and greedy of a longer life, peevish, surly, given to praising the days he spent as a boy, and to reproving and condemning the young. Many blessings do the advancing years bring with them; many, as they retire, they take away.”<sup>5</sup>

3 On the duty of children to parents, cf. Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 205–216; on loss of paternal power, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 230–235; Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 153–159.

4 Chiara Crisciani/Luciana Repici/Pietro B. Rossi (Eds.), *Vita longa. Vecchiaia e durata della vita nella tradizione medica e aristotelica antica e medievale*, Firenze 2009 (Micrologus' Library 33); Richard A. H. King, *Aristotle on Life and Death*, London 2001; Silvia Gastaldi, *Aristotele e la politica delle passioni. Retorica, psicologia ed etica dei comportamenti emozionali*, Torino 1990 (Biblioteca storico-filosofica); Alan Gotthelf/James G. Lennox (Eds.), *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, Cambridge 1987; see Repici this volume.

5 “*Multa senem circumveniunt incommoda, vel quod quaerit et inventis miser abstinet ac timet uti, vel quod res omnis timide gelideque ministrat, dilator spe longus, iners avidusque futuri, difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti se puero, castigatorem censorque minorum. multa ferunt anni venientes commoda secum, multa recedentes adimunt.*” For the text and translation, cf. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), *Ars Poetica* (The Art of Poetry), in: *id.*, *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, ed. and transl. by Henry Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, Mass. 1926 (Loeb Classical Library 194), pp. 442–489, at ll. 169–175.

The similarity of views may imply that Horace knew his Aristotle, or that such views were part of common parlance and recognised stereotypes in the way writers expressed old age in literature. A final example is taken from Ptolemy of Alexandria written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE; his astrological study of the stages of life has the following:

“Sixth, Jupiter, taking as his lot the elderly age (56–68), again for the space of his own period, twelve years, brings about the renunciation of manual labour, toil, turmoil, and dangerous activity, and in their place brings decorum, foresight, retirement, together with all-embracing deliberation, admonition, and consolation; now especially he brings men to set store by honour, praise, and independence, accompanied by modesty and dignity.

Finally to Saturn falls as his lot old age (68 onwards), the latest period, which lasts for the rest of life. Now the movements both of body and of soul are cooled and impeded in their impulses, enjoyments, desires, and speed; for the natural decline supervenes upon life, which has become worn down with age, dispirited, weak, easily offended, and hard to please in all situations, in keeping with the sluggishness of his movements.”<sup>6</sup>

These literary and philosophical constructs embody stereotypical characteristics which Roman authors refer to on a regular basis, however, at the same time ancient authors recognised as Seneca did, that there is not “one old age for all men”.<sup>7</sup> In the Roman world the definition of old age was a difficult concept to pin down. Ages of man systems might provide a chronological framework in which to situate a life, but these were not

6 “Ἐκτος δ’ ὁ τοῦ Διὸς τὴν πρεσβυτικὴν ἡλικίαν λαχὼν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς ἰδίας περιόδου πάλιν δωδεκαετίαν τὸ μὲν αὐτουργὸν καὶ ἐπίπονον καὶ ταραχώδες καὶ παρακεκινδυνευμένον τῶν πράξεων ἀποστρέφεται ποιεῖ, τὸ δὲ εὐσχημον καὶ προνοητικὸν καὶ ἀνακεχωρηκός, ἔτι δὲ ἐπιλογιστικὸν πάντων καὶ νοητικὸν καὶ παραμυθητικὸν ἀντεισάγει, τιμῆς τότε μάλιστα καὶ ἐπαινοῦ καὶ ἐλευθεριότητος ἀντιποιεῖσθαι παρασκευάζων μετ’ αἰδοῦς καὶ σεμνοπρεπείας. / Τελευταῖος δὲ ὁ τοῦ Κρόνου τὴν ἐσχάτην καὶ γεροντικὴν ἡλικίαν ἐκκληρώθη μέχρι τῶν ἐπιλοίπων τῆς ζωῆς χρόνων, καταψυχομένων ἤδη καὶ ἐμποδιζομένων τῶν τε σωματικῶν καὶ τῶν ψυχικῶν κινήσεων ἐν ταῖς ὁρμαῖς καὶ ἀπολαύσεσι καὶ ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ταχέαις, τῆς ἐπὶ τὴν φύσιν παρακμῆς ἐπιγινομένης τῷ βίῳ κατεσκληρότι καὶ ἀθύμῳ καὶ ἀσθενικῷ καὶ εὐπροσκώπῳ καὶ πρὸς πάντα δυσαρέστῳ κατὰ τὸ οἰκείον τῆς τῶν κινήσεων νωχελείας.” For the text and translation, cf. Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy), *Tetrabiblos* (Quadripartitum), ed. and transl. by Frank E. Robbins, Cambridge, Mass. 1940 (Loeb Classical Library 435), 4.10.205–206. On the literary construction of age systems in antiquity cf. Tim Parkin, *Life Cycle*, in Mary Harlow / Ray Laurence (Eds.) *A Cultural History of Childhood and the Family in Antiquity*, Oxford-New York 2010, pp. 97–114.

7 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Marciam* (On Consolation to Marcia), in: id., *Moral Essays*, vol. 2, ed. and transl. by John W. Basore, London et al. 1965 (The Loeb Classical Library 254), pp. 2–97, at 21. 4.

consistent, each dividing life into various ages and their associated stage.<sup>8</sup> Even in our own time, the concept of old age has transformed. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western world, it was often framed around retirement ages, but the Romans did not have a concept of retirement in the modern sense of leaving the world of employment and moving on to a new stage of life. There are other parameters we might consider which gave an age framework to the lives of men. The Republican *cursus honorum*, for instance, gave minimum ages for the holding of certain offices.<sup>9</sup> Under Augustus's marriage laws (*Lex Julia et Papia Poppea* 9 CE), men were not exempt from the penalties of being unmarried until the age of sixty, and women until the age of fifty.<sup>10</sup> Ageing, however, is not just about numbers and years lived, nor is old age marked by a rite of passage as other stages of life might be. The Romans were conscious that appearance and body language might dictate how old they appeared to be, and that physical appearance and mental capacity were perhaps more significant than chronology. Then, as now, people aged at different rates dependent on genetics, life-style and environment. Women's life courses followed a biological framework more closely than men's as women were essentially defined by their ability to produce heirs. Where the life course of the upper class Roman might be marked by periods in office, that of women was sectioned by marriage, motherhood and widowhood – all stages marked by their connection to family.

Ptolemy's scheme is interesting because he divides old age into two stages, 'old age' and 'old-old age'. In the earlier stage a life of dignity and respect, free from manual labour is envisaged. The latter stage is not so 'rosy' and aligns more with Aristotle in that physical decrepitude and mental decline are 'creeping in'. This division appears frequently when writers concern themselves with the subject and asked the question of how to live a good old age.

Medical writers of the period viewed old age as a cooling of the body and recommended a range of regimens that an individual could choose to follow as a way of coping with their inevitable decline.<sup>11</sup> Early authors, following the Hippocratics, saw old age

8 Parkin, *Life Cycle* (see note 6), pp. 97–101.

9 On the *cursus honorum*, cf. Alan E. Astin, *The Lex Annalis before Sulla*, Brussels 1958 (Collections Latomus 32); on its changes and effect on the life course, cf. Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1), pp. 104–116.

10 For commentary, cf. Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage. Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, Oxford 1991, pp. 60–80.

11 For an overview of medical attitudes to the ageing body, cf. Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 34–56; Tim Parkin, *The Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*, in: Pat Thane (Ed.) *A History of Old Age*, London 2005, pp. 58–65.

as a form of disease which could not be cured.<sup>12</sup> In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, the physician Galen modified this thinking and argued that old age, like other stages of life, was part of a natural process which required its own particular attention, and as bodies differed each therefore required different treatments and regimens.<sup>13</sup> In the fifth book of “*De sanitate tuenda*”, Galen provides a lot of advice on how to live well in old age. He argued that as the body aged, it became cooler and drier, organs no longer function so well and the drying out of the body is apparent in weight loss, faltering limbs and wrinkles. To combat the effects of ageing Galen recommends a regimen which is predicated on the existing constitution of the patient. He advised gentle exercise: In the morning, after a massage with oil, the elderly should walk and take passive exercise<sup>14</sup> even chariot riding was considered good. Other forms of exercise are recommended for those who have the capacity: shadow boxing, discus throwing, using weights. Massage too is recommended to suit the individual: a gentle massage is preferred for those who are frail while stronger bodies can benefit from a more vigorous work out. Tepid baths were recommended as good for moistening and warming the body.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of diet, older people were advised to avoid excess in certain foods such as cheese, boiled eggs, snails, pork, lentil soup, mushrooms and meat from stags, goats, oxen or sheep.<sup>16</sup> Certain breads were also to be avoided but soft bread dipped in goat’s milk was good for some, and bread prepared with honey or a honey-wine mixture can also form part of the elderly person’s diet. Milk from well pastured animals could be good, but like wine it should be taken to suit an individual’s constitution.<sup>17</sup> All vegetables are good, especially if served with oil and fish sauce. Figs, plums and seasonal fruits are also acceptable, but dried fruits could also offer benefits.<sup>18</sup> Wine is good as it both heats the

12 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales (Moral Epistles)*, vol. 3, ed. and transl. by Richard M. Gummere, London 1962 (The Loeb Classical Library 77), ep. 108.28, where he comments on Vergil’s “Aeneid” (Publius Vergilius Maro [Vergil], *Aeneis [Aeneid]*, vol. 1, ed. by Henry Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, Mass. 1967 [The Loeb Classical Library 63], 6.274). For Seneca’s “Moral Epistles” cf., for example, the following edition: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, 3 vols., ed. and transl. by Richard M. Gummere, London 1961–1962 (The Loeb Classical Library 75–77).

13 Claudius Galenus, *Galenus De sanitate tuenda*, ed. by Karl Koch, Leipzig-Berlin 1923 (*Corpus medicorum Graecorum* V. 4.2), 5.1–2; cf. 5.8 for his view on and ageing body as cold and dry.

14 *Ibid.*, 5.3.

15 *Ibid.*, 5.10.

16 *Ibid.*, 5.6.

17 *Ibid.*, 5.7–8.

18 *Ibid.*, 5.9.

body and acts as a diuretic, and Galen takes some care to explain exactly which wines offer most benefit to particular types of body.<sup>19</sup>

Much of the type of advice given by the medical writers was followed by Pliny's friend, Spurinna. In Pliny's opinion, Spurinna led an exemplary old age, staying in bed until an hour after dawn, then taking a three-mile walk to exercise both his mind and body. Depending on whether he was alone or in company, he either engaged in serious conversation or a book was read aloud to him during this walk. These activities continued when he returned home, until he went out in his carriage with either his wife or his friends. The carriage would drive seven miles, then Spurinna would walk another mile. On his return home he would retire to his room and do some writing. In the late afternoon, before his bath he would take off his clothes and walk around in the sunshine, throwing a ball briskly. He took a short rest after his bath and before dinner. During dinner light literature was read aloud. Dinner itself was a simple affair and either light literature was read aloud or comic entertainment offered between courses. "Thus, Spurinna had reached the age of 77, hale and hearty."<sup>20</sup> Pliny approves of Spurinna's lifestyle and his approach to ageing but not everyone could follow such regimens or remain so apparently in control of their lives.

Not everyone was so sanguine about old age. The orator Fronto complained often about his health in letters to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (scholars have estimated that up to a third of his correspondence dealt with matters of health).<sup>21</sup> Fronto probably eventually died of plague in his early seventies but from his fifties onwards appears, to the modern reader at least, to obsess and moan about his health; for example: "I was seized with pain in the knee, but so slight that I could both walk slowly and use a carriage. Tonight the pain has come on more violently, but so that I can easily bear it, if it gets no worse."<sup>22</sup> From the same period, Fronto excused himself from a meeting with the emperor because of his ailments, specifically pain in neck and elbow.<sup>23</sup> In later years he

19 Ibid., 5. 5.

20 Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, vol. 1, ed. by Radice (see note 1), ep. 3. 1.

21 Edward Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome*, Cambridge, Mass. 1980, p. 141; Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 44–46.

22 "Genus dolore arreptus sum, verum ita modico ut et ingrederer pedetemptim et vehiculo uterer. Hac nocte vehementior dolor invasit, ita tamen ut iacens facile patiar, nisi quid amplius ingruerit." For the text and translation, cf. Marcus Cornelius Fronto, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. and transl. by C. R. Haines, Cambridge, Mass. 1919 (Loeb Classical Library 112–113), ep. 5.6 (145–147 CE).

23 Ibid., ep. 5.29.

complains of severe pain in the groin<sup>24</sup> to which the emperor replies that he hopes the pain subsides with the use of fomentations and remedies as he knows the distress pain causes Fronto. Marcus Aurelius receives a swift reply opening with “I have been seized with severe pains in the other side of the groin”.<sup>25</sup> It is a testament to the closeness of the relationship between the emperor and his former tutor that Marcus Aurelius is constantly concerned for Fronto’s health, and that Fronto has no compunction about opening his correspondence with tales of his ailments.

Seneca, who ended his life hounded to suicide by Nero at the age of sixty-nine in 65 CE, wrote philosophical treatises in the form of letters, many of which deal with growing older and coping with ailments and pain. Like Fronto, he had many complaints but he also found some solace in the ageing process. In describing the start of his day, Seneca says wryly that bodily exercise only takes up a small amount of time now as old age has made him tired as soon as he starts. He runs with a slave as pacemaker, who jokes he is at the same stage of life as his master as they are both losing their teeth.<sup>26</sup> He takes warm baths as opposed to the cold ones of his younger days.<sup>27</sup> For breakfast he has some stale bread, and then takes a nap.<sup>28</sup> In other letters he complains about suffering from sinus and catarrh problems and asthma<sup>29</sup> but he also thanks old age for keeping him bed-ridden and thus allowing more time with his books and letters.<sup>30</sup> Seneca’s stoicism meant that he would prefer to face the troubles of growing older with bravery and patient endurance,<sup>31</sup> and that friends and the study of philosophy bring consolation for such ills.<sup>32</sup> Seneca saw other consolations in old age, particularly in its early stages: “Life is

24 Ibid., ep. 5.18.

25 Ibid., ep. 5.50.

26 Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, vol. 2, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 83.3–4; cf. letter 12 on Seneca failing to recognise a slave who had been a boy with him as the slave looked so run down and decrepit. The letter highlights the differential rate of ageing between classes (id., *Moral Epistles*, vol. 1, ed. by Gummere, London 1961 [The Loeb Classical Library 75], ep. 12); Tim Parkin, *Ageing in Antiquity. Status and Participation in:* Paul Johnson / Pat Thane (Eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity*, London 1998 (Routledge Studies in Cultural History 1), p. 27.

27 Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, vol. 2, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 83.5; cf. ep. 67. 1.

28 Ibid., ep. 83. 6.

29 Ibid., ep. 78.1–2; id., *Moral Epistles*, vol. 1, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 54. 1.

30 Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, vol. 2, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 67. 2.

31 Ibid., ep. 67. 6.

32 Ibid., ep. 78.4; ep. 76.

most delightful when it is on the downward slope but has not yet reached the abrupt decline".<sup>33</sup>

While the physical aspects of the ageing body preoccupied those who were having to deal with physical degeneration, literate members of upper-class Roman society were also anxious about being side-lined once they were viewed as elderly. In 44 BCE in his early sixties, Cicero wrote a treatise on old age, dedicated to his life-long friend, Atticus, who was sixty-five. The text of Cicero's "Cato Maior de Senectute" is composed as a dialogue between Cato the Elder and two younger men, Scipio Aemilianus and Gaius Laelius. It is set in the past, approximately a century before Cicero's own time, when Cato would have been 83.<sup>34</sup> It does not detail the daily lives of the elderly but stresses how much older men have to offer the state in terms of experience and knowledge. Through the voice of Cato, Cicero attempts to render the inconveniences of old age to an agreeable state.<sup>35</sup> Cato denies old age is a burden, those who lack the character to live a virtuous life would find any age difficult<sup>36</sup> but he concedes the point that he argues from a favourable position, being wealthy, in good health and held in respect.<sup>37</sup> Cato argues that while physical strength may decline, this does not stop the elderly from being mentally active. He suggests exercises to keep the mind active, such as training himself to remember the names of people, and their fathers and grandfathers.<sup>38</sup> And while physical weakness means the elderly no longer have an obligation to hold office, they still have much to offer in terms of civic life – he could still make public speeches, he would have the time to teach Scipio rhetoric. Cato says it is our duty to resist old age, to fight against it as we would disease – and writing prior to Galen and Pliny – says that old age can be kept at bay by adopting a regimen of health, practising moderate exercise and eating

33 Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, vol. 1, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 12. 5. For a fuller discussion of Seneca's attitude to growing older, cf. Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 48–49; Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 69–72; Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1), pp. 125–127.

34 For the text and translation, cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cato maior de senectute* (Cato the Elder on Old Age), in: id., *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*, ed. and transl. by William A. Falconer, Cambridge, Mass. 1923 (Loeb Classical Library 154), pp. 2–99. For English commentary on the Latin text cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cato Maior de Senectute*, ed. by Jonathan G. F. Powell, Cambridge 1988 (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 28).

35 Cicero, *Cato the Elder*, ed. by Falconer (see note 34), 1. 2.

36 *Ibid.*, 2. 4.

37 *Ibid.*, 3. 8.

38 *Ibid.*, 6–8.

frugally.<sup>39</sup> The waning of sexual prowess, if not desire, in old age was another common anxiety. Cato welcomes this as a positive as it only detracted from higher pursuits, such as philosophy.<sup>40</sup> One activity that Cato found increasingly of interest in his old age was farming, particularly in noting the cultivation of vines, but also the kitchen garden, the care of cattle and of bees. One can imagine that this is primarily an intellectual interest, gentlemen like Cato did not actually dig the ground, or milk the cows.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Cato / Cicero argues that old age is not to be feared as it means the inevitability of death is not far away and this is the period of life to prepare for it through the study of philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

Although written in the voice of Cato, it is not hard to understand why the subject of old age might have preoccupied Cicero in his early sixties. While it can be argued that he was about the approach the year which many Romans considered ‘climacteric’<sup>43</sup> it is perhaps more the precariousness of his political and personal situation that has focussed his mind. Cicero had lost his beloved daughter, Tullia, in 45 BCE and turned to the consolation of philosophy to help him endure his grief. He was also facing a turbulent political time in which he had not only started out supporting the wrong side but was also in danger of being side-lined. Setting the discourse as a conversation between the elderly statesman and two young men was perhaps a way of negotiating a role for older men in the new political reality in which the younger generation were taking over.<sup>44</sup> Despite his words, the possibility of ‘retirement’ from politics to a life of intellectual pursuits, a life of *otium*, did not seem to be particularly attractive to Cicero.

39 Ibid., 11.36.

40 Ibid., 12.41.

41 Ibid., 15.51–54.

42 Ibid., 23.84–85.

43 “Observatum in multa hominum memoria expertumque est, senioribus plerisque omnibus sexagesimum tertium vitae annum cum periculo et clade aliqua venire aut corporis morbi que gravioris aut vitae interitus aut animi aegritudinis. Propterea, qui rerum verborumque istiusmodi studio tenentur eum aetatis annum appellant κλιμακτηρικόν.” “It has been observed during a long period of human recollection, and found to be true, that for almost all old men the sixty-third year of their age is attended with danger, and with some disaster involving either serious bodily illness, or loss of life, or mental suffering. Therefore, those who are engaged in the study of matters and terms of that kind call that period of life the ‘climacteric.’” For the text and translation, cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* (*Attic Nights*), vol. 2, ed. and transl. by John C. Rolfe, Cambridge, Mass. 1989 (Loeb Classical Library 212), 15. 7.1–2.

44 On intergenerational conflict in this period, cf. Elena Isayev, *Unruly Youth? The Myth of Generation Conflict in Late Republican Rome*, in: *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 56 (2007), pp. 1–13.

A century and a half later, Plutarch, in a short treatise, “An seni respublica gerenda sit” (“On whether an Old Man Should Withdraw from Public Affairs”),<sup>45</sup> reiterated several of Cicero’s themes. Plutarch regarded the experience and wisdom that came with old age as the qualities that should recommend the older statesman for a life in service to the state. To ‘retire’ or withdraw from public life at the moment one has most to offer was considered shameful. Withdrawal and a life of domesticity was for women, not for men. Plutarch and Cicero were senior statesmen who had held significant roles in the state, they did not want to lose the dignity, *gravitas* and authority that accompanied that status, nor did they wish the state to lose the benefit of their years of experience in holding office.<sup>46</sup>

The portrait images produced during Cicero’s lifetime reflected his attitudes towards old age, making a virtue of the physical characteristics of ageing. Sculpted images depicted every wrinkle, scar, drooping eyelids, furrowed brows, thinning lips, accentuated nasal-labial lines and receding hairlines. Figs. 1 and 2 are typical of this veristic style. Fig. 1 dates to the last century BCE. Fig. 2 depicts a similar image which maybe a Republican original or a mid-1<sup>st</sup> century CE rendering in the veristic style of a balding male with carefully delineated facial features which show sunken cheeks, furrowed, frowning brow, bags under the eyes and down-turned mouth. These portrait styles depict the individual as dignified, serious and authoritative; they reflect the *gravitas* of a life lived in public service.<sup>47</sup>

These portrait busts are meant to be viewed frontally. The artists have worked hard to ensure age is a central feature of the production. The emphasised facial expressions and serious demeanour are understood to reflect the character of the individual – a man who has done his duty to the state and the gods, has *gravitas* and has earned respect. The portrait reflects the very wisdom and experience that Cicero and Plutarch plead for the elderly. Cicero himself, if the portrait is correctly attributed, had a portrait in the same vein.<sup>48</sup> Republican portraiture represents a public way of being remembered and puts an emphasis on the nobility of ageing.

45 Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (Plutarch), *Moralia* (Morals), vol. 10, ed. and transl. by Harold Cherniss, Cambridge, Mass. 1976 (The Loeb Classical Library 427), pp. 73–153; sections 783 b–797 f.

46 On respect due to senators, cf. Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 106–129.

47 On Republican portrait traditions, cf. Jane Fejfer, *Roman Portraits in Context*, Berlin-New York 2008 (Image & Context 2), pp. 263–268; Jeremy Tanner, *Portraits, Power and Patronage in the Late Republic*, in: *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000), pp. 18–50; Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, Yale 2002, pp. 31–47.

48 A bust identified as Cicero is in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

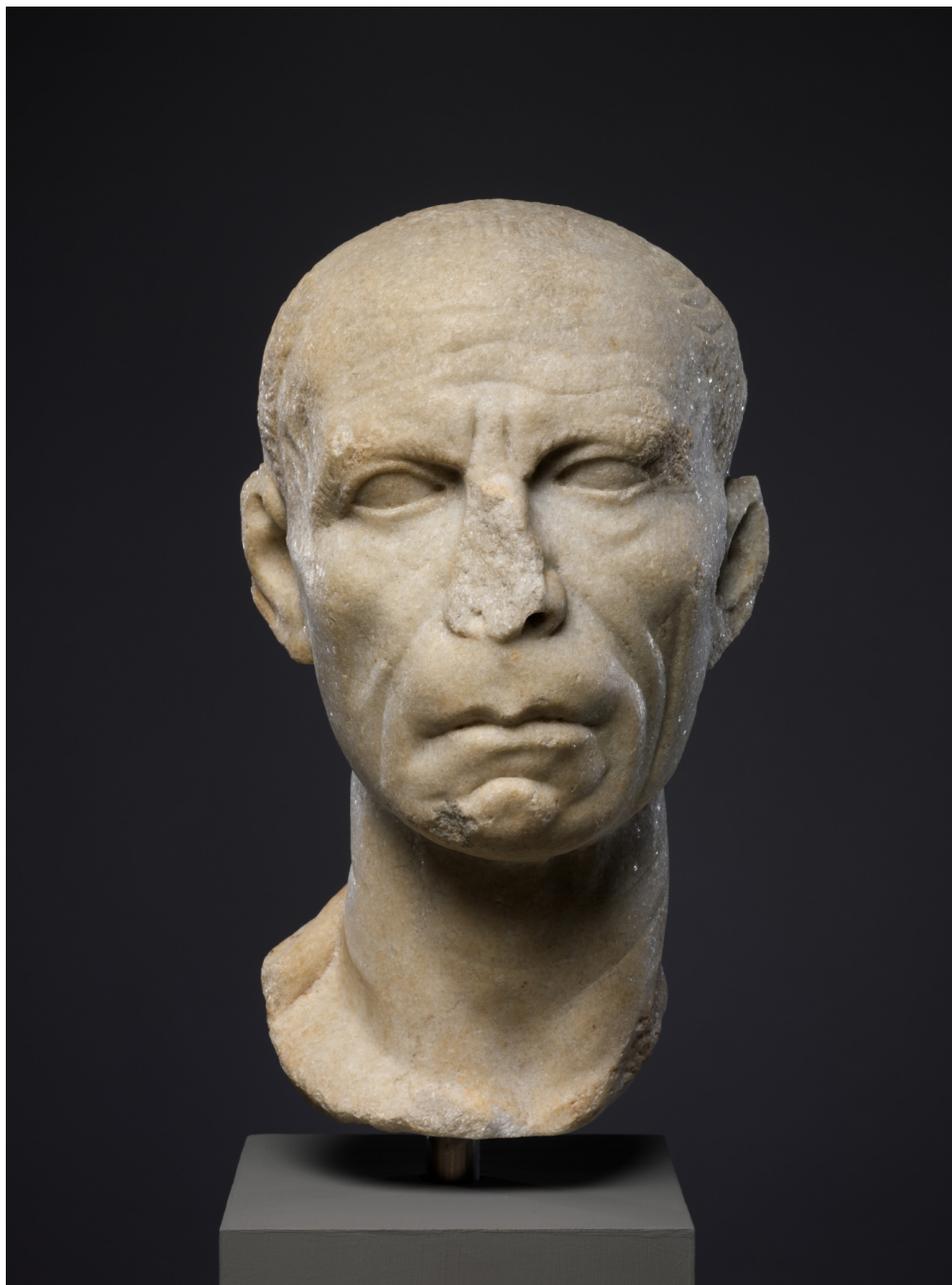


Fig. 1: Marble portrait of a man, late 1st century BC, Rogers Fund, 1921, Acc. No. 21.88.14, Metropolitan Museum of Art. URL: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/251040>; 7.6.2022.

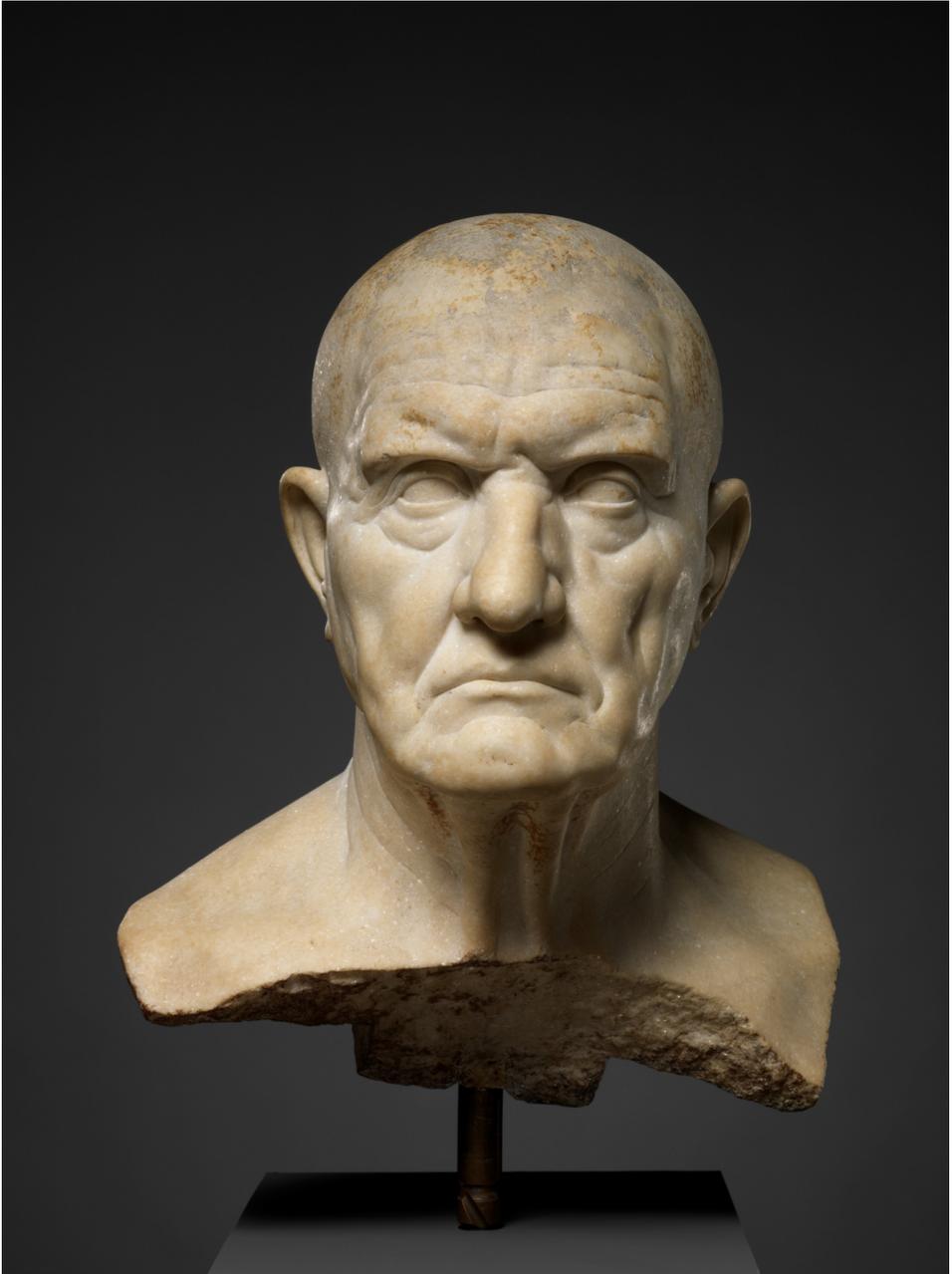


Fig. 2: Marble bust of a man, mid-1st century AD, Rogers Fund, 1912, Acc. No. 12.233, Metropolitan Museum of Art. URL: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248722>; 7.6.2022.

However, as we have seen above, this does not mean everyone was equally sanguine about the ageing process. Even Cicero was said to have worn his tunic low at the back of his legs to hide his varicose veins.<sup>49</sup> Julius Caesar was apparently embarrassed by his baldness to the extent that he created the world's first known comb-over by bringing the hair from the back of his head to the front. Suetonius reports that he was pleased to be awarded the laurel wreath as he could use that to cover his balding head.<sup>50</sup> Hair loss is a common part of the physical aspect of ageing and was clearly an issue for some men. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Synesius of Cyrene, a neo-Platonist philosopher, warrior lord and bishop, wrote a treatise with the title "On Baldness" ("Calvitii Encomium"). This was partly a response to an "Encomium on Hair" ("Encomium comae") by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE orator Dio Chrysostom.<sup>51</sup> Synesius bemoans the fact that he was "wounded to the heart when the terrible thing happened and my hair began to fall off" and was anxious about how women would view him: "What wrong have I done that I should appear unsightly to the fair sex?"<sup>52</sup> But he then goes on to list a catalogue of positive attributes of baldness: all philosophers are bald and wise, while a man with hair is unlikely to be wise. Bald men, Synesius argues, along the lines of Cicero and Plutarch, make up the worthy in society, they are the priests, prophets, generals, school masters, and guardians of youth, and possess a superiority of intelligence.<sup>53</sup> Synesius was a highly educated member of the upper classes and his treatise, like those of Cicero and Plutarch is as much about expressing his own intelligence and rhetorical skills as it is about its subject matter. Synesius, moreover, includes parody and humour in his sketches of bald and hairy men, so it is hard to know how seriously to take his words. His treatise does highlight the point that men may begin to lose their hair at any age, but the very fact that their hair was thinning aged them socially.

The physical attributes of ageing, such as greying and thinning hair, were easy targets for writers of satire and comedy who chose to highlight the grotesque and to exaggerate

49 Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (Quintilian), *Institutio Oratoria* (*Institutes of Oratory*), vol. 5, ed. and transl. by Donald A. Russell, Cambridge, Mass. 2001 (Loeb Classical Library 494), 11.13.143.

50 Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *Julius Caesar*, in: id., *De vita Caesarum* (*Lives of the Caesars*), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by John C. Rolfe, Cambridge, Mass. 1914 (Loeb Classical Library 31, 38), pp. 37–149, at 45.

51 For a fuller commentary on Synesius "On Baldness", cf. Mary Harlow, Introduction, in: *A Cultural History of Hair in Antiquity*, London-New York 2019 (*A Cultural History of Hair* 1), pp. 1–3.

52 Synesius (of Cyrene), *Calvitii Encomium* (*In Praise of Baldness*), ed. and transl. by George H. Kendal, Vancouver 1985, 1.

53 *Ibid.*, 1. 3.

many of the characteristics of old age which we first came across in Aristotle. Juvenal, writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, highlights the hideousness of ageing in his description of “the unceasing miseries of a long old age”.

“Give me a long life, Jupiter, give me many years.’ But just think of the many, never ending disadvantages an extended old age is full of! Take a look at its face, first of all – ugly and hideous and unrecognisable – and the ugly hide in place of skin and the drooping jowls and the wrinkles ... But old men all look the same: voice and body trembling alike, head now quite smooth, a baby’s dripping nose. The pathetic creature has to munch his bread with weaponless gums. He’s so disgusting to his wife and kids and to himself that he makes even Cossus the fortune-hunter feel sick.”<sup>54</sup>

As the satire progresses, the debilitations of old age accumulate: the old man cannot enjoy food, or sex, or even conversation as he is now deaf; his dignity is lost as he needs to be fed by his slaves and, finally his memory goes and he cannot tell the difference between his slaves and his children. Juvenal’s character with his wrinkled skin, baldness and incapacity provides a very different reading of the sculpted portraits, and also of Galen’s, Cicero’s and Plutarch’s notions of growing old gracefully and usefully. Karen Cokayne notes the similarities between Juvenal’s fictional old man and the situation of Domitius Tullus whom Pliny reports as being so incapacitated by age that his slaves needed to feed him and clean his teeth. The final indignity for a man of status was having to lick the fingers of his slaves.<sup>55</sup>

While Juvenal may ridicule old men for their impotence, increased sexual appetite was also a matter for criticism. Sexual misbehaviour on the part of old men (and women) was the antithesis of the attitudes advocated by Cicero / Cato in “De Senectute”. One

54 “Da spatium vitae, multos da, Iuppiter, annos.’ [hoc recto vultu, solum hoc et pallidus optas.] sed quam continuis et quantis longa senectus plena malis! deformem et taetrum ante omnia vultum dissimilemque sui, deformem pro cute pellem pendentisque genas et talis aspice rugas quales, una senum facies, cum voce trementia membra et iam leve caput madidique infantia nasi; frangendus misero gingiva panis inermi. usque adeo gravis uxori natisque sibique, ut captatori moveat fastidia Cosso.” For the text and translation, cf. Decimus Junius Juvenalis (Juvenal), *Saturae (Satires)*, in: id. / Aulus Persius Flaccus, *Juvenal and Persius, The Satires of Juvenal*, ed. and transl. by Susanna Morton Braund, Cambridge, Mass. 2004 [Loeb Classical Library 91], pp. 43–512, satire 10, pp. 364–397; ll. 190–191, 198–202).

55 Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 54–55; Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, vol. 2, ed. by Radice (see note 1), ep. 8.18. On Pliny and old age, cf. Parkin, *Ageing in Antiquity* (see note 26).

of the stock characters of Roman comedy was the *senex amator*, the elderly lover. The humour lay in the over-turning of acceptable social behavioural norms wherein love and passion were the prerogative of the young. For a father, already ugly and unattractive by virtue of his age, to chase after young women caused embarrassment to his grown-up sons and threatened the *status quo*. Such a character is exemplified by Demipho in Plautus's "Mercator". As Karen Cokayne has shown, Demipho is set up as the antithesis of the respectable Roman *paterfamilias*. He is described as physically abhorrent (grey-haired, knock-kneed, pot-bellied, big mouthed, with lantern jaws and splayed feet) and very conscious of his own role-reversal bad behaviour. Demipho seeks to justify his desire for a young girl, his own son's girlfriend, by arguing for a reconsideration of social norms: old age should be the right time to have an affair, youth a time for making money.<sup>56</sup> Such a suggestion flies in the face of Roman tradition wherein youth is a time for love, passion and the running up of debt rather than accumulation of wealth. In the "Mercator" the topsy-turvy world of comedy is, of course, righted by the end of the play and normality resumed with Demipho agreeing to behave in a way more suited to his age and the son getting the girl. The humour lies in the audience shared understanding of cultural norms about old age and youth and knowing that any subverting of values lasts only for the duration of the play. Comedy does however offer a good foil to the moralising and medical writings discussed above.<sup>57</sup>

While the elderly lover is ridiculed for behaviour unsuited to his age, we should note that two of the most conspicuous individuals mentioned in this paper – Cato the Elder and Cicero – despite any pontificating on the virtue of sexual abstinence and the decline of sexual prowess in old age, both remarried as older men to much younger women. It was the Roman tradition for a wife to be perhaps 8–10 years younger than her husband, an age-gap any greater than this could raise questions.<sup>58</sup> Among the upper classes of Roman society we can track several examples of men marrying multiple times to ever younger women. Pompey the Great, for instance, married five times to increasingly younger women. His last two wives, Julia – the daughter of Julius Caesar – and Cornelia Metella, were younger than his children by a previous marriage and Cornelia would have made a more suitable partner for his son – but both these marriages were characterised by Plutarch as being particularly affectionate and loving – rather subverting Plutarch's

56 Titus Maccius Plautus, *Mercator, or the Merchant*, in: id., *The Merchant, the Braggart Soldier, the Ghost, the Persian*, ed. and transl. by Wolfgang De Melo., Cambridge, Mass. 2011 (The Loeb Classical Library 163), pp. 1–128, at ll. 546–549.

57 Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 115–133, in particular pp. 119–120.

58 Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1), pp. 92–103.

own apparent disapproval for such out-of-step unions.<sup>59</sup> Cato the Elder, for all the words Cicero put into his mouth about the lessening of both sexual desire and appetite, and being held up as a model of Roman austerity and *virtus*, remarried at the age of seventy-four. After the death of his wife, Cato shared a house with his son and daughter-in-law. Here, Cato consoled himself with a young slave girl. His son, however, expressed disgust at his elderly father's behaviour. This prompted Cato to offer himself in marriage to the young daughter of one of his clients. The client was hardly in a position to oppose the match, so Cato remarried at the age of seventy-four and fathered another son.<sup>60</sup>

Cicero himself was not above breaking normal social codes. At the age of sixty, he divorced his wife, Terentia, after thirty-three years of marriage, and promptly married his young ward, Publilia. Publilia was about fifteen at the time of her marriage and much younger than her new stepchildren. Cicero was accused by his ex-wife of being swept off his feet by Publilia's youth and charm. Despite their moral stands, both these men broke the social codes surrounding the behaviour of older men. Cicero, however, did respond by saying he married Publilia because he needed new political alliances and money (these are much more acceptable reasons for a marriage in the Roman mind).<sup>61</sup> These examples, from the lives of real rather than fictional characters, show that the double standard was alive and well in upper-class Roman culture. Sexual activity in old age, particularly between disparate age groups might have been disapproved of in high-flown intellectual texts and in comic writing, but the social reality appears to reflect a different set of values.

As stated above, our views of Roman social life are seen through the dominant prism of literate, upper class males. This very small group of the Roman population reflect the preoccupations of their own class and gender, and their own anxieties about growing old. They were not particularly interested in the lives of elderly women. As

59 Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, Pompey, in: id., *Vitae parallelae* (Parallel Lives), vol. 5, ed. and transl. by Bernadotte Perrin, London et al. 1967 (The Loeb Classical Library 87), pp. 115–325, at 53.1 on Pompey's devotion to Julia, and Plutarch's comment that Pompey "at his age, scarcely seemed a fit object for such devotion"; on Pompey's marriage to Cornelia: *ibid.*, 55.2. For Plutarch's "Lives" cf., for example, the following edition: Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (Plutarch), *Vitae parallelae* (Parallel Lives), 11 vols., ed. and transl. by Bernadotte Perrin, London et al. 1959–1971 (The Loeb Classical Library 46–47, 65, 80, 87, 98–103). Cf. also Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1), p. 96; Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), p. 126; Shelley P. Haley, *Five Wives of Pompey the Great*, in: *Greece and Rome* 32 (1985), pp. 49–59.

60 Plutarchus, Cato Maior, in: id., *Parallel Lives*, vol. 2, ed. by Perrin (see note 59), pp. 301–385, at 24, 27.

61 Plutarchus, Cicero, in: id., *Parallel Lives*, vol. 7, ed. by Perrin (see note 59), pp. 81–209, at 41; Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1), pp. 98–99.

Roman *matronae* did not write their own histories, the lives of older Roman women are even more invisible than those of their younger counterparts.<sup>62</sup>

For women in Roman society marriage and motherhood was the accepted life path. For respectable women there were very few other options available. A father's status was reflected in the marriage partner he could achieve for his daughter, and the prospective bride often had little choice over whom she married.<sup>63</sup> Once married, a woman's status improved if she became a mother of legitimate offspring, a *materfamilias*.<sup>64</sup> Within the family, a woman could gain authority as she aged and the number of people within her sphere of influence increased. Thus, as a mother, aunt and grandmother she might have an extensive group of individuals tied to her through *pietas* and respect. Latin history writers often used women as *exempla*, as models of good behaviour to be emulated. One such was Veturia, the elderly (as her name implies) mother of Coriolanus who, together with his wife, Volumnia, confronted her son and demand he chose between Rome and his mother and family, or the Volscians.<sup>65</sup> Veturia is presented as reflection of Republican values, embodied in a woman – prepared to put the state and her family before herself. The speeches given to Veturia by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy both stress Roman ideals of the Augustan period: Veturia points out to her son that if he goes to war with Rome he will be guilty of matricide as well a traitor to his country. Her speech emphasises her role as a mother who chose not to remarry and have more children who would care for her in her old age, but instead she dedicated herself to Coriolanus' upbringing, in the expectation of reciprocal care as she grew older. In Livy's version, Veturia refers to

62 Suzanne Dixon's book remains one of the best texts on the problems of locating women in Roman life and literature (Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women. Sources, Genres and Real Life*, London 2001).

63 On Roman marriage, cf. Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (see note 10); on marriage in the life course, cf. Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1), pp. 79–91.

64 For brief discussion of the female life course, cf. Harlow/Laurence, *Growing Up* (see note 1); Harlow, *Blurred visions* (see note 3), pp. 197–201; Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, London 1988; Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 159–164.

65 Titus Livius (Livy), *Ab urbe condita* (*History of Rome*), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by Benjamin O. Foster, Cambridge, Mass. 2014 (Loeb Classical Library 114), 2.40; Dionysius Halicarnassensis (Dionysius of Halicarnassus), *Antiquitates Romanae* (*The Roman Antiquities*), vol. 5, ed. and transl. by Earnest Cary, Cambridge, Mass. 2014 (Loeb Classical Library 372), 8.40–54; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri* (*Memorable Doings and Sayings*), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, Cambridge, Mass. 2014 (Loeb Classical Library 492), 5. 4.1; Katariina Mustakallio, *Representing Older Women. Hersilia, Veturia, Virgo Vestalis Maxima*, in: Christian Krötzel/Katariina Mustakallio (Eds.), *On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2011 (*The History of Daily Life* 2), pp. 40–56.

herself as *senecta*, as part of her emotional appeal to her son. Both historians attribute very emotive speeches to a woman which play on the duties expected of sons towards their mothers, and the authority a mother could expect to command as she grew older.<sup>66</sup>

Another famous mother whose attempt to exert influence over her son was less successful, was Livia, the wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius. The relationship between the elderly Livia and her adult son is a complex story, related to us through the eyes of partisan historians. Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio all report negatively on her behaviour during and following her husband's last days. According to Tacitus and Cassius Dio she controlled news of Augustus's death until her son could be recalled from Illyricum, and having been instrumental in his accession to power, expected some role for herself.<sup>67</sup> Livia was seventy-two when she became a widow; her long marriage to Augustus and the influence and patronage she had accrued during his reign put her in a position comparable to the one of Plutarch's elder statesman not wishing to be side-lined. The Roman male world view did not include women in positions of power and any attempt by Livia to exert her influence was met by resistance from Tiberius and disparagement by the recorders of the period. Suetonius reports that Tiberius avoided meeting his mother as he did not want to give the appearance of being guided by her. Accordingly, he refused her any conspicuous honours and warned her not to meddle with affairs of importance which he considered to be unbecoming to a woman. Suetonius and Tacitus both assert that Tiberius's 'retirement' to Capri was a result of his frustration with Livia's constant interfering.<sup>68</sup> Like many elder statesmen, Livia did not wish to withdraw but there was no established role for a dowager empress to slip into. She became a role model for the imperial women who came after her. Livia, like Ummidia Quadratilla is a bit of a 'special case' due to her unique position in Roman history, and because she lived to a great age, dying at her late eighties in 29 CE.

66 Judith P. Hallett, *Absent Roman Fathers in the Writings of their Daughters*. Cornelia and Sulpicia, in: Sabine R. Hübner/David M. Ratzan (Eds.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 175–191, at p. 184.

67 Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales (Annals) I–III*, in: id., *The Histories*, vol. 2: *Histories*, books IV–V. *Annals*, books I–III, ed. and transl. by John Jackson, London-New York 1931 (*The Loeb Classical Library* 249), pp. 242–643, at 1. 5,5–6; Lucius Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana (Roman History)*, vol. 8, ed. and transl. by Earnest Cary, Cambridge, Mass. 2005 (*The Loeb Classical Library* 176), 57.12.

68 Suetonius, *Tiberius*, in: id., *Lives of the Caesars*, ed. Rolfe (see note 50), pp. 291–401, at 50–51; Tacitus, *Annals*. Books 4–6, 11–12, ed. and transl. by John Jackson, Cambridge, Mass. 2006 (*Loeb Classical Library* 312), 4.57; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, ed. by Cary (see note 67), 57.12; Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 162–163.

Women of wealth and status could have some bargaining positions with their offspring who might expect to inherit from them. They also had moral tradition on their side and could insist on the duty of children to at least support their elderly parents and at best obey their wishes. It appears that older women, as well as men, knew how to play on the stereotypes of ageing to establish or maintain their status. Within the family and wider society respectable women seem to gain authority and *gravitas* as they aged. They might also become independent to a certain extent, particularly if wealthy in their own right, and be able to live their lives as they pleased, like Ummidia Quadratilla.

However, not every woman was a *matrona* and there is a group of women who have practically a whole genre of literature which focuses on them – this is the ageing courtesan and prostitute.<sup>69</sup> All the tropes concerning the ageing body that men worried about were exaggerated when they were addressed to women. Roman poetry is full of love stories between young poets and their young courtesans; youth and beauty walked hand-in-hand in the elegiac and satirical *mentalité*. Young courtesans who depended on their charm and looks to captivate lovers, are presented as having an understandable fear of growing older, when whatever seductive power they may have wielded over their lovers would wane. Propertius writes to Cynthia warning her to make the most of her charms while they last: “May old age oppress you with the burden of the years, and may ugly wrinkles come upon your beauty. Then you may wish to tear at the white hairs by the roots and now the mirror chides you with wrinkles”.<sup>70</sup>

The threat of ageing means the death of beauty to Propertius. It is the final insult to the cast aside mistress, that despite their natural beauty or clever use of cosmetics, age cannot be denied or hidden. Like men, women also attempted to hide the visible ravages of ageing. Martial gives a vivid description of an ageing prostitute, Galla, and how she takes off her street *persona* at night: “You are at home yourself Galla, but you are made up in the middle of the Subura. Your hair is manufactured in your absence. You lay your teeth aside at night, as you do your silks, and lie stored in a hundred caskets. Your face does not sleep with you ...”.<sup>71</sup>

69 Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 135–152. Vincent Rosivach presents a series of negative stereotypes including witches, drunks and whores (Vincent Rosivach, *Anus. Some Older Women in Latin Literature*, in: *Classical World* 88,2 [1994], pp. 107–117).

70 Sextus Aurelius Propertius, *Elegiae* (Elegies), ed. and transl. by George P. Goold, Cambridge, Mass. 1990 (Loeb Classical Library 18), 3.25.11–16.

71 Marcus Valerius Martialis, *Epigrammata* (Epigrams), ed. and transl. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, vol. 2: Books 6–10, Cambridge, Mass. 1993 (Loeb Classical Library 95), 9.37.

The failing body of the elderly women is also targeted by the satirists – here is just one example by Horace, and not by any means the most ‘disgusting’:

“I’m not a hard young man, nor do I have an insensitive nose; for whether it’s a stinking cuttlefish or a goat that lurks in your hairy armpits, I can smell it out more keenly than a sharp-scented hound detects where a female boar is hiding. What a sweat and what a nasty smell comes from her withered limbs when, finding my penis limp, she presses on to satisfy her wild lust, her chalk make-up grows damp, and, along with the rosy colour produced from crocodiles’ dung, begins to run, and now in her animal heat she breaks the thongs of the bedstead and its canopy”.<sup>72</sup>

While Roman authors were not particularly interested (or perhaps too delicate to address) the sexual desires of respectable women – when it came to women they viewed as over-sexed or demanding, it upset their sensibilities about the gendered natural order in which men were virile, masculine and dominant, whereas women were weak, feminine and subordinate. Beautiful young courtesans could cross this boundary by virtue of their allure and, in the poetic world at least, they could rule over their young lovers. Older, uglier, ‘smellier’ women were not permitted this licence – they lost their power and should ‘retire’ gracefully assuming the values and behaviour of respectable women. The reality was probably that such a choice was simply not available to lower class women, whatever their professions.

This attitude towards women was also reflected in some art: the grotesque and pathos of these images of drunken or elderly working women – shows the visible effects of ageing in a very different way from the earlier portraits – but they may, for all their stylistic contrivances, reflect the reality for poor women without resources (fig. 3). In the poorer classes, the elderly, both men and women, had to rely on family support once they reached the stage of dependency – if they reached that stage. The reality of life for the poor elderly with failing health and no resources was stark. There was no such thing as state support and most elderly individuals in the Roman world probably worked until they ‘dropped’.

72 “mittis nec firmo iuveni neque naris obesae? namque sagacius unus odoror, polypus an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis, quam canis acer ubi lateat sus. qui sudor vietis et quam malus undique membris crescit odor, cum pene soluto indomitam properat rabiem sedare, neque illi iam manet umida creta colorque stercore fucatus crocodili, iamque subando tenta cubilia tectaque rumpit!” For the text and translation, cf. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), *Epodi liber* (Epodes), in: id., *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and transl. by Niall Rudd, Cambridge, Mass. 2004 (Loeb Classical Library 33), pp. 22–261, epode 12, ll. 3–12.



Fig. 3: Marble statue of an old woman, 14–68 AD, Rogers Fund, 1909, Acc. No. 09.39, Metropolitan Museum of Art. URL: [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248132?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Marble+statue+of+an+old+woman&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248132?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Marble+statue+of+an+old+woman&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=;); 7.6.2022.

## 2 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a rather eclectic ‘taster’ lecture of a selection of Roman attitudes towards old age. Despite the limitations of the source material, it is possible to review the range of, often contradictory, images of growing older in Roman society. One theme that runs through all the examples is that of vulnerability, or the fear of it, be it physical or mental. The physical aspects of ageing seen on the body (wrinkles, loss of musculature, thinning, greying hair, stooped postures etc.) could only be disguised so far. Coupled with mental incapacity (loss of memory, inability to communicate, dementia etc.) old age could make the individual very vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life. Elderly relatives would fare better if they had family support and the wealthy could perhaps rely on their slaves to care for them if they lacked family. The reciprocal behaviour owed by children to parents, embodied in the virtue of *pietas*, might offer an ageing parent support and protection but several legal rulings suggest this might not be an automatic presumption.<sup>73</sup> We have seen above how some mothers could pull emotional strings by stressing the duty owed to them, but also that some sons resented such pressure and assumptions.<sup>74</sup>

Latin authors could use several tropes and stereotypes of ageing across many different genres because they reflected a form of reality even if grossly exaggerated. For wealthy men the best way to prepare for the inevitable decline was to follow certain regimens, and to hope you might be Spurrina rather than the old man in Juvenal’s tenth satire. Elderly women might hope to emulate Ummidia Quadratilla perhaps. Some, however, chose not to face a painful decline. Despite the advice Cicero offered his great friend Atticus in “De Senectute”, at the age of seventy-eight and in pain from an intestinal illness, Atticus refused food in order to bring about his death. A similar approach was taken by Pliny’s guardian, Corellius Rufus, who suffered terrible pains in his feet.<sup>75</sup> Such deaths were considered an honourable exit from life. The dignity of such a death might not be possible for the vast majority of the population of the Roman world.

One of the great limitations of the source material is that it is rarely interested in the poor or working classes except in what survives in comic interludes and satire

73 *Digesta seu pandectae Iustiniani Augusti*, vol. 1, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, Berlin 1870, 25. 3.5; Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 205–216.

74 On intergenerational conflicts, cf. Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 1), pp. 226–228; Isayev, *Unruly Youth?* (see note 44).

75 Cornelius Nepos, *De excellentibus ducibus exterarum gentium* (On Great Generals. On Historians), ed. and transl. by John C. Rolfe, Cambridge, Mass. 1929 (Loeb Classical Library 467), Atticus, 21–22; Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, vol. 1, ed. by Radice (see note 1), ep. 1.12.

(written primarily by the upper classes). Horace and Martial's prostitutes fit into this category, their sexual grotesqueness further exasperated by their poverty or potential poverty once they can no longer earn a living from their bodies. Like much of the world population in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, large numbers of people in the Roman world would either not live long enough to enjoy an old age, or if they did, would simply work until they 'dropped'. It is to be hoped that readers who have got this far will follow the regimen of Romilius Pollio – who lived to be a hundred – take honeyed wine within and oil without.<sup>76</sup>

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76 Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis historia* (Natural History), vol. 6, ed. and transl. by William H. S. Jones, Cambridge, Mass. 1969 (Loeb Classical Library 392), 22.53.114.

Sonja Kerth

## “ein krücke was sîn stiure”

### Literary Perspectives on Old Age and Disability in Medieval Courtly Romances (“Eneas”, “Erec”, “Iwein”/“Yvain”)

#### Abstract

Old age and the process of ageing have received a lot of attention in recent research on medieval literature, mainly in historical studies on rhetoric, topoi, genealogy and gender. My paper focuses on ageing and old age as a relevant subject for premodern literary disability studies. Elderly characters in medieval literature appear to be in a complex situation between ability as a positive mark of distinction and privilege (honouring their wisdom and experience) and disability as impairment, weakness, and privation that may cause a general handicap in human life. After an overview my paper focuses on elderly characters in selected romances by Heinrich von Veldeke (“Eneasroman”), Hartmann von Aue (“Erec”<sup>1</sup> and “Iwein”), and their Old French sources. Even though the elderly figures in medieval vernacular narratives usually play rather marginal roles in the plot, they are connected to important subjects such as intergenerational relationships, succession to the throne, (lack of) physical strength in battle, experience, wisdom, and the (un)willingness to step back behind the younger characters.

From a physical perspective, many aspects of ageing and old age seem to be naturally determined biological facts, part of evolution or at least to have remained constant over centuries in the sense of *longue durée*.<sup>2</sup> Social sciences tend to have a different view: they

1 The quotation “ein krücke was sîn stiure”, “A crutch supported him”, is taken from Hartmann von Aue’s “Erec” (Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*. *Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch*, ed., transl. and comment. by Volker Mertens, Stuttgart 2008 [RUB 18530], v. 290 (E); English translation: Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, ed. and transl. by Cyril Edwards, Suffolk 2014 [German Romance V], p. 17).

2 Christian A. Neumann, *Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik*, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2018), pp. 387–405, at p. 388; Jürgen Wiener, *Einleitung*, in: id. (Ed.), *Altersphantasien im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Düsseldorf 2015 (*Studia humaniora* 49), pp. 7–15, at pp. 7, 10.

regard old age primarily as a cultural and historical construct that is regarded differently in varying times and societies.<sup>3</sup> Archaeological and anthropological studies which seem to be closest to a historical ‘reality’ teach us that both views cannot be separated or measured up against each other.<sup>4</sup> Within this discourse, that requires interdisciplinary approaches, literary studies seem to be relatively free of limitations. Their sources naturally do not ‘operate’ without connection to a historical and sociocultural context. However, they give a voice to hopes, dreams, fears, dangers, and alternatives, and they present imaginations and abstract concepts.<sup>5</sup> Like any other form of art, they are free to experiment, and this has consequences for the way literary texts depict and reflect old age and ageing.

## 1 Old Age and Disability in Medieval Literature. An Overview

The most common premodern cultural model for ageing is the understanding of life as a sequence of stages, often represented by sections of a wheel or steps on a staircase, each representing a certain number of years. As pictures show, every stage is connected with certain activities, clothes, accessories, and a standing in society that decreases from the middle of life onwards. Old age usually begins around the age of 50 years and persons in the phases of life starting from 60 to 70 years onward are considered to be very old. Textual representations connect these advanced stages of life with terms such as “weak”, “decrepit”, and “withering”.<sup>6</sup> This model does not leave much room for individual physical or mental conditions connected to ageing, and it gives the impression that impairments

3 Cf. e.g. Lynn Botelho, *Old Age and Menopause in Rural Women of Early Modern Suffolk*, in: ead./Pat Thane (Eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, Harlow et al. 2001, pp. 43–65.

4 Cf. e.g. Eva Stauch, *Alt werden im Frühmittelalter*, in: Brigitte Röder/Willemijn de Jong/Kurt W. Alt (Eds.), *Alter(n) anders denken. Kulturelle und biologische Perspektiven*, Köln 2012 (*Kulturgeschichte der Medizin* 2), pp. 133–160.

5 Tory Vandeventer Pearman: “[L]iterary discourse’s proliferation of the disabled body allows for a complex interrogation of the social, historical, and cultural understandings of the construction of the body and its race, sex, gender, class, and ability that does not exist in other discourses” (Tory Vandeventer Pearman, *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature*, New York 2010, at p. 21); cf. also Andreas Kraß, *Einführung: Historische Intersektionalitätsforschung als kulturwissenschaftliches Projekt*, in: Nataša Bedeković/id./Astrid Lembke (Eds.), *Durchkreuzte Helden. Das “Nibelungenlied” und Fritz Langs Film “Die Nibelungen” im Licht der Intersektionalitätsforschung*, Bielefeld 2014 (*GenderCodes* 17), pp. 7–47, at p. 18.

6 See also the chapter by Andrea von Hülsen-Esch in this volume; for literature in summary Sonja Kerth, *Alter(n) und Dis/ability in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, in: Cordula Nolte/Bianca

are considered ‘normal’ and inevitable for a human being of a certain age.<sup>7</sup> Wheels and stairs do not consider intersectional factors such as gender or social rank, because only men and members of the social upper class are depicted. These models are very common in premodern literature, especially in didactic contexts that teach people how to behave properly according to their status and stage of life. Due to this, literary studies researching age and ageing have specifically focused on aspects and questions connected with the stages of life and analysed a wide field of sources, especially lyrics, didactic and epic literature.<sup>8</sup> Some of the topoi connected to old age are positive, others are negative; they tend to be normative and stereotypical.<sup>9</sup> For old age and disability in complex narratives, the life stage model is not sufficient for interpretation.

Frohne/Uta Halle/Sonja Kerth (Eds.), *Dis/ability History der Vormoderne. Ein Handbuch. Pre-modern Dis/ability History. A Companion*, Affalterbach 2017, pp. 210–211.

7 Neumann, *Perspektiven* (see note 2), pp. 399–400.

8 *Groundsetting*: Ernst R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern-München 1973, pp. 108–115. Cf. also Thorsten Fitzon/Sandra Linden/Kathrin Liess/Dorothee Elm von der Osten (Eds.), *Alterszäsuren. Zeit und Lebensalter in Literatur, Theologie und Geschichte*, Berlin-Boston 2012; Dorothee Elm/Thorsten Fitzon/Kathrin Liess/Sandra Linden (Eds.), *Alters-topoi. Das Wissen von den Lebensaltern in Literatur, Kunst und Theologie*, Berlin-New York 2009; Ruth Sassenhausen, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen in der Periodisierung menschlicher Lebensalter. Zu ‘Schwellenzuständen’ in der Artusepik des hohen Mittelalters*, in: Ulrich Knefelkamp/Kristian Bosselmann-Cyran (Eds.), *Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung im Mittelalter. 11. Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes vom 14.–17. März 2005 in Frankfurt a. O.*, Berlin 2007, pp. 200–212; Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, *Junge Alte – alte Junge. Signale und paradoxe Verschränkungen des Alter(n)s in höfischer Epik*, in: Elisabeth Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit. Internationaler Kongress Krems an der Donau 16.–18. 10. 2006, Wien 2008* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit 21), pp. 141–155; For appropriate behaviour of old people in the context of didactic literature, cf. e. g. Ingrid Bennewitz, “wann alte weib und änten gehören in ainen see.” Ratschläge zum Umgang mit älteren Frauen und Männern in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see above), pp. 117–128; Wernfried Hofmeister, “Hânt alte liute jungen muot, die jungen alten, deist niht guot“. Das ‘sprichwörtliche Alter’ in Freidanks “Bescheidenheit”, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see above), pp. 129–140; Sonja Kerth, “myn heubt daz ist mir worden gra / myn ruck hat sich gebogen” – Alter(n) in der Sangspruchdichtung von Reinmar von Zweter bis Michel Beheim, in: JOWG 21 (2016–2017: Horst Brunner/Freimut Löser [Eds.], *Sangspruchdichtung zwischen Reinmar von Zweter, Oswald von Wolkenstein und Michel Beheim*), pp. 59–72; Sonja Kerth, “Homo debilis”. Dis/ability and Alter(n) in kleinepischen Verserzählungen, in: Ingrid Bennewitz/Jutta Eming/Johannes Traulsen (Eds.), *Gender Studies – Queer Studies – Intersektionalität. Eine Zwischenbilanz aus mediävistischer Perspektive*, Göttingen 2019 (Berliner Mittelalter- und Frühneuzeitforschung 25), pp. 269–292.

9 For topoi and metaphors used, cf. Simone Loleit, *Zeit- und Alterstopik im Minnesang. Eine Untersuchung zu Liedern Walthers von der Vogelweide, Reinmars, Neidharts und Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, Berlin 2018 (Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung 30), pp. 31–52, 155–180.

The research on old age and disability (and intersectionality) in medieval literature is still in its early stages.<sup>10</sup> This can be seen in the context of a certain reluctance (especially in German literary studies) to work with the methodological tools offered by disability history and intersectional studies in general. It is also a consequence of the way the texts themselves deal with old age: vernacular medieval love lyrics, for example, usually portray young, beautiful people in love affairs that are (hopefully, but not likely) about to start. According to the principle of *kalokagathia*, an old and unattractive body stands for deficit – both outward and inward – and therefore does not conform to the idealized lady in most of Trobadors', Trouvères' and Minnesänger's lyrics.<sup>11</sup>

In narratives (for example in courtly romances and heroic epics), aged persons are usually minor figures and remain far from the centre of the plot and the narrator's main focus.<sup>12</sup> Courtly romances typically present the life of young knights growing into an adult ruler's responsibility through fighting and experiencing love and marriage. The focus is usually on finding a wife and a place in the (fictional) feudal society. Ageing noblemen who rule their lands in a peaceful and orderly way, who live a courtly life and turn over their property to their sons only play supporting roles in the plot<sup>13</sup> and their

10 Detlef Goller, "die jungen zir gelichen, die alten zuo den alten." Der Platz alter Menschen in der höfischen Literatur, in: Cordula Nolte (Ed.), *Homo debilis. Behinderte – Kranke – Versehrte in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters*, Korb 2009 (Studien und Texte zur Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters 3), pp. 149–163; Rasma Lazda-Cazers, *Old Age in Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival" and "Titurel"*, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, Berlin-New York 2007 (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 2), pp. 201–218; Sonja Kerth, *Wolframs Greise. Alter(n) im "Parzival", "Titurel" und "Willehalm"*, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 144 (2015), pp. 48–76.

11 Cf. e.g. Volker Mertens, *Alter als Rolle. Zur Verzeitlichung des Körpers im Minnesang*, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 128 (2006), pp. 409–430; Loleit, *Zeit- und Alterstopik* (see note 9).

12 Cf. esp. the articles by Goller, "Die jungen" (see note 10); Barbara Haupt, *Alte Männer – alte Frauen in der volkssprachigen (deutschen) Epik des Mittelalters*, in: Wiener (Ed.), *Altersphantasien* (see note 2), pp. 41–68; Brinker-von der Heyde, *Junge Alte* (see note 8).

13 Ines Heiser, *Generationenkonflikte? Erbrecht und Elternfürsorge in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur*, in: ead./Andreas Meyer (Eds.), *Aufblühen und Verwelken. Mediävistische Forschungen zu Kindheit und Alter. 4. Tagung der Arbeitsgruppe "Marburger Mittelalterzentrum (MMZ)". Marburg, 17. November 2006, Leipzig 2009*, pp. 145–158; Detlef Goller, "Denn was wäre die Literatur ohne die Erzählung von Familiengeschichten, Nachfolge- und Erbstreitigkeiten." Nachlassfragen in den höfischen Romanen des hohen Mittelalters, in: Christoph Oliver Mayer/Alexandra-Kathrin Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen. Alter(n) in Romanischem Mittelalter und Renaissance*, München 2012 (Mittelalter und Renaissance in der Romania 5), pp. 179–196.

wives receive even less attention. In many romances, the parental generation has already passed away, or is not even mentioned.

In heroic epics and German *chansons de geste*, elderly characters traditionally play more active and prestigious roles as wise counsellors, experienced warriors and rulers. Still, they are usually supporting young protagonists as well, as seen in the case of old Hildebrand in “Nibelungenlied” (around 1200) and Dietrich von Bern epics (13–15<sup>th</sup> century). Other examples include old Heimrich in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s “Willehalm” (around 1220–1225) and old Berchtung in the “Wolfdietrich epics” (versions range from 13–15<sup>th</sup> century) who try to fight like the young ones, but experience handicaps due to physical weakness at times.<sup>14</sup> There seems to be only one elderly character at the centre of attention: In “Karlmeinet-Kompilation”, old Charlemagne still rules and fights undisputedly, but at times he also looks back passively and with melancholy on the defeat at Roncesvalles, when young Roland and Olivier fell in battle. On occasions like these, the mental, sensual and physical conditions of older male figures may be mentioned. Older women are hardly found in heroic epics. If they are named and singled out at all, it is because they support their husbands, sons, and nephews and form the emotional centre of the family, just like old Ute in the Dietrich epics and old Irmschart in “Willehalm”. This short synopsis suggests that epic narrations determine old figures less by general topoi about ageing and old age than by literary factors connected with individual texts: they are more or less fictional, determined by genre, plot, and themes, by figure concepts, narratology, and aesthetics.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of genre-related trends, every text needs to be examined with regard to its specific view on old age: are elderly figures presented at all? Which gender do they have, and what part do they play in the general plot? How are they viewed by the narrator and by other figures? Are they presented as being healthy, active, and integral in society or are they portrayed as handicapped, relying on the help of others and excluded? If elderly characters are shown to keep or acquire honourable roles like counselling, teaching, and

14 Cf. e. g. Wolfgang Dinkelacker, *Der alte Held. Belege aus mittelalterlicher Heldendichtung und ihr kulturhistorischer Quellenwert*, in: Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen* (see note 8), pp. 183–202; Kerth, *Wolframs Greise* (see note 10). The lament about physical weakness is a traditional topos in heroic epics, starting with Nestor in “Ilias” (Hartwin Brandt, verbal communication).

15 Cf. also the chapter on “Beowulf” in the following monograph by Thijs Porck: Thijs Porck, *Old Age in Early Medieval England. A Cultural History*, Woodbridge 2019 (*Anglo-Saxon Studies* 33), pp. 177–211; cf. also by the same author: id., *Vergrijzing in een Oudengels heldendicht. De rol van oude koningen in de Beowulf*, in: Madoc. *Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen* 26 (2012), pp. 66–76.

judging,<sup>16</sup> they stand for wisdom, purity, and merit and ask for authority, respect, and awe. They might be presented as having developed strategies of survival and adaptation through life experience. They seem to be blessed by being granted a long life and may appear to be the emotional centre of the family ('grandma-/grandpa-effect'). In these cases, having 'white hair' stands for a positive distinction, a privilege and special ability.<sup>17</sup>

However, if elderly characters fail to acquire or keep honourable roles, the texts demonstrate marginalization and devaluation. Elderly characters might be subject to an increase in illness and other impairments, such as a decline of the senses and physical and mental weakness. Old age might even be portrayed as being a chronic disease itself. Holding on to property, office, influence, sexuality, and other worldly joys is often considered to be inappropriate for the elderly and to pose a threat to the young:<sup>18</sup> many texts voice the opinion that all of these things should be left to the young, while the old should focus on death and afterlife.<sup>19</sup> If regarded this way, old age appears to be a kind of *debilitas*, meaning impairment, weakness, and privation. Following this logic, old age may be regarded as a general handicap in human life<sup>20</sup> and thus be considered as a disability.<sup>21</sup>

16 Rolf Sprandel, Modelle des Alterns in der europäischen Tradition, in: Hans Süssmuth (Ed.), Historische Anthropologie. Der Mensch in der Geschichte, Göttingen 1984 (Kleine Vandenhoeck-Reihe 1499), pp. 110–122; Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz, 'Alter' und 'Krankheit'. Die Dynamik der Diskurse und der Wandel ihrer historischen Aushandlungsformen, in: Josef Ehmer / Peter Gutschner (Eds.), Das Alter im Spiel der Generationen. Historische und sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2000 (Grenzenloses Österreich), pp. 109–155.

17 Hans-Werner Goetz, Alt sein und alt werden in der Vorstellungswelt des frühen und hohen Mittelalters, in: Vavra (Ed.), Alterskulturen (see note 8), pp. 17–58, at pp. 41–42, 48–49; cf. also Detlef Goller, Von dem grauen Haar: Eine Spurensuche in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur, in: Kurt Gärtner / Hans-Joachim Solms (Eds.), "Von Ion der wisheit". Gedenkschrift für Manfred Lemmer, Sandersdorf 2009 (Edition Scriptorum), pp. 95–106.

18 This perspective dominates the attitude towards old age in the pre-Reformation Church, cf. Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, „Die Kindlein spotten meiner schier.“ Quellen und Reflexionen zu den Alten und zum Vergreisungsprozess im Mittelalter, Hamburg 2006 (Hergemöllers historiographische Libelli 4), pp. 68–69, 84; cf. also Sprandel (see note 16), p. 115.

19 Kerth, "myn heupt" (see note 8).

20 Hans-Werner Goetz, "Debilis". Vorstellungen von menschlicher Gebrechlichkeit im frühen Mittelalter, in: Nolte (Ed.), "Homo debilis" (see note 10), pp. 21–55, at p. 46.

21 For general concepts of premodern disability history, cf. e. g.: Nolte et al., Dis/ability History (see note 6); Irina Metzler, A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages. Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment, New York-London 2013 (Routledge Studies in Cultural History 20); Bianca Frohne, Leben mit "kranckhait". Der gebrechliche Körper in der häuslichen Überlieferung

The literary sources I use for my considerations about old age and disability are vernacular courtly romances dating back to the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century: “Eneas” by Heinrich von Veldeke, “Erec” and “Iwein” by Hartmann von Aue and their Old French sources.<sup>22</sup> My analysis begins with an adaptation of the Bechdel test<sup>23</sup>, which is a list of questions developed by feminist researcher Alison Bechdel to evaluate US-American films with regard to their gender focus. Adjusted to my subject, one needs to ask:

1. Do the analysed romances portray at least two elderly characters? Are their names known?
2. Do the elderly characters talk to and interact with each other?
3. Do they talk about something other than about the younger characters? Do they act independently from the needs and goals of the younger characters?

After my text analysis, I will try to examine the portrayal of old age in relation to disability and to analyse the potential of literary conceptions of ageing and old age for the recipients.

## 2 “Eneas”

The Middle High German romance “Eneasroman” was written in the time period 1170–1180 by Heinrich von Veldeke.<sup>24</sup> It is based on the Old French “Roman d’Eneas”<sup>25</sup>, which was written around 1160 by an unknown author. In addition, Veldeke uses Vergil’s “Aeneis”, a Vergil-commentary by Servius and poetry by Ovid as sources.<sup>26</sup>

des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts. Überlegungen zu einer Disability History der Vormoderne, Affalterbach 2014 (Studien und Texte zur Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters 9).

22 See also Bernard Ribémont’s chapter about old age in French medieval literature in this volume.

23 Website: <http://bechdeltest.com/>; 7. 6. 2022.

24 Heinrich von Veldeke, Eneasroman. Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch. Nach dem Text von Ludwig Ettmüller, transl. and comment. by Dieter Kartschoke, Stuttgart 1986 (RUB 8303) (ER). English Translation: Rodney W. Fisher: Heinrich von Veldeke, “Eneas”. A Comparison with the “Roman d’Eneas” and a Translation into English, Bern et al. 1992 (Australian and New Zealand Studies in German Language and Literature 17).

25 Le Roman d’Eneas, transl. and introd. by Monica Schöler-Beinhauer, München 1972 (Klassische Texte des romanischen Mittelalters in zweisprachigen Ausgaben 9) (RdE). English translations by S.K.

26 For general information, cf. Joachim Hamm/Marie-Sophie Masse, Aeneasromane, in: Geert H. M. Claassens/Fritz Peter Knapp/Hartmut Kugler (Eds.), Historische und religiöse Erzählun-

Eneas leaves the burning city of Troy by order of the gods. In Carthage, he begins an affair with Queen Dido, whom he leaves in order to continue his journey to Italy where he is to found a new Troy. After a journey to the underworld, Eneas travels to Italy in order to marry princess Lavinia. Her fiancé, Turnus, refuses to give up his claim on the princess and the inheritance connected to her. Both men and their allies get involved in heavy fighting. Lavinia's elderly father, Latinus, supports Eneas, which is contrary to his former promises to Turnus. Lavinia's mother, on the other hand, stays loyal to Turnus and tries to prevent the marriage with Eneas by all means. During the negotiations and fights, Eneas and Lavinia see each other and fall deeply in love. After Eneas wins the battle against his opponent and kills Turnus, he marries Lavinia and becomes Latinus's successor. The old queen dies miserable and full of rage.

There are few elderly characters in "Eneasroman", and most of them are male. They are identified as being old by means of the use of the Middle High German word "ald(e)", and with distinctive attributes such as grey hair and bodily frailty, and sometimes with traits such as stubbornness. Some of them hold prestigious roles such as experienced counsellors or warriors, heads of families and rulers, and are seen as being at the point of settling all affairs for the future (or refusing to do so). Thus, important subjects such as intergenerational relationships, succession of rulership, and cooperation with vassals in times of change are dealt with in the context of ageing; these are topics that are also relevant to premodern elites beyond the literature itself.<sup>27</sup>

Intergenerational relationships and matters of succession are discussed in the scenes featuring the royal family in Pallanteum: Eneas asks them for help in his struggle against Turnus. The king and queen welcome Eneas warmly. They give him precious gifts and even let him take their only son, Pallas, who is barely an adolescent, into battle. The old (ER v. 6116), wise (ER v. 6297) und famous (ER v. 6189) king is named Evander, while the queen remains nameless. Evander tells Eneas about his long friendship with Eneas's father, Anchises, and the emotional closeness is transferred to the next generation. After Pallas is killed by Turnus, his elderly parents are left behind without any positive perspective on life: they lost their only son and successor, and they mourn excessively, even fainting from sorrow (Evander's frailty and vulnerability appear even more strongly in "Roman d'Eneas": vv. 4760, 6301–6315). Especially the queen abandons all hope. In the German romance, she curses Eneas and threatens to turn away from her gods if they

gen, Berlin-Boston 2014 (Germania Litteraria Mediaevalis Francigena IV), pp. 79–116; Elisabeth Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane des Mittelalters*, Berlin 2001 (Grundlagen der Germanistik 39), pp. 72–102.

27 Wiener, *Einleitung* (see note 2), p. 11.

fail to avenge Pallas (ER vv. 8172–8177, 8200–8234). The loss of their only son leads the elderly couple to extremes of emotion, to hopelessness, and finally, to exclusion from the plot: after the lavish burial of Pallas, they disappear from the narrator’s attention.<sup>28</sup>

My first examples present elderly characters appearing in minor parts of the plot. This is different to the royal couple of the kingdom Latium,<sup>29</sup> who play a central role in the conflict regarding the marriage of Lavinia and Eneas and the succession of the kingdom. The king is named Latinus (according to the mythological and literary tradition) while the queen is nameless in both medieval Eneas-romances (Vergil calls her Amata). Latinus stands for divine orders given and for the royal right to reverse a decision that has been made. At times, he appears to be a wise ruler and husband in a severe political and personal conflict, but occasionally he acts without sovereignty and strength. His wife legitimizes her actions based on the argument of oaths once made being sacrosanct, old legal customs and a general knowledge of human nature and culture. However, she is also depicted as being high-handed, manipulative, and full of rage.

28 For differences between “Roman d’Eneas” and Veldeke’s “Eneas” in the presentation of the royal couple cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), pp. 52, 59 and *passim*. For the scene in ER, cf. also Christoph Schanze, *Kampfzorn, Gewalteskalationen und Gemeinschaftshandeln im “Eneas” Heinrichs von Veldeke*, in: Claudia Ansorge / Cora Dietl / Titus Knäpper (Eds.), *Gewaltgenuss, Zorn und Gelächter. Die emotionale Seite der Gewalt in Literatur und Historiographie des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 45–87, at p. 67; Marion Oswald, *Gabe und Gewalt. Studien zur Logik und Poetik der Gabe in der frühhöfischen Erzählliteratur*, Göttingen 2004 (Historische Semantik 7), pp. 210–215. The old nobleman Tyrreus, and the old, famous counsellor and warrior Mezzentius, meet a similar fate after losing their sons. When the latter hears that his son Lausus was killed in battle, he wants to take revenge by all means even though he is wounded. He dies by the hand of the much younger Eneas, and his behaviour is marked as “tumbheit” (“folly”, v. 7901), even though his wish for revenge seems to result from pain, both emotional and from his wound, rather than from senility.

29 For Latinus in “Eneasroman” and in “Roman d’Eneas” cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), *passim*; Saskia Gall, *Erzählen von “unmāze”. Narratologische Aspekte des Kontrollverlustes im “Willehalm” Wolframs von Eschenbach*, Heidelberg 2018 (Beihefte zum Euphorion 101), pp. 13–15 and notes 2–3 with further references; Jonathan Seelye Martin, *Monopolizing Violence. “Gewalt”, Self-Control, and the Law in Heinrich von Veldeke’s “Eneasroman”*, in: *The German Quarterly* 91,1 (2018), pp. 18–33, at pp. 21–22; Oswald, Gabe (see note 28), pp. 205, 244–245; Christopher Baswell, *Men in the “Roman d’Eneas”. The Construction of Empire*, in: Clare A. Lees (Ed.), *Medieval Masculinities. Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis-London 1994 (Medieval Cultures 7), pp. 149–169, at p. 156. For the queen in ER and RdE cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), *passim*; in ER Gall, (see above); Schanze, *Kampfzorn* (see note 28), pp. 84–85; Silvia Schmitz, *Die Poetik der Adaptation. Literarische “inventio” im “Eneas” Heinrichs von Veldeke*, Tübingen 2007 (Hermaea NF 113), pp. 200–202 and *passim*; Baswell, *Men in the “Roman d’Eneas”* (see above), pp. 162–163.

Both the king and queen mainly focus on the marriage of the heiress and the succession of the kingdom, but at the same time, a struggle for power between the two takes place. The queen presents herself as being focused, well informed, and highly educated, but also as being furious and uncontrollable. She acts against the order of the gods and the wishes of her husband concerning the wellbeing of the kingdom and of her daughter. Thus, she is the horrifying portrayal of a medieval queen and wife.<sup>30</sup> This image is not explicitly connected to her old age for much of the text. Her devaluation takes place on a normative level by showing topoi of misogyny: women ruling over men in marriage are generally judged negatively in premodern times.<sup>31</sup> She is called “old” only once (vv. 13013) when she gives up her claims and abandons her attempts to sabotage her daughter’s wedding celebration that she could not prevent in the end: “diu alde kuneginne” (“the old queen”) lies in bed for days and looks ill – rage, powerlessness and world-weariness cause her to be old and ugly and bring her life to a bad, cruel end (vv. 13089–13092).<sup>32</sup>

Her husband appears to be weak, both physically and in family matters (which are far from ‘private’). He also demonstrates the ambivalence of old age. On occasion, Latinus is called wise and powerful (vv. 4257–4258), but also old and physically frail (vv. 4022–4025). He is a positive example of a feudal ruler when he asks his lords for their opinion and counsel, but he appears to be indecisive and at the same time reluctant to commit because he does not act resolutely in a crisis. He explicitly justifies his indecisiveness with his old age and physical weakness: “ich bin aber ein alt man, / also ir selbe wol gesiet: / ichn mach hinnen vort niet / vehten noch strîten / noch gewâfent rîten: / mir wâre zîtiger gemach” (vv. 4020–4025; “But I am an old man, as you yourselves can clearly see. I cannot go out fighting or campaigning, nor even ride in

30 Lienert calls her a “monströse Karikatur” (Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane* [see note 26], p. 96), but Gall states that the queen has positive traits, too, and appears ambivalent: she is an expert on love and teaches her daughter about this – her counselling and teaching both from life experience and knowledge of Ovid can be considered positive (Gall, *Erzählen* [see note 29], pp. 274–275). Cf. also Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature*, Syracuse NY 1997, pp. 29–65.

31 The fact that she is nameless both in “Roman d’Eneas” and “Eneasroman” can be regarded as a devaluation, see the commentary by Hans Fromm in: Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneasroman*. Die Berliner Bilderhandschrift mit Übersetzung und Kommentar, ed. by id., Frankfurt a. M. 1992 (Bibliothek des Mittelalters 4), p. 822.

32 There is no parallel in RdE; cf. Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), p. 81; for ER cf. Haupt, *Alte Männer* (see note 12), p. 47.

armour anymore. Peace and quiet are more appropriate for my age.”<sup>33</sup> When Latinus advises Turnus to negotiate with Eneas and to choose another woman as his wife, Turnus openly swears at him and accuses Latinus of breaking his promise and oath (vv. 9580–9713). Latinus is not able to stop this, or to prevent his vassals from turning away from him, taking Turnus’s side on the occasion.<sup>34</sup> When the king hears about the horrible battle between the two suitor’s armies, he becomes fearful and flees in panic, leaving most of his idols behind him (vv. 11838–11850; less derogatory in RdE: vv. 9439–48). This is another manifestation of weakness and disorientation. But later on, when a single combat between Eneas and Turnus is to take place, he appears to be wise and acts in sovereign manner: he takes hostages to prevent acts of revenge and feuds after the duel (vv. 12184–12198; not in RdE). He also negotiates a proper date for the wedding after Eneas’s victory.

During the preparations for the wedding, he steps back behind Eneas and starts to recede from the narrator’s attention. The old king is now presented in the positive role of the father and ruler who retires at the right moment and hands over his daughter and kingdom to the young, active and powerful hero. Through this, the ambivalence of Latinus changes for the positive: even though he himself has become weak and old (v. 13289: “unmachtich”, and “alt”), he has found a son and successor (ER vv. 13287–13288) with the best traits to take over his kingdom. In this situation, Latinus’s own weakness sets a strong contrast for Eneas’s strength, ability to enforce his will and generosity. Latinus’s dynasty faces a bright future in the upcoming Roman Empire, even though the old king himself steps back. “Roman d’Eneas” has a very short version of this, stating only that Latinus welcomed Eneas, declared him to be the heir and turned over his lands to him (vv. 10091–10101; 10124–10130). Thus, in “Roman d’Eneas”, Latinus’s old age does not play as significant a role as in the “Eneasroman”. Latinus gets less attention during the

33 In RdE, Latinus states only that he is a very old man without a male heir (v. 3230).

34 Power is clearly connected to property: Latinus had already turned over his castles and territories to Turnus when he promised him Lavinia’s hand. Now, when he changes his opinion and the conflict with Turnus becomes virulent, the lords of his kingdom stay on Turnus’s side. Cf. Sonja Feldmann, *Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im “Eneasroman” Heinrichs von Veldeke*, in: Cora Dietl/Titus Knäpper (Eds.), *Rules and Violence. On the Cultural History of Collective Violence from Late Antiquity to the Confessional Age. Regeln und Gewalt. Zur Kulturgeschichte der kollektiven Gewalt von der Spätantike bis zum konfessionellen Zeitalter*, Berlin-Boston 2014, pp. 63–81, at pp. 67–70, 74. In RdE, the barons left Turnus, who was now in a position of isolation. Latinus expressed his personal sympathy for Turnus and offered him half of his belongings; Turnus called him childish and unfair but seemed calmer (vv. 7728–7828; cf. Fisher, Heinrich [see note 24], pp. 65–66).

whole conflict and at the nuptials, where the focus is clearly on Eneas and Lavinia. The queen and her death are not mentioned at all in this final scene.

A similar focus determines the appearance of Anchises, Eneas's aged, deceased father, in the underworld. Due to physical weakness, he had to be carried out of the burning city of Troy (ER vv. 133–136) in the first parts of the narrative, and he died during the voyage through the Mediterranean Sea. He later reappears in Eneas's dreams and advises him to visit the underworld; there, in Elysium, the two meet again (v. 3578 ff.). Anchises is more than happy to see Eneas and foretells his son's future on instruction of the gods. This future will contain battles and losses, but also the marriage to Lavinia that will lead to a glorious future of the dynasty.<sup>35</sup> The image of the weak old man<sup>36</sup> from the opening part of the narrative is now substituted with the prestigious role of the wise, old counsellor and prophet. But, this is focused completely on Eneas, who will not only have glorious descendants (who are named until Romulus, and later until Julius Caesar and Augustus), but also has a dignified ancestor.<sup>37</sup> "Roman d'Eneas" describes the father-son-relationship more emotionally: unlike Veldeke's Eneas, the French Eneas himself had carried his old father out of the burning city of Troy (RdE vv. 55–56), and their reunion and subsequent farewell in the underworld are described far more affectively (vv. 2831–2872, 3005–3014). Anchises is also closer to the gods: he summons up the generations following Eneas, and his words and deeds in Elysium are limited by the god's orders.

A very different aspect of old age is demonstrated by Sibylle, who guides Eneas through the underworld. She gives him good advice and protects him. Her social status remains unclear, and she seems to be rather 'a' Sibyl (i. e. prophetess) rather than a specific person who needs to be introduced to the listeners and readers. Heinrich von Veldeke draws far more attention to the figure than do the Old French anonymous or Vergil. Veldeke's interest is focused on her ageing female body; old age therefore becomes a matter of gender-specific aesthetics. Sibylle appears to have shrunk, she is only skin and bones, and her teeth are sparse and yellow. Her grey hair is long and dishevelled, her wrinkly neck and her mouth are black; there is curly, moss-like hair growing out of her ears which prevents her from hearing properly (ER vv. 2702–2741). This description connects old age to physical ugliness, but it does not lead to a complete devaluation of

35 Haupt, *Alte Männer* (see note 12), p. 44, Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), pp. 34–35, 39–40.

36 There is no evidence of an earlier lameness, as mythology reports. Cf. Marie-Luise Dittrich, *Die "Eneide" Heinrichs von Veldeke. Quellenkritischer Vergleich mit dem "Roman d'Eneas" und Vergils "Aeneis"*, Wiesbaden 1966, p. 66.

37 Anchises himself expresses the discriminatory opinion that Eneas should not take old warriors into battle, because their physical and mental power might be limited: ER vv. 2573–2576.

the figure according to the learned principle of *kalokagathia*, because Sibylle is a kind, helpful and highly educated woman. From long personal experience, she knows the dangers connected with the underworld, and she has solutions to all problems at hand. She reassures the fearful Eneas<sup>38</sup> and helps him to find his way. Her age-related ugliness corresponds to great knowledge and special abilities that help the protagonist and is therefore not a disability. On the other hand, she is an outsider, showing features almost like those of a shaman. After helping Eneas through the underworld, she disappears from the plot without a trace. There is no room for her in the world of war, love and rulership that Eneas experiences in Latium.

The French Sibilla is not depicted as being quite as gruesome as her German equivalent. Only some features mark her as being rather unattractive and frightening:<sup>39</sup> “Ele seoit devant l’entree / tote chenuie, eschevelee; la face aveit tote palie / et la char et neire et froncie” (vv. 2267–2270: “She sat in front of the entrance with white, long, and wild hair; her face was completely pale, and her flesh was black and wrinkled.”, cf. also vv. 2289–2295). A specific interest in her aged female body is not noticeable, and the impression she makes seems to be directed towards the recipient, not Eneas: “peor preneit de son reguart, / femme senblot de male part” (vv. 2271–2272, “one felt fear from the way she looked, she seemed to be a woman from hell.”). Just like her German pendant, she does not have any further significance for the plot from this point onwards.

Heinrich von Veldeke’s “Eneasroman” and its source, “Roman d’Eneas”, do not generally differ in their basic concepts of old age. Neither ageing nor old age seem to be very important matters of themselves. Older figures are primarily regarded in the contexts of legitimacy, genealogy and handing over power, while in other cases they are supportive counsellors. But in the end, the young ones settle all issues by themselves and take over control.

38 Sabine Obermaier, Höllenangst, Kriegerangst, Liebesangst. Narrative Räume für Angst im “Eneasroman” Heinrichs von Veldeke, in: Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung 12,1 (2007: Annette Gerok-Reiter/ed., Angst und Schrecken im Mittelalter. Ursachen, Funktionen, Bewältigungsstrategien), pp. 144–160.

39 Fisher, Heinrich (see note 24), pp. 35–36; Dittrich, Die “Eneide” (see note 36), pp. 17–19; Haupt, Alte Männer (see note 12), pp. 44–45; Ulrich Ernst, Haut-Diskurse. Semiotik der Körperoberfläche in der Erzählliteratur des hohen Mittelalters, in: Friedrich Wolfzettel (Ed.), Körperkonzepte im Arturischen Roman, Tübingen 2007 (Schriften der internationalen Artusgesellschaft 6), pp. 149–200, at pp. 173–175.

### 3 “Erec”

The romance “Erec” by Hartmann von Aue<sup>40</sup> is dated to around 1185 and adapts the Old French romance “Erec et Enide” by Chrétien de Troyes from around 1170<sup>41</sup>. “Erec” is the oldest Middle High German Artus-romance and ground setting. Hartmann changes many details from his source, but the main plot roughly stays the same.<sup>42</sup> The young and unarmed knight Erec, son of King Lac, is insulted by an uncourtly knight and his dwarf in the presence of Queen Ginover. He secretly follows his opponents and reaches a strange city. He finds a place for the night in the run-down castle of an impoverished old count. The nobleman lets Erec have his own old armour and his beautiful young daughter, Enite, as company for a tournament. After the victory, Erec takes Enite with him as his bride to King Artus’s court. Erec and Enite return to his father’s kingdom after the wedding. There, the young couple makes a significant mistake: they are so much in love with each other that they hardly leave their bedroom anymore. King Lac’s knights start to complain about Erec neglecting his duties because of his new wife. Erec leaves home unprepared, takes Enite with him, and searches for adventures. In the following combats he proves under great pains that he is learning to pay tribute to both his personal wishes and his courtly duties. In the end, the damaged honour is restored and in harmony with the marriage. After King Lac’s death, the couple live as a shining example together with Enite’s parents, who join the court.

Just as in “Eneasroman”, the number of elderly protagonists in “Erec”, and the attention given to them, is limited. Several rich old kings who are invited to the wedding of the protagonists are only part of the crowd in both Hartmann’s and Chrétien’s romances. They do, however, demonstrate the great importance of the celebration as being an assembly of noblemen, uniting old and young. In Hartmann’s “Erec”, the old kings are

40 For the edition quoted, see note 1 (E).

41 Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide. Erec und Enide. Altfranzösisch / Deutsch*, transl. and ed. by Albert Gier, Stuttgart 1987 (RUB 8360) (EE). English translations by S. K.

42 For general information, cf. Volker Mertens, *Der deutsche Artusroman*, Stuttgart 2007 (RUB 17609), pp. 24–44, 49–63; Christoph Cormeau / Wilhelm Störmer, *Hartmann von Aue. Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Thomas Bein, München 2007 (Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte), pp. 160–193; Marie-Sophie Masse, *Chrétien und Hartmanns Erecroman*, in: René Pérennec / Elisabeth Schmid (Eds.), *Höfischer Roman in Vers und Prosa*, Berlin-Boston 2010 (Germania Litteraria Mediaevalis Francigena 5), pp. 95–133; Jürgen Wolf, *Einführung in das Werk Hartmanns von Aue*, Darmstadt 2007 (Einführungen Germanistik), pp. 46–68.

named and they are fit enough to take part in the hunt.<sup>43</sup> Some of them are rich dwarf kings with the youngest of their companions being 140 years old (E vv. 2073–2113). In Chrétien’s romance, only King Quirion of Orcel and his entourage of 200 white haired liegemen, each at least 100 years of age, are explicitly called “old”. King Lac’s invitation to the wedding was issued from a position of authority, the narrator claims, so they all came to the celebration from far away.<sup>44</sup> Their visit makes King Artus very happy (EE vv. 1873–1881; 1933–1940).

Erec’s father, old King Lac, is also of limited importance for the plot. Still, important issues in the context of succession are connected with him: Lac is a model father who passes on royal blood and a kingdom to Erec without showing any egoistic traits or causing any disturbance. He greets his son with courteousness and joy, when Erec returns home after living at King Artus’s court for several years (E vv. 2867–2868, 2888–2892). He shows even more enthusiasm when he welcomes his new daughter-in-law, the beautiful Enite (E vv. 2904–2917; more details in Chrétien’s “Erec et Enide”: vv. 2273–2395<sup>45</sup>). King Lac asks Erec and Enite to participate in ruling the kingdom soon after the wedding (E vv. 2918–2923, not in EE)<sup>46</sup> and dies at an ‘appropriate moment’, namely right after Erec’s last adventure, when the protagonist is free from other obligations and is ready to take over the kingdom.<sup>47</sup> The last referral to him in Hartmann’s “Erec” is in a posthumous praise at Erec’s coronation celebration (E vv. 10064–10071; not in EE). King Lac’s wife, Erec’s mother, is not mentioned at all.

Old age gains more prominence in the case of another figure namely Enite / Enide’s father Koralus (E), or Licorant (EE). The girl’s family has already been the subject of research on several occasions,<sup>48</sup> but the focus was usually more on the matter of Enite /

43 For signs of irony in Hartmann’s “Erec”, cf. Barbara Haupt, *Das Fest in der Dichtung. Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik eines literarischen Motivs in der mittelhochdeutschen Epik*, Düsseldorf 1989 (*Studia humaniora* 14), pp. 146–147.

44 Uta Störmer-Caysa, *Grundstrukturen mittelalterlicher Erzählungen. Raum und Zeit im höfischen Roman*, Berlin-New York 2007 (*De Gruyter Studienbuch*), pp. 46–47.

45 Cf. the commentary by Manfred Günter Scholz: *Hartmann von Aue, Erec*, ed. by id., Frankfurt a. M. 2009 (*Bibliothek des Mittelalters* 5), pp. 730–731.

46 Cf. the commentary by Volker Mertens: *Hartmann von Aue, Erec*, ed. by id. (see note 1), pp. 651–652, and Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), pp. 730–731, 989–994.

47 King Lac’s death is reported in E vv. 9969–9970; more detailed in EE, vv. 6452–6484, with a description of the obsequies at King Artus’ court. Cf. Mertens, *Kommentar* (see note 46), pp. 696–697.

48 Nigel F. Palmer, *Poverty and Mockerey in Hartmann’s “Erec”*, v. 525 ff. *A Study of the Psychology and Aesthetics of Middle High German Romance*, in: Timothy McFarland / Silvia Ranawake

Enide's descent and her first meeting with Erec. Enite's father, Koralus, is an impoverished count who lives in an old masonry on the outskirts of a market town. He is not a member of the highest nobility, even though he is married to the sister of a prince. Koralus was deprived of his heritage by powerful peers "vil gar unlasterliche" (E v. 403, "through no disgrace on his part" [p. 23]). He lost his possessions in many feuds that he could not possibly have won against the superior strength of his opponents. He therefore is at no fault for the loss, as the narrator emphasizes (vv. 406–410). Now there was not a single servant, not one piece of rich clothing, no beautiful furniture nor lavish food left to the family. Still, Koralus firmly holds on to courtly behaviour. In the scene, old age is presented within the discourse of poverty, even though the focus is not on the material or social aspects but rather on ethical matters. The narrator stresses the fact that the old man lives as a model of courtly behaviour, paying greatest attention to his looks and appearance (vv. 277–286).<sup>49</sup> The crutch Koralus has with him (v. 290) seems to be more of a symbol of age-related *sapientia*<sup>50</sup> ("wisdom") than an indication of physical impairment. The young prince Erec humbly stretches out both hands to the old man and turns red from shame when he asks the old man for a bed for the night (vv. 298–299, 303).<sup>51</sup>

Koralus obviously does not see a chance to regain his former possessions on his own. He has kept his old, splendid armour just in case a friend or relative might need it for fighting. Too old and weak to fight himself, he is happy to loan it to Erec, together with his shield and spears (vv. 589–612).<sup>52</sup> The potential of his daughter being able to secure a favourable marriage also seems to be outside of Koralus's focus; the old man cries with shame when Erec asks if he may marry Enite as a reward for Koralus having allowed Erec to take the girl with him to the tournament. Koralus thinks this must be insolent mockery (vv. 525–549, 557–559). In this scene, Koralus seems to be insecure, a helpless

(Eds.), Hartmann von Aue. *Changing Perspectives*. London Hartmann Symposium 1985, Göttingen 1988 (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 486), pp. 65–92; Rosemarie Deist, *Gender and Power. Counsellors and Their Masters in Antiquity and Medieval Courtly Romance*, Heidelberg 2003; Jessica Quinlan, *Vater, Tochter, Schwiegersohn. Die erzählerische Ausgestaltung einer familiären Dreierkonstellation im Artusroman französischer und deutscher Sprache um 1200*, Heidelberg 2013 (Studien zur historischen Poetik 7).

49 Masse, *Chrétien und Hartmanns Erecroman* (see note 42), pp. 117–118; Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), pp. 632–633.

50 Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), p. 633.

51 Mertens, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 46), p. 630.

52 None of his peers are mentioned to have helped him, but Koralus's rich brother-in-law offers financial support: see Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), p. 650.

victim of bad circumstances who suffers more from the visible signs of his poverty than from poverty itself: “dem wirte was diu arbeit / die er von grôzer armuot leit / dâ wider sûeze als ein mete / dâ engegen und im diu schame tete” (vv. 424–427; “For that host the hardship which he suffered out of great poverty was sweet as mead compared with how the shame of it hurt him” [p. 25]). The only power and control he still has is over his wife and daughter (vv. 348–353); beyond that he seems to be weak, passive, and excluded from the inner circles of nobility.

At the same time, Koralus fulfils his role perfectly by hosting the young prince, supplying him with armour and a lady as a companion, as well as essential information about the “costume” (“legal custom”).<sup>53</sup> He even turns out to be an old friend of King Lac (vv. 550–556); therefore, he is a suitable father-in-law for Erec after all. It seems to be only appropriate that Erec takes care of him and his wife Karsinefite after the victory over his opponent and on the occasion of his marriage to Enite. Erec asks King Artus to send treasures from the king’s treasury, and he asks his own father, King Lac, to let Koralus have two castles as his own property (vv. 1806–1837). As a result, the elderly couple has a secure perspective for a safe, courtly life. They join their daughter and son-in-law for the coronation celebration, and later on they stay at Karnant as highly appreciated company for the new king and queen.

Old Karsinefite stands in the background behind her husband in “Erec”. The narrator mentions the fact that she is from higher descent than Koralus and is the sister of a prince. But he does not use this information for any purpose (like making a statement about a mesalliance, for instance). She also plays only a marginal role in the hosting of the young knight at her run-down home, where neither luxurious blankets nor rich food can be supplied. The only time that she is at the centre of attention, is on the occasion of Enite leaving home for King Artus’s court, when Karsinefite cries even harder than Koralus does. Here she is presented as an important person in matters of emotion (vv. 1456–1465).

Hartmann changes Chrétien’s father figure (in EE named Licorant) significantly. This begins with the first appearance: Koralus sits silently in a corner of the rather isolated masonry that cannot be seen from outside, holding on to his crutch. Licorant in “Erec et Enide” rests on the outer stairs of his home, that seems to be in the middle of the town. He is by himself and lost in thought, but when he sees the stranger appearing, he jumps up and gives him a warm welcome (EE vv. 373–389). Unlike Koralus, Licorant

53 For Dennis H. Green, the engagement seems to be more of a business trade than a courtly wooing; cf. *id.*, *Women and Marriage in German Medieval Romance*, Cambridge 2009 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 74), p. 84.

is a *vavator* (a vassal's vassal, EE v. 375) and below a count in rank.<sup>54</sup> Still, he is doing better. He has no crutch. His household is rather poor (v. 376; wife and daughter are busy in the workshop: vv. 397–399), but, in contrast to Koralus' family, they were able to continue a life suitable to nobility. Licorant and his wife Tarsenesyde have a servant, they are able to present pillows, carpets, tablecloths and platters with fowl and meat to their guest (EE vv. 479–500). In this situation, Erec is even more puzzled about Enide's poor clothing, and he asks why she is so simply dressed.

The old man explains that he spent all his life as a warrior. As a result of this, he lost his whole property over the years. There is no comment or judgement; the issue of guilt is not raised. Poverty seems to be the inevitable consequence of a long-lasting warrior's life.<sup>55</sup> Licorant continues to explain that he refused help from his rich brother-in-law (who is a count in "Erec et Enide"), because he had always hoped for a rich son-in-law. He also declined the proposals for marriage that several members of the local gentry made Enide's father: Licorant absolutely wants a count or king to take beautiful Enide with him as his wife (vv. 509–536). The fact that a king's son is standing right in front of him at that moment obviously does not surprise or embarrass the old man. Licorant presents himself as a self-confident and agile father who wants his daughter to make a good match in the future. He seems to be well integrated in his peer group.<sup>56</sup> Licorant is well informed about the "costume" and is able to provide Erec with a lady and a suit of armour; unlike Koralus, Licorant owns a brand new and beautiful set of armour (EE vv. 611–620).

After the wedding, Erec fulfils his promises and sends precious gifts to his parents-in-law. He asks them to come to King Lac's kingdom, where they get two castles. The narrator stresses that these castles were beautiful and in an excellent location. He also mentions that they were invincible in case of war and siege (vv. 1829–1832) – this is possibly a reference to Licorant's bad experiences with war. King Lac is happy to hear that the two want to settle in his kingdom and guarantees for their safety and rank (vv. 1852–1856). Therefore, the news Erec gets about the old couple is "boenes et beles"

54 Deist, *Gender* (see note 48), pp. 53–55, 178–185; Scholz, *Stellenkommentar* (see note 45), p. 642; cf. also Quinlan, *Vater* (see note 48), p. 261.

55 Deist, *Gender* (see note 48), pp. 182–183, for parallels to real social consequences of a warrior's life.

56 Still, Quinlan sees a certain sensitivity towards his rich brother-in-law (Quinlan, *Vater* [see note 48], pp. 266–274). When it comes to possible gifts for Enide after the tournament, the rich uncle negotiates with the new groom Erec, and not with Licorant (EE vv. 1349–1437). But the conflict is not the object of further attention from the narrator, and Tarsenesyde remains as marginal as Karsinefite in Hartmann's "Erec".

(“good and beautiful”, v. 1864). After King Lac’s death, Enide’s parents gain attention once more: they are the first ones to be invited to the wedding and they travel to Nantes with a great entourage. The narrator emphasizes that their company was not made up of clerics or “useless stupid men” (“n’ot pas rote de chapelains / ne de gent fole n’esbaie”; vv. 6518–6519), but rather of excellent knights and courtly people in fine clothes. They are able to travel the long distance in a few days, and welcome their daughter and son-in-law gently and happily, “si com il durent” (v. 6533, “as it was supposed to be”). Together with Erec and Enide, they step in front of Artus und Guenièvre, to whom they are introduced in detail by their son-in-law (vv. 6540–6555). King Artus does not tire of praising them, though mostly in their role as suitable parents of the noble, beautiful Enide (vv. 6556–6567), who is happy to see them again after a long time. Afterwards, the old couple lose the attention of the narrator, who concentrates on the details of the coronation ceremony and the activities of the royal couples Erec and Enide, and Artus and Guenièvre. The last time Licorant and Tarsensyde are mentioned, is when they are crying for joy (vv. 6830–6835).

Chrétien’s Licorant is a figure that is far more active than Hartmann’s Koralus, who represents powerlessness, exclusion, and lack of perspective (despite the fact that he is model of courtesy) until Erec takes care of him.<sup>57</sup> Even though count Koralus has a higher rank than Licorant, he appears as being far more victimized and pitiable. The reason for this is the detailed description of the bad material situation that the family lives in and their “schame” (“shame”).

This negative perception might be a modern one, however, as the contrast between material poverty and inner richness is a common and important topos in medieval religious literature. Hartmann could have used it to paint the courtly Koralus and his family in a positive light in order to increase the listener’s or reader’s empathy towards them:<sup>58</sup> “swen dise edelarmen / niht wolden erbarmen, / der was herter dan ein stein” (E vv. 432–434; “Anyone who would not take pity upon these noble poor folk, must have had a heart harder than stone.” [p. 25]). The rise from terrible, and undeserved poverty to richness and honour might serve to increase the joy about the happy end of the plot. It adds to the fairy tale-like outcome of the romance: it is not only the young couple,

57 E vv. 1806–1815; cf. Quinlan, Vater (see note 48), p. 285. In all, the elderly characters seem to be important mostly through the focus on the younger ones once again; Erec helps his parents-in-law because of his new wife.

58 Alois Wolf, Die “adaptation courtoise”. Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem neuen Dogma, in: Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift 27 (1977), pp. 257–283, at p. 271; Palmer, Poverty (see note 48), pp. 70–71, 77–78, 87–89, 91; Masse, Chrétiens und Hartmanns Erecroman (see note 42), pp. 117–118.

but also the old parents, who live happily ever after. Thus, Chrétien's whitehaired *vavasor* lacks some of Koralus's narrative potential, even though he appears to be more vital and in better control of his life.

#### 4 "Iwein" / "Yvain"

Hartmann von Aue's second Artus romance, "Iwein",<sup>59</sup> is dated at around 1200 and is also based on a source by Chrétien de Troyes ("Yvain", around 1180).<sup>60</sup> The young knight Iwein leaves King Artus's court in order to undertake an adventure that involves a magic well. He kills the defender of the well and hides in a tower of the castle. Through a window he observes the mourning widow, Laudine, and falls in love with her. Her maid cleverly manages to arrange a marriage between the two. King Artus's court arrives for the wedding, and on this occasion, knight Gawein advises Iwein to not live exclusively for love as their friend Erec did. The two of them leave for tournaments and adventures and the newly wed Laudine demands his word that he will come back within a year. Iwein misses the date by mistake and Laudine leaves him. The young knight loses his mind from shame and sorrow and lives like an animal in the woods. After he is miraculously healed from insanity, he has to prove under pains that he is learning to live up to his responsibilities and to respect dates. He wins the friendship of a lion that helps him to fight and gives him a new identity as "The Knight with the Lion". In the end, the maid succeeds in bringing Laudine and Iwein back together. They live happily ever after.

Neither Iwein/Yvain nor Laudine have elderly relatives appearing in the plot. Therefore, ageing and old age seem to be even less important here than in the romances about Eneas and Erec. There is only one *aventure* in the second part of "Iwein" with figures described as being old: they are the nameless owners of the "Castle of the Dire Adventure". The connection between age and personal strength is central for the whole

59 Hartmann von Aue, Gregorius. Der arme Heinrich. Iwein, ed. and transl. by Volker Mertens, Frankfurt a. M. 2008 (Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag im Taschenbuch 29). (I). English translation: Hartmann von Aue, Iwein or the Knight with the Lion, ed. from Manuscript B, Gießen, Universitätsbibliothek Codex Nr. 97, and transl. by Cyril Edwards, Cambridge 2007 (German Romance 3).

60 Chrestien de Troyes, Yvain, transl. and introd. by Ilse Nolting-Hauff, München 1962 (Klassische Texte des Romanischen Mittelalters in zweisprachigen Ausgaben 1) (Y). English translations by S. K. For general information, cf. Mertens, Der deutsche Artusroman (see note 42), pp. 63–87; Cormeau/Störmer, Hartmann (see note 42), pp. 194–226; Elisabeth Schmid, Chrétiens "Yvain" und Hartmanns "Iwein", in: Pérennec/Schmid (Eds.), Höfischer Roman (see note 42), pp. 135–167; Wolf, Einführung (see note 42), pp. 69–93.

mysterious *aventure*, but at first it is youth that stands for deficit: a young king wanted to fight against two devilish giants out of pure levity (I vv. 6328–6331). With his 18 years, he proved to be too weak and frail in body to stand a chance. Thus, he had to concede the victory to the giants without ever fighting them, in order to save his life.<sup>61</sup> As the result of this, the king had to send 30 noble young ladies from his kingdom each year who were forced to do hard labour in the “Castle of the Dire Adventure”. One of the pitiable girls tells Iwein the story when he arrives at the castle searching for a place to stay for the night while on his way to another adventure.

While the ladies from the “Damsel’s Wharf” live in a state of desperation and exploitation, the young, beautiful daughter of the owner of the castle lives a life of tranquil luxury. Iwein meets her in a park where she is reading a book to her elderly parents. Iwein sees a very idyllic scene without worries and burdens:

“dar in het sich durch gemach / ein altherre geleit ... der herre hêrlîche lac. / er het einen schoenen alten lîp: / unde waene wol, si was sîn wîp, / ein vrouwe diu dâ bi im saz. / si ne mohten beidiu niht baz / von sô alten jâren / getân noch gebâren. / unde vor in beiden saz ein magt / diu vil wol, ist mir gesagt, / wâlsch lesen kunde: / die kurzte in die stunde. / ouch mohte si ein lachen / lîhte an in gemachen” (I vv. 6440–6460; “To take his ease, an old nobleman had laid down there ... That lord lay in lordly fashion. He had a handsome old person, and, I believe, she was his wife – the lady who sat by him there. Neither of them could, being so old in years, be of better figure nor demeanour, and in front of the two of them sat a maiden who could, so I am told, read the Romance language most readily. She shortened the hours for them. Moreover, she could readily provoke a smile from them.” [p. 305]).

The old couple welcome Iwein warmly. The girl takes off his armour and offers him luxurious leisure clothes. Afterwards, the young people retreat to another corner of the park to talk privately. The narrator stresses the difference between the two couples: the young ones long for summer, joy, and love, while the old ones have different subjects:

61 In Chrétien’s “Yvain” he is explicitly called a coward (v. 5279). Youthful immaturity is also the reason for problems and failure in case of Kalogreant, cf. Joseph M. Sullivan, *Youth and Older Age in the Dire Adventure of Chrétien’s “Yvain”, the Old Swedish “Haerra Ivan”, Hartmann’s “Iwein” and the Middle English “Ywain and Gawain”, in: Bart Besamusca/Frank Brandsma (Eds.), The European Dimensions of Arthurian Literature, Cambridge 2007 (Arthurian Literature 24), pp. 104–120, at p. 106.*

“dô redten aber die alten / sî waeren beidiu samt alt / unde der winter wurde lichte kalt: / sô solden si sich behüeten / mit rûhen vuhs hüeten / vor dem houpt vrostē. / si schuofen ir koste / ze gevüere und ze gemache: / si ahten ir sache / nâch dem hûs rate” (I vv. 6532–6541; “The old people, on the other hand, were talking then of how they were both old together, and the winter would perhaps be cold – then they ought to protect themselves with hairy fox-skin hats against the frost affecting their heads. Thus, they were weighing up the costs of ease and comfort – they were attending to household needs.” [p. 309]).<sup>62</sup>

The scenery seems to be peaceful, though pensive; the focus of attention is once again on the young people, with the elderly parents seeming to be set as a contrast.

The feeling of leisure, harmony and timelessness<sup>63</sup> abruptly ends during the dinner that Iwein is invited to attend. The father informs Iwein of the “costume” that the evil giants have imposed on the castle and of the prize waiting for whoever may defeat them: the daughter’s hand and the succession in ruling. Without a success in battle, there is no way for the father to marry off his daughter (vv. 6602–6613). Thus, the old nobleman has a clear interest in the end of the “costume”. At the same time, he apparently has an advantage from it continuing: the working rooms of the damsels are in his castle, and his rich and leisurely life seems to result from the revenues generated by their handcraft. There seems to be some kind of cooperation between the old nobleman and the giants, and this places the responsibility for the damsels’ fate on the old man. There are several hints that the castle’s owner is not a mere victim, not a helpless old man who cannot do anything against the injustice because of old age, physical weakness and an inability to fight. The idyllic scenery and the peace and comfort the old couple enjoy may be the result of asocial and exploitative behaviour; the old man might actually be acting in an egocentric and unethical way.<sup>64</sup> He appears to be more of an accomplice than a victim of the giants. But the whole *aventure* at the “Castle of the Dire Adventure” somehow

62 For the scene, cf. Mertens, Stellenkommentar, in: Hartmann (see note 59), p. 1042; Ulrich Barton, Iweins Lob der Nacht. Tageszeiten-, Jahreszeiten- und Lebensalter-Metaphorik als Deutungsperspektive für Hartmanns “Iwein”, in: Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft 53 (2012), pp. 147–174, at pp. 149–151.

63 Rebekka Becker, Muße im höfischen Roman. Literarische Konzeptionen des Ausbruchs und der Außeralltäglichkeit im “Erec”, “Iwein” und “Tristan”, Tübingen 2019 (Otium 12), pp. 302–308.

64 Quinlan, Vater (see note 48), pp. 158, 160–161.

remains mysterious;<sup>65</sup> as underlined by the fact that neither the parents nor the daughter have a name.

In Chrétien’s “Yvain” the castle’s owner even more clearly appears to profit from the forced labour: one of the damsels states that “he” (v. 5319; not “they”, the giants) got rich through their hard work and pains (Y vv. 5317–5319). The “prodome” (“nobleman”) rests on a silk blanket when Yvain first sees him (vv. 5363–5364) – maybe one of the damsel’s handiwork.<sup>66</sup> Unlike Hartmann’s castle owner, he is not called old, though, and the episode connecting him and his wife with winter and the need to take care of their health is missing. The only aspects of importance seem to be the fact that the “prodome” is the father of a daughter to be married, and the connection to the “Castle of the Dire Adventure”.<sup>67</sup>

## 5 Summary

To summarise, we can see that in the courtly romances analysed, negative attributes dominate over positive ones when it comes to descriptions of old age. Old age stands more for disadvantage and the loss of opportunities than for advantage and new chances; this is especially true for female figures. None of the elderly characters are true protagonists. Many of them have names, they talk and act, but they are very much focused on the young protagonists, who are usually sons, sometimes daughters and children-in-law. Still, a general characterisation of old age as a phase in life defined by extreme physical weakness,

65 According to this, research sees the *aventure* as a *mise en abyme*, an allegory ‘beside’ the main plot with the function of a mirror; cf. Roberta L. Krueger, Chrétien de Troyes and the Invention of Arthurian Courtly Fiction, in: Helen Fulton (Ed.), *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, Chichester 2009 (Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 58), pp. 160–174, at p. 169; Barton, Iweins Lob (see note 62), pp. 148–149.

66 Quinlan, Vater (see note 48), pp. 160, 162, 186–189: Even though it appears that the material side of the cooperation is more apparent in “Yvain”, the *prodome* seems to be more dependent on the giants; cf. also Sullivan, Youth (see note 61), pp. 115–117, Ricarda Bauschke, “adaptation courtoise” als “Schreibweise”. Rekonstruktion einer Bearbeitungstechnik am Beispiel von Hartmanns “Iwein”, in: Elizabeth Andersen / Manfred Eickelmann / Anne Simon (Eds.), *Texttyp und Textproduktion in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Berlin-New York 2005 (Trends in Medieval Philology 7), pp. 65–84, at p. 71.

67 Only one woman from the village below the castle is old; she tries to warn Yvain and gives him essential information – thus, she has the honourable role of a (rare) female adviser and is characterised as “cortoise et sage” (Y v. 5144, “courtly and wise”; in I v. 6125 she is only a “vrouwe”, a “lady”).

illness, disability and immanent death is not to be found either.<sup>68</sup> Sensual impairments are hardly mentioned in my sources; none of the elderly characters needs to be nursed in bed<sup>69</sup> or suffers from dementia. The actual process of ageing is also not the subject of any of the analysed texts;<sup>70</sup> the characters are old, they do not become old. The only change to be noted is death. But surprisingly, ageing can be reversible in some cases: old Koralus does not need his crutch anymore when his rich and strong future son-in-law shows up, and Eneas's father Anchises even seems to be revitalized in the underworld.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, the courtly romances analysed neither present old age as a biological nor a chronological 'fact' marked by the passage of a number of years. Old age seems to be more determined by sociocultural aspects: are elderly characters able to act on their own wishes – or not?; are they independent from younger figures – or not?; are they agile and mobile – or not? Still, the most important factors are literary ones: the general plot, the constellation and characterisation of figures might ask for old age to be highlighted – or not.

The question remains open as to whether the target audience expected a realistic description of the impairments and disabling factors connected with old age on the one hand, and of the privileges and positive aspects on the other hand. Modern research probably has to set a wide level of tolerance regarding what was acceptable in literature without being regarded as purely imaginary and without connection to 'reality'. This includes narratives of intergenerational relationships and succession, loss of sensual, physical and mental strength and functionality, as well as gains in prestige and influence.<sup>72</sup>

68 Goller, "Die jungen" (see note 10), p. 159.

69 This is different with old Titurel in Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival", cf. Kerth, Wolframs Greise (see note 10), pp. 59–61.

70 The lack of growing (very) old stands in clear opposition to the high importance of the process of growing up from a young to an adult warrior; cf. Sassenhausen, Grenzen (see note 8), p. 207; for general aspects Fitzon et al. (Eds.), Alterszäsuren (see note 8).

71 This is not explained by magic or miraculous influence, as the common topoi of the tree/fountain of youth or the Holy Grail in some texts and pictures suggest.

72 Neumann, Perspektiven (see note 2).

# The Representation of Old Age in French Medieval Literature

## Abstract

Our Western society has inherited a paradoxical and ambivalent view of old age from Antiquity, but above all from the Middle Ages. Although old age has been analysed with respect to selected works of French medieval literature, a more comprehensive and systematic treatment is still lacking, which is a gap that this paper aims to fill. It intends to propose an overview of medieval literary texts of various genres – epics, courtly romances, satires and allegorical poetry – in order to understand how old age was perceived and represented. Sometimes, the fictional literary works integrate knowledge from non-fictional texts such as encyclopaedias and medical treatises. When old age is portrayed, a broad panorama of positive and negative attributes and topoi are employed: on the one hand, wisdom, counsel, prowess, and exemplary behaviour, while on the other hand, the loss of mental and psychic abilities, physical frailty, ugliness and marginality. The main focus will be placed on questions of gender, which still deserve more attention. It will be examined to what extent the portrayal of male and female old age differs, whether the representation of each gender is balanced in itself or is rather one-sided, to what extent the physical and psychological changes occurring during old age are correlated, and finally, how much the comparisons of old age to the other stages of life and interactions between older and younger characters matter.

## 1 Introduction

Before turning forty, Jean Froissart looks back on his past with yearning and composes the “Joli buisson de jeunesse” (“Joyous Grove of Youth”),<sup>1</sup> whilst there is still time, as he says

I would like to thank Christian Alexander Neumann for his help in preparing the English version of this paper.

1 Jean Froissart is well-known above all as being one of the most famous chroniclers of the Middle Ages, especially for his writings on the Hundred Years’ War. He was also a courtly poet, in particular

in the prologue: “Des aventures me souvient / Dou temps passé. Or le couvient / Entroes que j'ai sens et memore ... Et volenté appareillie / Qui m'amoneste et me remort / Que je remonstre avant me mort / Comment ou Buisson de Jonece / Fui jadis, et par quel adrece”.<sup>2</sup> Apart from Froissart, some other medieval writers engaged in a retrospective in the middle of life. Christine de Pizan recalls her happy and carefree childhood in the “Mutacion de Fortune”, which she composed when she was about 40 years old. Being still in her middle years, she castigates the madness of youth in “Charles V” and the “Advision”.<sup>3</sup> At the very beginning of “Le Testament”, François Villon tells the reader that he, being in his thirties, is “neither mad nor wise”.<sup>4</sup>

Old age frees man from passions and brings wisdom but, at the same time, weakness of the body. As Jacques Le Goff notes, old age “wavers between admiration and disapproval” (“oscille entre admiration et reprobation”).<sup>5</sup> Medieval literature inherits this duality, which is dealt with in different ways depending on the genre, the motifs and themes employed. As characters or allegorical figures, elderly men and women appear many times.<sup>6</sup> I here propose a ‘round’ in French medieval literature including several

under the sponsorship of Philippa of Hainault, the wife of King Edward III of England. Froissart produced some lyric pieces related to courtly love and several *dits*. The “Joli Buisson de Jonece” is one of them, and is, to some extent, an echo of “L'Espinette amoureuse”, an older allegorical text. Regarding the tradition of the *dit*, cf. Bernard Ribémont (Ed.), *Écrire pour dire. Études sur le dit médiéval*, Paris 1990 (Collection “Sapience” 3); Monique Léonard, *Le Dit et sa technique littéraire des origines à 1340*, Paris 1996 (Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Âge 38).

2 Jean Froissart, *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*, ed. by Anthime Fourrier, Genève 1975 (Textes littéraires français 222), vv. 1–10. “I am remembering the adventures of the past; while I still have reason, memory and willpower encouraging and admonishing me to show before my death how I formerly was in the Grove of Youth” (own translation).

3 Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de l'advision Cristine*, ed. by Christine Reno / Liliane Dulac, Paris 2001 (Études christiniennes 4).

4 François Villon, *Le Testament*, in: *Lais, Testament, Poésies diverses. Avec Ballades en jargon*, ed. by Jean-Claude Mühlethaler / Éric Hicks, Paris 2004 (Champion Classiques. Moyen Âge 10), pp. 83–207. In the Middle Ages, members of the wealthier classes wrote their wills while still young (Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, *La Mort au Moyen Âge [XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle]*, Paris 1998 [La vie quotidienne], pp. 71–76).

5 Jacques Le Goff / Nicolas Truong, *Une histoire du corps au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2003, p. 113.

6 Cf. in particular, Georges Minois, *La Vieillesse dans la littérature religieuse du Haut Moyen Âge*, in: *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 92,4 (1985), pp. 389–401; *Vieillesse et vieillissement au Moyen Âge, Aix-en-Provence* 1987 (Senefiance 19); Georges Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse en Occident. De l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris 1987 (Nouvelles études historiques); Bernard Ribémont, *Sur quelques aspects de la relation vieillesse / sagesse au Moyen Âge. L'exemple du Chevalier au Barisel*, in: *Vieillesse et vieillissement* (see above), pp. 299–316; Shulamith Sha-

genres: fictional representations as seen in courtly love poetry, chivalric novels, epics, allegorical texts, and non-fictional references as seen in medical and encyclopaedic texts.

Considering French medieval literature in this article, some links to general representations of old age in the Latin West can be made. The Middle Ages inherited ancient models, particularly from comedy: from Plautus (for example Melenis in “Cistellaria”) and Terentius (for example Syra in “Hecyra”); and also the tradition of “De vetula” (“On the Old Woman”) falsely attributed to Ovid<sup>7</sup> and the “Matron of Ephesus” by Petronius<sup>8</sup>. Later on, with the advent of Christianity, religious and patristic literature produced an image of old age between wisdom and madness<sup>9</sup>. Medieval literature incorporated all these models, developing and shaping them according to the literary genres and morals that were to be conveyed. In order to study the representation of old age in literature, it is necessary to give some observations about the status of older people in society, i. e. the social environment that generated the literature in question.

From a social point of view, the elderly were not rejected, as they were integrated into family and kinship relationships.<sup>10</sup> Some forms of retirement and support existed

har, Who were Old in the Middle Ages?, in: *Social History of Medicine* 6,3 (1993), pp. 313–341; Michael E. Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age. The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought. 1250–1350*, Lanham 1989; Paul Johnson / Pat Thane (Eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, London-New-York 1998 (Routledge Studies in Cultural History 1); Bernard Ribémont, *Femme, vieillesse et sexualité dans la littérature médiévale française (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> s.)*. De la nostalgie à la lubricité, in: Alain Montandon (Ed.), *Éros, blessures et folie. Détresses du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand 2006, pp. 57–77; Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, Berlin-New York 2007 (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 2).

7 Karen Pratt, *De vetula. The Figure of the Old Woman in Old French Literature*, in: Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages* (see note 6), pp. 321–342.

8 Killis Campbell lists 73 versions of the tale: Killis Campbell, Introduction, in: *The Seven Sages of Rome*, ed. by id., New York 1907, pp. XI–LXXII. Cf. also Camille Fort, *De Pétrone à Fry, la matrone d’Éphèse. Tribulations d’un cadaver conjugal*, in: *Textualités* 8 (2007), pp. 35–47, at p. 35; *La Matrone d’Éphèse. Histoire d’un conte mythique*, 2 vols., Trois-Rivières 2003 (Cahiers des études anciennes 39–40), and in particular Yasminah Foehr-Janssens, *Mourir d’aimer. Le récit de la Matrone d’Éphèse dans le miroir des fabliaux du Moyen Âge*, in: *La Matrone d’Éphèse* (see above), pp. 89–100.

9 Minois, *La Vieillesse dans la littérature religieuse* (see note 6), pp. 389–401.

10 Jean-Pierre Bois observes that their exclusion, according to the poverty registers, started only at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century: Jean-Pierre Bois, *Exclusion et vieillesse. Introduction historique* in: *Gérontologie et Société* 25 (2002–2003), pp. 13–24. Cf. also, for a particular example, Lucie Laumonier, *En prévision des vieux jours. Les personnes âgées à Montpellier à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in: *Médiévales* 68 (2015), pp. 119–146.

in the form of guilds and corporations,<sup>11</sup> and also the Church<sup>12</sup> which gave assistance to the elderly poor<sup>13</sup>. When dealing with a specific age, one has to consider all the ages of man and the distinctions between them.<sup>14</sup> The Greco-Roman categories of *infans*, *puer*, *adulescens*, *juvenis*, *senior*, and *senex*<sup>15</sup> were passed on, even if, under the influence of the Church Fathers in particular, the chronological limits and meanings were modified.<sup>16</sup> The end of childhood was generally set at fifteen years<sup>17</sup> and old age

11 For example, in the weavers guild, a master craftsman who was too old or infirm to work received one *denier* per week from his fellow weavers; in the marshals guild, it was two *deniers*. The musicians founded their own hospital in the *faubourg* Saint-Martin for the sick of their profession (Étienne Martin Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations de métiers depuis leurs origines jusqu'à leur suppression en 1791, suivie d'une étude sur l'évolution de l'idée corporative au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et sur les syndicats professionnels*, Paris 1922, URL: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4057358/texteBrut;7.6.2022>).

12 Kirsi Salonen, What Happened to Aged Priests in the Late Middle Ages?, in: Christian Krötzl / Katariina Mustakallio (Eds.), *On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2011 (*History of Daily Life* 2), pp. 183–196; Nicholas I. Orme, *Sufferings of the Clergy. Illness and Old Age in Exeter Diocese, 1300–1540*, in: Margaret Pelling / Richard M. Smith (Eds.), *Life, Death, and the Elderly*, London et al. 1991 (*Studies in the Social History of Medicine*), pp. 62–73.

13 Michel Mollat, *Les Pauvres au Moyen Âge. Étude sociale*, Paris 1978 (*Le temps et les hommes*). In fact, the action of the Church with regard to charity and assistance focused on the poor in general, both young and old. There are no studies, as far as I know, specifically devoted to the elderly poor. We can measure the action of the Church through the history of its foundation of God's houses; for example, cf. Jean-François Cordier, *Lieux d'Assistance et d'Hospitalité au Moyen Âge*, in: *Bulletin de l'Académie Nationale de Médecine* 202,8–9 (2018), pp. 2069–2083.

14 Henri Dubois / Michel Zink (Eds.), *Les Âges de la vie au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1992 (*Cultures et civilisations médiévales* 7); John A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man, A Study of Medieval Writing and Thought*, Oxford 1986. Many medieval authors use a distinction of the ages of man to support their writing and in accordance with their work. Cf., for example, the treatise by Philip of Novara: Philippe de Novare, *Des quatre âges de l'homme. Traité de morale de Philippe de Novare*, ed. by Marcel de Fréville, Paris 1888 (*Société des anciens textes français*); Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker, *Philippe de Novare. Les Quatre âges de l'homme*, in: *Romania* 127, 505–506 (2009), pp. 104–146.

15 Moses I. Finley, *Les personnes âgées dans l'Antiquité classique*, in: *Communications* 37 (1983), pp. 31–45.

16 Jean Gerson in his "Sermon", for example, counts seven ages (Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, *La relève des générations. Sociologie, mythes et réalités*, in: *Revista d'Història Medieval* 5 [1994] pp. 13–40, at p. 16).

17 *L'Enfant au Moyen Âge. Littérature et civilisation*, Aix-en-Provence 1980 (*Sénéfiance* 9); Didier Lett, *L'Enfant des miracles. Enfance et société au Moyen Âge (XII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris 1997 (Col-

started at sixty,<sup>18</sup> which was an age that very few actually reached within an essentially young society.<sup>19</sup>

From the viewpoint of medicine, medical treatises devoted little space to ageing, as Marie-Thérèse Lorcin points out.<sup>20</sup> According to the Hippocratic tradition,<sup>21</sup> the body should be cared for in every stage of life and only a few diseases are attributed to a particular age. It is therefore necessary to turn to the medieval *regimina sanitatis* to find some, often scattered, advice for the elderly.<sup>22</sup> It is undoubtedly Roger Bacon, building on various sources, above all ancient and Arabic, who took a special interest in old age. Most famous is his “Epistola de retardatione accidentium senectutis”.<sup>23</sup> In this work, Bacon expounds on medicine and miraculous remedies to retard the ageing process, which is

lection historique); Danièle Alexandre-Bidon/Didier Lett, *Les enfants au Moyen Âge (V<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris 2013.

18 Isidore of Seville puts the limit at 70 years (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, vol. 2, ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay, Oxford 1911, lib. XI. 2, 6–7; Isidoro di Siviglia, *Etimologie, libro XI [De homine et portentis]*, ed. by Fabio Gasti, Paris 2010 [Auteurs latins du Moyen Âge 20], pp. 107–132 [“De aetatibus hominis”], at p. 108). Bartholomew the Englishman compiles the distinctions by various authors, such as Remigius of Auxerre, Constantine the African, and especially Isidore in the first chapter of Book VI of the “De proprietatibus rerum” (Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, Regensburg 1505, lib. VI, ch. 1 [De etate hominis], s. p.).

19 Georges Duby, *Dans la France du Nord-Ouest au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les “jeunes” dans la société aristocratique*, in: *Annales ESC* 19,5 (1964), pp. 835–846; Giovanni Levi/Jean-Claude Schmitt (Eds.), *Histoire des jeunes en Occident, vol. 1: De l’Antiquité à l’époque moderne*, Paris 1996 (L’Univers historique); Didier Lett, *Genre et jeunesse au Moyen Âge*, in: *Genre & Histoire* 5 (2009) (URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/859>; 7. 6. 2022).

20 Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, *Vieillesse et vieillissement vus par les médecins du Moyen Âge*, in: *Bulletin du Centre Pierre Léon* 4 (1983), pp. 5–22; ead., *Gérontologie et gériatrie au Moyen Âge*, in: *Vieillesse et vieillissement* (see note 6), pp. 201–213.

21 Véronique Boudon-Millot, *La vieillesse est-elle une maladie? Le point de vue de la médecine antique*, in: *Cahiers des études anciennes* 55 (2018), pp. 97–124.

22 Marilyn Nicoud, *Les Régimes de santé au Moyen Âge. Naissance et diffusion d’une écriture médicale (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 2 vols., Rome 2007 (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et Rome 333,1–2).

23 Roger Bacon, *Epistola de retardatione accidentium senectutis*, in: id., *De retardatione accidentium senectutis (cum aliis opusculis de rebus medicinalibus)*, ed. by Andrew G. Little/Edward T. Withington, Oxford 1928 (*Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconis* 9), pp. 1–83; Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Il mito della *prolongatio vitae* e la corte pontificia del Duecento. Il *De retardatione accidentium senectutis**, in: id., *Medicina e Scienze della natura alla corte dei papi del Duecento*, Spoleto 1991 (Biblioteca di Medioevo latino 4), pp. 281–326. The “De conservanda juventute et retardanda senectute” attributed to Arnau de Vilanova is largely based on the mentioned treatise (Arnaldus

revealing of the fact that it is youth (around 25–30 years of age) that is regarded as being the prime of life. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Galen's work was again thoroughly studied, leading Gabriele Zerbi to publish his "Gerentocomia" in 1489, which one can consider a *summa* of the geriatric knowledge from the Renaissance.<sup>24</sup> In the medical and also encyclopaedic discourse, old age is characterised primarily by the greying or whitening of the hair<sup>25</sup> which is due to phlegm and the loss of the inner heat and humidity, as, for example, Jean Corbechon, the translator of Bartholomew the Englishman into French, notes in the "Livre des propriétés des choses".<sup>26</sup> But although the elderly person's complexion becomes frail, his or her mental capacities, above all wisdom, increase.<sup>27</sup> This concept, that one may call "good ageing" or "good old age" can be found, for instance, in

Villanovanus, *De conservanda iuventute et retardanda senectute*, in: Arnaldi Villanovani Opera Medica Omnia, Basel 1585, cc. 813–838).

24 Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerentocomia*, Roma 1489; Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerentocomia. On the Care of the Aged and Maximianus. Elegies on Old Age and Love*, transl. by Levi R. Lind, Philadelphia 1988 (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 182). On this topic, cf. Natale Gaspare De Santo / Carmela Bisaccia / Rosa Maria De Santo / Alain Touwaide, *The Pre-Vesalian Kidney. Gabriele Zerbi. 1445–1505*, in: *American Journal of Nephrology* 22 (2002), pp. 164–171; Margaret Wade Labarge, *Gerentocomia. On the Care of the Aged. A Fifteenth Century Italian Guide by Gabriele Zerbi (1445–1505)*, in: Rowena E. Archer (Ed.), *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century*, Stroud 1995, pp. 209–221.

25 On the symbolism of hair in medieval literature, cf. Chantal Connochie-Bourgne (Ed.), *La chevelure dans la littérature et l'art du Moyen Âge*, Aix-en-Provence 2004 (Senefiance 50).

26 Barthélemy l'Anglais, *Livre des propriétés des choses*, transl. by Jean Corbechon, lib. V, ms. franç. BNF 16993, fol. 73 v. Cf. also Roger Bacon and Sydrac the Philosopher: Roger Bacon, *Epistola de retardatione* (see note 23), p. 6; Sydrac le philosophe, *Le Livre de la fontaine de toutes sciences*, ed. by Ernstpeter Ruhe, Wiesbaden 2000 (Wissensliteratur im Mittelalter 34), § 856, p. 28.

27 As for Sydrac: "Les vieulx si ont l'ame plus ferme et plus sage et plus sachante de faire toutes choses, car ele a plus oÿ et plus veu et plus usé de faire les choses" (Sydrac le philosophe, *Le livre de la fontaine* [see note 26], § 471, p. 187). "Elderly people have a stronger soul, are wiser and more learned because they have heard more, seen more and are more experimented being used to do a lot of things" (own translation). "Le viell doit plus apprendre que le joenne, car il a plus cler entendement" (ibid., § 717, p. 252). "The old man should learn more than a young man because he has a better understanding" (own translation). As for Isidore of Seville: "Senectus autem multa secum et bona et mala. Bona, quia nos ab inpuidentissimis dominis liberat, uoluptatibus inponit modum, libidinis frangit impetus, auget sapientiam, dat maturiora consilia: mala autem, quia senium miserrimum est debilitate et odio" (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum libri* [see note 18], lib. XI. 2, 30). "Old age brings with it both good and bad things. Good things because it frees us from unbridled lords, gives moderation to pleasures, destroys desire, increases wisdom and enables one to give prudent advice. It brings bad things because very miserable old age is characterised by weakness and hate" (own translation).

Petrarch<sup>28</sup> and in a number of texts, especially from the late Middle Ages, for example, in the “Passe temps” by the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Burgundian poet Michault Caron, also known as Taillevent.<sup>29</sup>

## 2 The Old Man

Medieval narrative literature portrays many older or old men with different characteristics and ways of behaving in both a positive and negative light. Whatever the genre – epic, courteous, satirical, allegorical – the old man presents a rather flat and topical description in accordance with the features that prevail in medical and encyclopaedic texts, i. e. the whiteness of his hair and beard. One can here mention Charlemagne with his white beard and head<sup>30</sup> and his faithful adviser, Naimes de Bavière, who is also white-bearded, and – in a very different tradition, namely didactic – as the wise Dolopathos, whose “head was white and hoary” (“chiés estoit blans et chanuz”).<sup>31</sup> In the allegorical-didactic genre, the hermit Arsène of Philippe de Mézières’ “Songe du vieil Pélerin” (“The Dream of the Old Pilgrim”) is described as having hair that is whiter than snow.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the “Roman de Renart” obviously plays on this topos, as Renart at the time of his judgement cunningly announces: “G’ai tote chenué la gorge. / Vels sui, si ne me puis me aidier,/ Si n’ai

28 Francesco Pétrarque, *Lettres de la vieillesse. Rerum senilium libri*, ed. by Elvira Nota; transl. by Frédérique Castelli/François Fabre/Antoine de Rosny, 5 vols., Paris 2002–2013 (*Les classiques de l’humanisme*).

29 “De Viellesse suiz bien content / Bien sçay qu’il fault viel devenir / Et aussi sçay je bien qu’on tent / Tousjours a la fin a venir ... Qui despent temps en bon usage / Il est de joye aprez refait / En ses vieulx jours / pour ce bon fait / Mener sa vie riglement” (Michault Taillevent, *Un poète bourguignon du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Édition et étude*, ed. by Robert Deschaux, Genève 1975 [*Publications romanes et françaises* 132], vv. 21–24, 605–608). “I’m happy of old age. I know that we have to become old. And I also know that we always go to the end ... Who is spending his time in a good manner is rewarded in his old days. That is why it is good to get on with one’s life wisely” (own translation).

30 “Blanche ad la barbe e tut flurit le chef” ([La] *Chanson de Roland*, ed. by Cesare Segre, Genève 2003 [*Textes littéraires français* 368], v. 117).

31 (Le) *Roman de Dolopathos*. Édition du manuscrit H 436 de la Bibliothèque de l’École de médecine de Montpellier, vol. 1, ed. by Jean-Luc Leclanche, Paris 1997 (*Les Classiques français du Moyen Âge* 124), v. 1104. This text is to be considered in the tradition of the “Seven Wise Men of Rome”.

32 Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du Vieil Pelerin*, vol. 1, ed. by George W. Coopland, Cambridge 1969, p. 192.

mes cure de plaidier”,<sup>33</sup> in order to escape justice. Exaggeration is employed as well: the influence of the Old Testament and its extreme old patriarchs is certain, which explains why more than a hundred years of age are very often attributed to Charlemagne,<sup>34</sup> and even to William of Orange in the “Moniage”.<sup>35</sup>

Cicero’s “De Senectute” left a lasting trace in the Middle Ages and beyond concerning the representation of old age as a period of life marked by wisdom, measure, moderation, and reason which overcomes the passions and whose role model is Cato the Elder.<sup>36</sup> The influence of the work increased at the end of the Middle Ages, when France was in turmoil,<sup>37</sup> under the influence of Petrarch<sup>38</sup> and Laurent de Premierfait’s

33 Le Roman de Renart, ed. by Jean Dufournet, Paris 1970 (Garnier-Flammarion 233), branche I, vv. 1266–1267. “My head is all white / I am old, when I am no longer able to sustain myself / So I cannot plead no more” (own translation).

34 In “Song of Roland”, Blancandrin tells that Charlemagne “he is very old, he is worn out. In my opinion, he is more than hundred years old”, “est mult vielz, si ad sun tens user / Men escient dous cenz anz ad passet” ([La] Chanson de Roland, ed. by Segre [see note 30], Genève 2003, vv. 523–524). The juggler in “Gaydon” attributes two hundred years to Charlemagne (Gaydon. Chanson de geste du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by Jean Subrenat, Louvain-Paris 2007 [Ktémata 19], v. 10543).

35 Les deux rédactions en vers du Moniage Guillaume, chansons de geste du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, vol. 1, ed. by Wilhelm Cloetta, Paris 1906, v. 7.

36 Regarding the success of the “Disticha Catonis”, cf. Birger Munk Olsen, L’étude des auteurs classiques latins aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Catalogue des manuscrits classiques latins copiés du IX<sup>e</sup> au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, vol. 1, Paris 1982 (Documents, études et répertoires), pp. 61–86 (Dionysius Cato, Cato Minor); Richard Hazelton, The Christianization of “Cato”. The Disticha Catonis in the Light of Late Medieval Commentaries, in: Mediaeval Studies 19 (1957), pp. 157–173; Ernstpeter Ruhe, Untersuchungen zu den altfranzösischen Übersetzungen der Disticha Catonis, München 1968 (Beiträge zur romanischen Philologie des Mittelalters 2).

37 At the end of the Middle Ages, the kingdom of France was in such turmoil (Hundred Years’ War, plague, civil war etc.) that it was thought ‘that God had abandoned it’. During that period texts full of morbidity appeared. They convey the image of a tragic and sudden death that can hit people from all walks of life just as the genre of the “Dance of Death” does. On the other hand, as a counterpoint to the brevity of life, a long life was praised and associated with wisdom in old age.

38 In his “Letters of Old Age”, Petrarch emphasis the need to train one’s memory, which is an aspect that medieval literature takes little account of (Laure Hermand-Schebat, “Lege memoriter”. Lecture, écriture et mémoire chez Pétrarque, in: Hélène Casanova-Robin [Ed.], Écritures latines de la mémoire de l’Antiquité au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris 2010 [Colloques, congrès et conférences sur la Renaissance européenne 66], pp. 267–284, at pp. 8–9; ead., Pétrarque épistolier et Cicéron. Étude d’une filiation, Paris 2011 [Rome et ses renaissances]). Petrarch begins to be well known in France in the milieu of the first so-called French Humanism, with scholars and writers such as Jean Gerson, Jean de Montreuil, Laurent le Premierfait, and Nicolas de Clamanges, who intended to retrieve a classical Latin as that of Cicero. On this topic, cf. Dario Cecchetti, “Sic me Cicero laudare docuerat.”

French translation of “De Senectute”<sup>39</sup>. The connection between old age and wisdom is a moral and literary topos repeated in many texts. When, for example, wise men are to be summoned, as in the “Sept Sages de Rome” (“Seven Wise Men of Rome”), they are old.<sup>40</sup>

The old man is a positive character in basically three respects: firstly, as a man of experience, for he acts as an adviser to the young in matters of chivalry and courtesy, secondly, he is a person who gives advice concerning custom, law and good conduct to be observed on various occasions, and which, especially in military matters should be listened to, and, finally, it is worthwhile to follow his example in terms of faith and morals. In the latter case, narrative literature offers an archetype, that of the hermit, a recurrent character in the novels of chivalry. As Pierre Jonin notes, old age and the hermit are strongly linked as a topos.<sup>41</sup> As one example of many, one can cite the description of the character in “Robert le Diable” (“Robert the Devil”): “Es vous venu l’iermite esrant / Le saint homme kenu, ferrant / Sur une potente que il tient / Tout apoiant au postic vient”.<sup>42</sup> The hermit’s age is associated with wisdom, as Henri d’Arci notes in his “Vitas

La retorica nel primo umanesimo francese, in: Carla Bozzolo/Ezio Ornato (Eds.), *Préludes à la Renaissance. Aspects de la vie intellectuelle en France au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1992, pp. 47–106. For a synthesis and bibliography on French Humanism, cf. Yelena Mazour-Matisevich, *Gerson et Pétrarque. Humanisme et l’idée nationale*, in: *Renaissance and Reformation. New Series 25,1* (2001), pp. 45–80; cf. also *L’Humanisme français au début de la Renaissance. XIV<sup>e</sup> colloque international de Tours, Paris 1973* (De Pétrarque à Descartes 29); Matteo Roccati, *La formation des humanistes dans le dernier quart du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: Monique Ornato/Nicole Pons (Eds.), *Pratiques de la culture écrite en France au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1995 (Textes et études du moyen âge 2), pp. 55–73.

39 Laurent de Premierfait, *Livre de vieillesse*, ed. Stefania Marzano, Turnhout 2009 (Texte, codex & contexte 6).

40 Voir Régine Colliot, *La mauvaise vieillesse des Sept Sages de Rome*, in: *Vieillesse et vieillissement* (see note 6), pp. 55–71, at p. 59. Regarding this novel, cf. Yasmina Fochr-Janssens, *Le Temps des fables. Le Roman des Sept Sages, ou l’autre voie du roman*, Paris 1994 (Nouvelle bibliothèque du moyen âge 27).

41 Pierre Jonin, *Des premiers ermites à ceux de la Queste del Saint Graal*, in: *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines d’Aix-en-Provence 44* (1968), pp. 293–350, at p. 327. Paul Bretel, however, mentions cases of young hermits (Paul Bretel, *Les ermites et les moines dans la littérature française du Moyen Âge [1150–1250]*, Paris 1995 [Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Âge 32], pp. 483–484).

42 *Robert le Diable*, ed. by Élisabeth Gaucher, Paris 2006 (Champion classiques. Série Moyen Âge 17), vv. 971–974. “The hermit came straight away, the old and hoary saintly man. He went to the gate leaning on a stick he held in his hand” (own translation). The famous hermit, Ogrin, in “Tristan” by Bérroul also uses a walking stick (Bérroul, *Tristan*, in: *Tristan et Iseut. Les poèmes*

Patrum” speaking of a “a saint hermit who is an aged and wise man”.<sup>43</sup> Exaggerating the chronological age can underline this aspect, as in the case of the hermit of more than one hundred years who is presented in the Third “Continuation de Perceval”, written by Manessier.<sup>44</sup>

Chrétien de Troyes, in “Le Chevalier de la charrette” (“The Knight of the Cart”), depicts a significant scene of an old knight reprimanding a young man, in this case his son, in the episode where Lancelot arrives on his cart of infamy at a meadow where young ladies and bachelors enjoy various games. The description of the old man – “extremely aged” (“hors d’âge”) and “hoary” (“chenu”) – above all his countenance and the richness of his harness and clothing, clearly reflect his positive character: “Uns chevaliers auques d’ahé / estoit de l’autre part del pré / sor un cheval d’Espagne sor, s’avoit lorain et sele d’or / et s’estoit de chienes meslez / Une main a l’un de ses lez / avoit par contenance mise ... Un mantel ot par ses espauls, d’escarlata et de veir antier”.<sup>45</sup> He tries to calm the temper of his son because he suspects that Lancelot will defeat him. Faced with the young man’s stubbornness, he is forced to have him seized and tied up for his own good.

In chivalric literature, the wisdom of the aged man is often indicated by the term *preudhomme* which means “a wise or prudent man”. This term, however, remains ambiguous with respect to exact age. A few explicit references that reveal that *preudhomme* refers to an elderly man will be now considered. In the “Queste del Saint Graal”, when Gauvain, after the episode of the “Castle of the Virgins”, meets a hermit, he decides to confess to him, as he inspires his confidence by being at an age that implies *preudom-*

français, la saga norroise, ed. by Daniel Lacroix/Philippe Walter, Paris 1989, pp. 22–231, at p. 84, v. 1368). It can be noted that Ogrin’s advice is not always moral, as is apparent in the second meeting where the hermit acts as a de facto accomplice to the ‘false true’ oath (Bernard Ribémont, Justice et procédure dans le Tristan de Béroul, in: Méthode. Revue de littératures française et comparée [2011], pp. 1–14). Additionally, one can mention the hermit in the “Chevalier au barisel” who “heavily leans on his cane”, “tout apoiant / li febles hom de son baston” (Chevalier au barisel. Conte pieux du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by Felix Lecoy, Paris 1965 [Classiques français du Moyen Âge 82], vv. 212–213); Bernard Ribémont, Sur quelques aspects de la relation vieillesse/sagesse au Moyen Âge. L’exemple du Chevalier au barisel, in: Vieillesse et vieillissement [see note 6], pp. 299–316).

43 Bretel, Les ermites (see note 41), p. 485.

44 Manessier, The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes, vol. 5: The Third Continuation, ed. by William Roach, Philadelphia 1983, vv. 5, 37513.

45 Chrétien de Troyes, Le Chevalier de la charrette, ed. by Catherine Croizy-Naquet, Paris 2006 (Champion classiques 18), vv. 1655–1665. “A very old knight with some grey hair was on the other side of the field, mounted on a golden-coated horse from Spain. It had reins and saddle made of gold. The man, to put on a bold front, had put his hand on his hip ... He wore on his shoulders a coat entirely made of precious scarlet material and fur” (own translation).

*mie* (“wisdom”).<sup>46</sup> The role model of an aged educator can be illustrated by Gornemont de Gohort from Chrétien de Troyes’ “Conte du Graal”. His age is not specified, but he is accompanied by two young men, “vaslets”, which suggests that he is already of an advanced age. In addition, he is constantly referred to as a “prodon”. In “Erec et Enide”, Chrétien also presents the wisdom of the old man through the character of Enide’s father, who shows all the qualities of courtesy in spite of his poverty. The portrait given is topical as well: “Un vavassor d’auques de jorz / Mes mout estoit povre sa corz / Biaux hon estoit, chenuz et blans / De bon’eire, jantis et frans”.<sup>47</sup> Finally, it should be pointed out that an elderly man, if he possesses the qualities of wisdom and courtesy, can also be a master of certain special knowledge. This is the case with regard to medicine in the “Mort du roi Arthur”. When Lancelot was seriously injured by Bohort at the Winchester tournament, an old knight was called in.<sup>48</sup>

The last major positive facet of the elderly man’s wisdom, which is not independent of the preceding ones, is that of a wise counsellor. According to feudal customs, the vassal owed two main services to his lord, namely *auxilium* and *consilium*. Counsel is most often needed when a serious decision has to be taken, for example in the case of war, or when a court of law is to be held. In chivalric literature, therefore, counsellors are portrayed in situations which, although fictional, are modelled on the practices of feudal society. It is in the *chanson de geste* that scenes of councils, trials and embassies are given a lot of importance. They are recurrent motifs, true *topoi*, which repeat and recreate

46 “Et mesires Gauvains resgarde le preudome, si le voit vielet ancien, et tant li semble preudons que si li prent talent de fere soi confés a lui” (La Queste del Saint Graal. Roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by Albert Pauphilet, Paris 1980 [Les classiques français du Moyen Âge 33], p. 54). “And Monsignor Gauvain looks at the prudent man and sees that he is very old; and he seems so wise that he decides to confess to him” (own translation).

47 Chrétien de Troyes, Erec et Enide, ed. by Michel Rousse, Paris 1994 (GF 763. Bilingue), vv. 375–378. “A very old vassal, the court of whom was poor, was a gentle man, hoary with white hair, from a noble birth, noble and free hearted” (own translation).

48 “Et quant li chevaliers voit la plaie, si en est touz esmaiez, si mande au plus tost que il puet I vielz chevalier qui près d’iluec manoit, qui s’entremetoit de plaies garir et plus en savoit que nus qui el país fust” ([La] Mort le roi Artu, ed. by Emmanuèle Baumgartner / Marie-Thérèse de Medeiros, Paris 2007 [Champion classiques. Moyen Âge 20], p. 72). “And when the knight sees the wound, he is deeply moved; so, as soon as he is able to, he asks for an old knight living in the area who knew how to cure wounds and had the best knowledge in that field throughout the country” (own translation).

the image of the wise old counsellor. The most famous is certainly Naime de Bavière,<sup>49</sup> Charlemagne's faithful counsellor, the one whom the Oxford manuscript describes as "his best vassal at court".<sup>50</sup> He is closest to the emperor who, after having consulted his barons, relies on him for "good personal advice" in the "Roland version" of Paris. He is the one who regularly "puts the king to reason",<sup>51</sup> because he is, as Aiquin's juggler says, "a man of utmost prudence" ("hom de sen assis").<sup>52</sup> It is on him that Charlemagne leans when he faints, as is described in the Paris version of "Roland", for example.<sup>53</sup> Generally speaking, the epic tradition presents him as a sage *par excellence*, the *Weise* of the "Rolandslied".<sup>54</sup> It is undoubtedly the "Chanson d'Aspremont" which offers the longest portrayal of him:

"Tel conseilier n'orent onques li Franc;  
Il n'aloit mie les barons aspirant.  
Ne ne donna conseil petit ne grant  
Par coi proudome deserité fussant,  
Les veves fames ne li petit anfant.  
...  
Les frans linages fist au roi essaucier,  
Et dou servise son seignor aprochier.  
Em poi de terme les sot si avemicier  
Que n'i estut achoison apuier".<sup>55</sup>

49 For information on this character, cf. Gerhard Moldenhauer, Herzog Naimen im altfranzösischen Epos, Halle 1922; Jean Subrenat, Les "vieux sages" épiques (l'exemple de Naimen de Bavière, Riol des Mans dans Gaydon), in: Vieillesse et vieillissement (see note 6), pp. 413–424.

50 La Chanson de Roland, ed. by Segre (see note 30), v. 231.

51 La Chanson de Roland. The French Corpus, vol. 3, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan, Turnhout 2005, V/193, v. 2434.

52 Aiquin ou la conquête de la Bretagne par le roi Charlemagne, ed. by Francis Jacques, Aix-en-Provence 1979 (Senefiance 8), v. 439.

53 La Chanson de Roland, vol. 3, ed. by Duggan (see note 51), IV/282, vv. 4767–4768.

54 Das Rolandslied, ed. by Karl Bartsch, Leipzig 1874 (Deutsche Dichtungen des Mittelalters 3), p. 41.

55 Aspremont. Chanson de geste du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by François Suard, Paris 2008 (Champion classiques. Moyen Âge 23), vv. 4–27. "The Franks never had such a counsellor. He did not wish harm for the knights and never gave any advice, however little or important, that could be bad for proud people, widows or children ... He advised the king to support the noble lineages, permitting them to be on duty by his side. In a short time, he improved their position, so that there was nothing to say about them" (own translation).

Even if Naime is not always identified as an old man – he is still a courageous warrior both in “Roland” and “Aspremont” – the regular mention of his sons who are knights (Bertrand of the song “Gui de Bourgogne”) and his nephews indicates that he is not a young man anymore. Some songs are more explicit in attributing traditional signs of old age to him. In the “Cambridge Version” of “Roland”, he is portrayed as being an old man “having a white beard and greying hair” (“blanche avoir la barbe et tout le pel ferrant”);<sup>56</sup> the same portrayal is also found in the “Venice 4 Version”.<sup>57</sup> The epic “Fierabras” repeatedly mentions his “greyish beard”, “guernon meslez” (c. 2682). In the same song, one also finds “Naime the white-bearded”, “Nainmon le floris”.<sup>58</sup> These topical attributes of the elderly man are not exclusively reserved for Christians. Naime’s counterpart in the “Roland” can be seen in Blancandrin, the Sarracen King Marsile’s adviser. In the Oxford manuscript, he himself mentions his beard which descends down to his chest and, in the “Venice 4 Version”, the juggler says about him: “Blançandin est plus saçes çivaler / blança oit la barbe et lo vis cler / De vassalaçe ert pro et bier / prodom est por son signor aider.”<sup>59</sup>

The *chanson de geste* “Gui de Bourgogne” offers an unconventional example of the treatment of the relationship between *juvenes* and *senes*. Indeed, when Gui orders his young knights to prepare an expedition to rescue the old men who are stuck in the mud before Córdoba, he orders his troops to set off in chariots on which they should carry the old men. This author states, with a somewhat astonishing precision: “Quant li jone seront as ruistes cous doner / Et li viel demorront por bons consaus doner”.<sup>60</sup>

It is relatively rare to find, but nonetheless noteworthy about the *senex*, that he can also be portrayed as a man of extreme generosity towards his children or towards the young in general. A good example is provided by the *fabliau* “La Housse partie”, a text in which a *preudon*, a widower who was very old, gives away all his possessions in order to be able to marry his son to a young lady whose father demands the couple’s property in

56 La Chanson de Roland, vol. 3, ed. by Duggan (see note 51), V/97, v. 11.

57 “Davanti Çarlo et li dux Naimes venu, / blança la barba et tut lo pel çanu” (La Chanson de Roland, vol. 1, ed. by Duggan [see note 51], II/112, v. 703).

58 Fierabras. Chanson de geste du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by Marc Le Person, Paris 2003 (Les classiques français du Moyen Âge 142), v. 1799.

59 La Chanson de Roland, vol. 1, ed. by Duggan (see note 51), II/88, vv. 27–30. “Blancandin is a wise knight; he has a white beard and a light face. He is a brave and valiant knight, bold to help his lord” (own translation).

60 Gui de Bourgogne. Chanson de geste du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by Françoise E. Denis / William W. Kibler, Paris 2019 (Classiques français du Moyen Âge 187), vv. 243–244 (ms. Tours). “When the young knights will be busy to give hard blows, the old ones will stay in the background to give good advice” (own translation).

its entirety. He will later regret his generosity because of his daughter-in-law's behaviour which is described as "proud and haughty".<sup>61</sup>

But while old age gives man wisdom, it also weakens the body, rendering the valiant knight as a so-called "recreant" who is no longer capable of fulfilling his military duties, that are the basis of his life and honour. The emperor of "Huon de Bordeaux" gives a very striking description of the frailty of his body.<sup>62</sup> Olivier de la Marche, speaking to Philip "the Fair", Duke of Burgundy, regrets that he can no longer serve him in accordance with his vassal duties.<sup>63</sup> The "Châteauroux-Venice 7" manuscript portrays a Charlemagne who has become weak due to old age and has to lean on Naimes, who is younger than him.<sup>64</sup> In the song "Anseïs de Carthage", when the angel appears to entrust him with the mission of liberating the city from the hands of the Saracens, Charles acknowledges his age and weakness.<sup>65</sup> Even if nothing is specified with regard to his exact age, one can wonder about Chrétien de Troyes' King Arthur in "Yvain", "Chevalier de la Charrette" and "Conte du Graal". In these three works, Arthur displays complete helplessness in facing the provocations of the knights who come to offend him in front of his court. In "Yvain", while Calogrenant falls victim to chivalrous dishonour, Arthur goes to take a rest.

61 La Housse partie, in: *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, vol. 1, ed. by Anatole de Montaiglon/Gaston Raynaud, Paris 1872, pp. 82–96.

62 "Viez sus et fraille, si ai le poil chaingier / .IX.xx. ans ait que montait sor destrier / Et .vii.xx. ans que fuit fait chevalier / Li corps me tramble soz l'ermine dougiér / Je ne peüs mais errer ne chavalchier" (Huon de Bordeaux. *Chanson de geste du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. William W. Kibler/François Suard, Paris 2003 [Champion classiques. Moyen Âge 7], vv. 81–85). "I am old and weak, and my hair whitened. I have ridden for 180 years on a steed and there are 140 years that I was dubbed. My limbs are trembling under the fine ermine. I can't ride and travel anymore" (own translation).

63 "A cause de mon viel eage ne vous puis faire service personnellement selon mon desir, tant en armes, en ambassades et aultres travaux" (Olivier de la Marche, *Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche*, vol. 1, ed. by Henri Beaune/Jean d'Arbaumont, Paris 1883 [Société de l'Histoire de France 213], p. 9). "Upon my desire, because of my old age, I cannot be anymore on duty by you, as well as in war, diplomatic missions or other duties" (own translation).

64 "Au col Naimon s'apovia, ce m'est vis / Blanche ot la barbe plus que n'est flor de lis" (La Chanson de Roland, vol. 2, ed. by Duggan [see note 51], III/432, vv. 7623–7624). "In my opinion, he leant on Naimes' shoulder. His beard was whiter than a lily flower" (own translation).

65 "Or me covient ostoier, che m'est vis / Mais tant sui foibles et de fort mal aquis / Ne m'a mestier palefrois ne ronchis / A moi porter, trop sui vieus et affis" (Anseïs de Carthage / Anseïs von Karthago, ed. by Johann Alton, Tübingen 1892 [Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 194], vv. 9320–9323). "I think I have to rest; I am so weak and in a bad state. Neither palfrey nor pack horse has to carry me; I am too old and decrepit" (own translation).

It must be noted, however, that the association between advanced age and bodily weakness is not systematic in epic literature. Naimes is also a valiant fighter and the old Aymeri of Narbonne still has all his strength to chase away his sons and to slap his wife in “Les Narbonnais” where, although “having a white beard, he has a bright looking face”.<sup>66</sup> At the beginning of “Roland”, the juggler draws parallels between the young and the old who repose after having fought in battle, associating old knights with wisdom. The two groups are contrasted, but it is understood that both fought for seven years in Spain, which shows that the physical characteristics linked to old age do not always automatically appear in a stereotypical manner.<sup>67</sup> The traits that are actually mentioned rather depend on the characters’ function and the genre of the text.

Physical weakness due to advanced age may also be associated with mental impairment. Depending on the perspective and nature of the text, the topos of the ‘childish’ and ‘foolish’ king is formed. In “Gaydon”, for example, Charles, who follows bad advice, is described as being “childish” (“assoté”).<sup>68</sup> The same is true in “Huon of Bordeaux”, when the emperor is so enraged with Huon that even Naime calls him “foolish” (“rasoté”), daring to tell him straight to his face that “you have become very childish in your old age”.<sup>69</sup>

Medieval narrative literature thus depicts the older man using a rich variety of facets. On the one hand, the old man is wise through his life experience, even if it may have been very challenging, and through this life experience, he gains the ability to act prudently. Therefore, old age can be regarded as a “good companion” as Jean de Meun does.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, there are negative facets such as physical frailty and mental weakness. Jean de Condé draws a very negative portrait of the old man in his “Lay dou blanc chevalier”,

66 “Blanche ot la barbe, si ot fresche color” (Les Narbonnais. Chanson de geste, vol. 1, ed. by Hermann Suchier, Paris 1898 [Société des anciens textes français 42], v. 26).

67 “As tables jüent pur els esbaneir / E as eschecs li plus saive et li veill / E escremissent cil bacheler leger” ([La] Chanson de Roland, ed. by Segre [see note 30], vv. 111–113). “For their entertainment, the older and wiser ones, play checkers and chess whereas the young knights are jousting” (own translation).

68 Gaydon, ed. by Subrenat (see note 34), v. 3314.

69 “Qu’èn vo vellece estes tous asotis” (Cited by Micheline de Combarieu, Les “vieux fous” épiques, in: Vieillesse et vieillissement [see note 6], pp. 367–390, at p. 379).

70 “Vieillece, qui les acompaigne / Qui mout lor est bonne compaigne / Qu’el les ramaine a droite voie / Et jusqu’èn la fin les convoie” (Guillaume de Lorris/Jean de Meun, Le Roman de la rose, ed. by Armand Strubel, Paris 1992 [Le livre de poche. Lettres gothiques 4533], vv. 4483–4486). “Old Age is going with them; he is a good companion who gets them on the straight and narrow and is on their side till the end” (own translation).

referring to a niggling and avaricious person full of bitterness.<sup>71</sup> While the treatment of the old man is, in general, rather ambivalent, the old woman, in contrast, is portrayed in a much more one-sided and caricatural way which will be shown in the following section. Despite some similarities, considerable differences can be observed between the representation of the old man and that of the old woman.<sup>72</sup>

### 3 The Old Woman

It cannot be said that the old woman is always presented in a negative way. A positive image is given, for example, of Ermengarde, the wife of Aymeri de Narbonne, “the wise” (“la sachante”), as the juggler of Guibert d’Adrenas calls her.<sup>73</sup> This work takes up the scene from “Les Narbonnais”, when Aymeri chases away his sons. He alludes to his old age, mentioning his “old body” and the rest he intends to take together with his wife (vv. 310–311).<sup>74</sup> Ermengarde, on the other hand, is described as a caring mother and a courageous woman who does not hesitate to defy her husband in order to remind him of the law of inheritance.<sup>75</sup>

Although their age is not specified, the positive portrayal of some women in epics can be mentioned. The beginning of the “Moniage Guillaume” shows Guillaume d’Orange broken by the death of his wife Guibourc and deciding, as he is an old man, to retire from the world. Aye d’Avignon – the eponymous heroine of the epic “Aye d’Avignon” – is described in a very positive way.<sup>76</sup> During the “Geste de Nanteuil” she experiences many adventures and two marriages. The end of “Gui de Nanteuil” implicitly

71 “Ch’est de viel homme la coustume / Rioteus et plains d’amertume / Et avarissieus devient” (Baudoin de Condé/Jean de Condé, *Dits et Contes de Baudoin de Condé et de son fils Jean*, ed. by Auguste Scheler, vol. 2, Bruxelles 1866–1867, vv. 521–523). “The old man usually becomes a ‘moaneur’, full of bitterness and avaricious” (own translation).

72 A PhD thesis on this subject is currently being written by Julien Maudoux at the University of Bordeaux-III under the direction of Danièle James-Raoul and Géraldine Puccini.

73 Guibert d’Adrenas, ed. by Muriel Ott, Paris 2004 (*Les classiques français du Moyen Âge* 147), v. 531.

74 “Dormir porré en ma sale hautaigne / Entre les bras Hermanjart ma compaigne” (ibid., vv. 236–237). “I’ll be able to sleep in my upper room between the arms of my wife Hermenjart” (own translation).

75 *Les Narbonnais*, ed. by Suchier (see note 66), vv. 364–373.

76 Bernard Ribémont, *Droit des fiefs, droit matrimonial. Du juridique au code d’honneur et au motif épique. Le cas d’Aye d’Avignon*, in: Émilie Goudeau/Françoise Laurent/Michel Quéreuil

presents Aye who has aged, according to the logic of the two songs “Aye d’Avignon” and “Gui de Nanteuil”. The fact that her exact age is not given is a matter of the logic of the genre. It is significant, for example, that the text “Gui de Nanteuil” continuously stresses the formula “Ganor and Aye, his wife” (“Ganor et Aye sa moillier”). From this point of view, their age underlines the high level of wisdom they have reached in relation to both their husbands and their children. But, at the same time, a woman who is the wife of a hero, is necessarily beautiful which is why the phrase “bright face” (“vis cler”) is recurrently found also with reference to elderly women. Not explicitly mentioning a woman’s physical signs of old age therefore helps to maintain their positive image.

Old age is, however, hardly favourable to women, and negative examples abound. In his satirical Bible, Guiot de Provins contrasts the three virtues of Charity, Truth and Righteousness with three “old abhorrent” ones which “are ugly and cruel” (“moult sont et laides et cruels”), namely Treason, Hypocrisy and Simony.<sup>77</sup> The female figure of “Vieillesse”, painted on the wall that encloses the “Garden of Love” in the “Roman de la Rose” by Guillaume de Lorris is portrayed in the company of vices such as envy, avarice and hypocrisy: topically, her head is “white” (“chenue”) and “white as if it was snow” (“blanche cum s’el fust florie”). She is “childish”, her body is “dry”, her face is wrinkled, her ears are “mossy”, and she has lost all her teeth. One also finds the topos of the needed walking stick.<sup>78</sup>

If, then, the portrait of the old man is generally not very detailed, that of the woman, on the other hand, presents many repellent aspects to clearly mark the loss of youth, which is revealed not only by physical weakness, but also and above all by hideousness, which can even reach grotesque proportions. This can be exemplified by the following description of the old woman Heaumière de Villon: “Le front ridé, les cheveux griz / Les sourciz cheux, les yeulx estains ... Nez courbes, de beaulté loingtaings / Oreilles pendentes, moussues / Le vizz paly, mort et destains / Menton froncé, levres peaussues ...”.<sup>79</sup> In the same way, the *fabliaux* of 13<sup>th</sup> century do not spare elderly women who are no longer capable of leading the trio “cuckolded husband, lover, and cunning

(Eds.), *Le Monde entour et environ. La geste, la route et le livre dans la littérature médiévale*, Clermont-Ferrand 2017 (Erga 14), pp. 133–142.

77 Guiot de Provins, *Les Œuvres de Guiot de Provins, poète lyrique et satirique*, ed. by John Orr, Manchester 1915 (Publications of the University of Manchester. Série française 1), v. 1145.

78 “Tant par estoit de grant viellune / Qu’el n’alast mie la montance / De quatre toises sans potence” (Roman de la rose, ed. by Strubel [see note 70], vv. 358–360). “She was so old that she was not able to walk four toises without a stick” (own translation).

79 François Villon, *Le Testament*, ed. by Mühlethaler (see note 4), vv. 509–516.

woman". The description of an old mother in "Le prêtre qui ot mere a force" ("The Priest who Raped the Mother") offers a particularly repulsive portrait.<sup>80</sup>

Such a description stands in contrast to the topical description of the young woman – the 'top model' of the time – who is blonde, with a bright, rose-coloured face and blue eyes ("vairs"). Therefore, the old woman most often represents the counterpart which almost automatically places her in the field of seduction and sexuality. Indeed, in chivalric literature as in the poetry written by *troubadours* and *trouvères*, the woman, the *domna*, is the object of seduction. The eye is considered to be the principal organ through which one falls in love: Cupid's arrow passes through it to strike the heart, as Guillaume de Lorris reminds us.<sup>81</sup> The man's gaze on the woman is thus determined by her beauty.

Having become ugly with regard to the contemporary criteria of youth and beauty, the old woman is thrown into some kind of dark sphere that makes it quite easy to apply a lot of negative characteristics to her. This is in accordance with the idea that the soul is the image of the body and vice versa. The way is thus open for matchmaking, cantankerousness, jealousy, envy and ridiculous lechery. From the prologue of the "Belle Hélène de Constantinople" onward, the juggler castigates the "evil old woman" ("malle vieille"), Henry's mother, for causing Helen's misfortunes by her nastiness.<sup>82</sup> In his version in verses, Wauquelin insists on the wickedness of "the old queen, who is so full of envy and bad intentions".<sup>83</sup> In a similar register of envy, jealousy and vile conspiracy against a young woman, Adenet le Roi presents Berthe's governess as the cause of her misfortunes, which is, according to the traditional pattern of *prolepsis*, identical to that of the juggler of the "Belle Hélène de Constantinople" in verse, when he speaks of an "ugly repulsive

80 "Mout felonnesses et mout avere / Bochue estoit, noire et hideuse / Et de tous biens contralieuse / Tout li mont l'avoit contre cuer" (Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux, vol. 5, ed. by Willem Noomen, Assen 1990, no. 41, vv. 4–7). "She was very perfidious and avaricious. She was hunch-backed, black and hideous" (own translation). In this particularly harsh category, we can also put the fabliau "Le Moine" which describes a sex market with a description of old women who are very unpleasant (ibid., vol. 10, no. 125, vv. 111–117, 128–131).

81 "Et trait a moi par tel devise / Que parmi l'oel m'a ou cors mise / La saiete par grant roidor" (Roman de la rose, ed. by Strubel [see note 70] vv. 1693–1695). "And he shot me in such a manner that through my eye he put its arrow into my body" (own translation).

82 La Belle Hélène de Constantinople. Chanson de geste du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. by Claude Roussel, Genève 1995 (Textes littéraires français 454), v. 12.

83 "la vieille royne, qui tant estoit remplie d'envye et de mauvais courage" (Jehan Wauquelin, La Belle Hélène de Constantinople. Mise en prose d'une chanson de geste, ed. by Marie-Claude de Crécy, Genève 2002 [Textes littéraires français 547], pp. 89–90).

old woman” (“orde vielle pullente”).<sup>84</sup> In the prose version, it is noteworthy that the author most often refers to Margiste as “the old Margiste”, or even “the false old woman” (“faulce vielle”).<sup>85</sup> The case of Berthe is interesting in so far as it places the old governess in the role of the matchmaker. It is through the fear that she instils in the young girl about the wedding night that she manages to cheat her.

It is in this field of sexuality and seduction that the representation of the old woman is particularly developed. André le Chapelain’s “De amore” contrasts with the “Roman de la Rose” in one quite significant aspect in this regard: in a short inserted narrative which describes the procession of women towards the Palace of Love, the unhappy, haggard and very ugly women arrive last, in tatters and mounted on old horses – “during their lifetime they have denied access to the ‘Palace of Love’ to those who wished to enter it”.<sup>86</sup> They are destined to live in the “Land of Dryness”, in the midst of thorns that tear them apart, in other words in a ‘Hell of Love’. The two representations are both characterised by ugliness and misery: one finds the old woman who can no longer love because she has become ugly, and the old woman who has spent her life refusing to love. Both underline the fact that female identity is almost exclusively marked by the relationship to love.

In this context, some encyclopaedic and medical texts are to be considered from which one learns about contemporary medical conceptions most probably also known to the writers of the time.<sup>87</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century encyclopaedia “Dialogue de Placides et Timéo”, the central point regarding sexuality, based on the medicine of humours and qualities, is that hot and cold attract each other. The man, through the sexual act, regulates his inner warmth and, the more he makes love, the more “he cools down”, as the text says.<sup>88</sup> The woman, on the other hand, is regarded in ways that may seem contradictory. She is warm, as Isidore of Seville says, also based on the etymology of the word itself.<sup>89</sup>

84 Adenet le Roi, *Berte as grans piés*, ed. by Albert Henry, Genève 1982 (*Textes littéraires français* 305), v. 289.

85 *Histoire de la reine Berthe et du roy Pepin. Mise en prose d’une chanson de geste*, ed. by Piotr Tylus, Genève 2001 (*Textes littéraires français* 536), pp. 136–137.

86 “pendant leur vie ont interdit l’accès du palais d’Amour à ceux qui désiraient y entrer” (André le Chapelain, *Traité de l’amour courtois*, ed. and transl. by Claude Buridant, Paris 1974 [*Bibliothèque française et romane. Sér. D. Initiation, textes et documents* 9], p. 87).

87 For more details, cf. Ribémont, *Femme, vieillesse et sexualité* (see note 6), pp. 57–77. I am going to take some aspects from this article here.

88 *Placides et Timéo ou li secrés as philosophes*, ed. by Claude A. Thomasset, Genève 1980 (*Textes littéraires français* 289), § 269, p. 122.

89 According to Isidore, the woman is hotter than the man according to the etymology that certain people, “alii”, adopt: “alii Graeca etymologia feminam ab ignea vi dictam putant, quia vehementer

But, according to her humours, she is cold and wet. So, a distinction must be made between sexual behaviour and humoral disposition. This duality is clearly expressed in the “De proprietatibus rerum” by Bartholomew the Englishman and in its translation by Jean Corbechon: “‘Female’ also comes from ‘fire’ because, ... the female is hotter than the male and she is more aroused by love ... The female is by nature weaker and more obedient than the male: this is due to a lack of warmth and abundance of cold humours ...”.<sup>90</sup> The woman must therefore warm herself through intimate contact with the man and look for men to satisfy her cravings, as they are insatiable.<sup>91</sup> One recalls Juvenal’s image of the woman “exhausted, but not satisfied” (“lassata, sed non satiata”),<sup>92</sup> an expression taken up again in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais.<sup>93</sup> The woman is considered passive, “always prepared for sexual intercourse” (“semper parata ad coitum”), and voracious, which is dangerous for men.<sup>94</sup> Elderly women are excluded from the world of love because their faces and bodies have lost the canonical attributes of beauty. Adam de la Halle cynically expresses this thought in the “Jeu de la feuillée” (“Play of the Greensward”), when he describes his wife as having grown old and become “abhorrent, misshapen” (“crasse, mautaille”).<sup>95</sup> The old woman finds herself between nostalgia for a bygone time, which can lead, on the one hand, to bitterness and even to a desire

concupiscit” (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum libri* [see note 18], lib. XI. 2, 24). “Others think that ‘woman’ by a Greek etymology is derived from the power of fire because she has a fierce desire” (own translation).

90 Jean Corbechon, *Le Livre des propriétés des choses. Une encyclopédie au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, transl. by Bernard Ribémont, Paris 1999, book XVIII, chap. 47, p. 282.

91 “et plus en fait la femme, et plus en vorroit faire et ne mie tant seulement le fait plus entalente-ment en chelle heure que en autre, mais tous jours, se malades n’est ou carquie de douleur” (Placides et Timéo, ed. by Thomasset [see note 88], § 269, pp. 122–123). “The more the woman do and the more she wants to do, and not especially at one precise hour, but every day except if she is ill or wracked with pain” (own translation).

92 Juvenal, *Satires*, no. 6, v. 130. For an edition, cf. for example: Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, *Satirae*, ed. and transl. by Joachim Adamietz, München 1993 (Sammlung Tusculum), lib. II, satira VI, p. 98, v. 130.

93 Vincentius Bellovacensis, *Speculum quadruplex sive speculum maius*, vol. 1: *Speculum naturale*, Graz 1964, lib. 31, ch. 5, cc. 2294–2295.

94 “la femme s’efforce par nature, ne mie par volenté qui a raison, mais par le volenté de le char, avoir chaleur d’omme” (Placides et Timéo, ed. by Thomasset [see note 88], § 271, p. 123). “The woman, because of her nature, not by her will or her reason, but due to the strength of her flesh, strives to get the heat of the man” (own translation).

95 Adam de la Halle, *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*, ed. by Jean Dufournet, Paris 1989 (Garnier Flammarion 520), v. 73.

for revenge – which is why she becomes completely cynical and immoral – and, on the other, to a sexual craving that is very difficult to satisfy. In a cruel and very biting way, De la Halle proposes to put mustard on his penis in order to “wean” (“sevrer”) his spouse who does not like it (vv. 43–44).

Jean de Meun brilliantly stages his character of the old woman between nostalgia and cynicism.<sup>96</sup> The old woman, being in the service of “Jalousie” (jealousy), which she fears, has the function of guarding “Bel Accueil”, an allegorical figure representing the positive feelings that the young girl, the rose, might have towards the one who is wooing her, the narrator-dreamer created by Guillaume de Lorris. When she arrives at “Bel Accueil”, the old woman plays the role of a procuress, giving a speech aimed at convincing the young girl.

One of the major attributes of the procuress is the art of discourse and rhetoric. Jean de Meun lets his old woman hold a speech of a disproportionate length, namely of almost 2 000 verses,<sup>97</sup> thus making the old woman a true master of rhetoric and even a scholar who knows Plato and Al-Khwarizmi and teaches the science of love from the pulpit (v. 12821). The two main elements correspond to the major characteristics of the old woman: the first is regret and nostalgia for the past. The old woman laments the fact that she did not follow the advice she is giving right now. She did not know how to take advantage of love, conceived as physical, when she was young and beautiful. Nor did she know how to use her charms to manipulate men and to enrich herself at their expense (vv. 14461–14484). The second line of the speech is an “admonition” (“chastoiement”), but far from following the rules of the genre, as it proposes a very peculiar morality. The old woman teaches the young girl all the tricks a woman must use to seduce a man continuing the tradition of “De ornatu mulierum”:<sup>98</sup> the dress, the make-up, the

96 Bernard Ribémont, *La Vieille et le sexe, ou la revanche du chatoisement (à propos du Roman de la Rose)*, in: Corinne Fug-Pierreville (Ed.), *Entremetteurs et entremetteuses dans la littérature de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Lyon 2007 (CEDIC 28), pp. 31–42.

97 *Roman de la rose*, ed. by Strubel (see note 70), vv. 12559–14550.

98 The textual tradition of the “De ornatu mulierum” is relatively complex. Originally, we find the “De ornatu mulierum” of Trotula, also called the “Trotula minor”, the second part of the book of medicine written by “Trotula”, the famous woman of the Salernitan School, the “Trotula Major”, a study in the feminine diseases (*The Trotula. A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. by Monica H. Green, Philadelphia 2001 [The Middle Ages Series]; Ferruccio Bertini [Ed.], *Trotula. Il medico, Medioevo al femminile*, Roma-Bari 2005; Jane Bael, *Trota of Salerno. Women's Medicine in Medieval Italy*, in: *Midwifery Today Int Midwife* 118 [2016], pp. 46–47. See also Marie-Geneviève Grossel, *Entre médecine et magie. Les gestes de beauté (l'Ornatus mulierum)*, in: *Le Geste et les gestes au Moyen Âge*, Aix-en-Provence 1998 [Senefiance 41], pp. 255–272).

breathing, the movements, etc. are explained in detail according to the circumstances and the physical appearance of the woman. All means are good to attract male desire and to take advantage of it, there are no scruples and every cunning must be used to exploit men.<sup>99</sup> This representation of the old woman can also be found in the character of the beautiful Heaumière. In the “Testament”, her speech is composed of two sections: in the first, regrets are expressed,<sup>100</sup> and in the second, advice is given, which is similar to that of the old woman in the “Roman de la Rose”, above all consisting of advice for ensnaring and exploiting men.<sup>101</sup> The “Évangiles des Quenouilles”, an anti-feminist text dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, does not present only one *vieille*, but rather a whole group of six matrons, aged between 57 and 80 years, whose description is repulsive, symbolising gluttony and lustfulness.<sup>102</sup> The old women are the custodians of secrets that are passed down from generation to generation, and at the same time they express their experience, their regrets about the past and their greed which is also shown by their mouths being wide open.

It is the *fabliau* that most radically portrays the old lecherous woman by introducing the character of the ‘gigolo’ *ante litteram* into French literature. Only one emblematic

99 This character, between ‘teacher’, madam and matchmaker, gave rise to a very famous text in Spain, the “Celestina” by the converted Jew Fernando de Rojas. On this topic, cf. Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina. Comedia o tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, ed. by Peter E. Russell, Madrid 2008; Jean-Paul Lecertua, *Le jardin de Mélibée. Métaphores sexuelles et connotations symboliques dans quelques épisodes de La Célestine*, in: *Trames. Études Ibériques* 2 (1978), pp. 105–138; Vincent Parello, *Aquel mudar de trajes, aquel derribar j renovar edificios. La modernité historico-sociale de La Celestina*, in: George Martin (Ed.), *Fernando de Rojas. La Celestina. Comedia o tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, Paris 2008, pp. 7–20; Carlos Heusch, *L’invention de Rojas. La Célestine*, Paris 2008 Collection (CNED-PUF. Série Espagnol), pp. 137–146; Odile Lasserre Dempure, *La Celestina de Fernando de Rojas. Un monde plein de vide*, in: *Babel. Littératures plurielles* 22 (2010), pp. 11–30.

100 “Ainsi le bon temps regretons ... Et jadis fusmes si mignotes” (Villon, *Le Testament*, ed. by Mühlethaler [see note 4], vv. 525, 531). “So we regret the old time ... And formerly we were so pretty” (own translation). The regrets comprise verses 453–532 of the cited edition and the advice comprise verses 533–624, which is followed by a ballad on the same theme, incorporating ancient examples as does Jean de Meun’s *vieille*.

101 “Prenz a destre et a senestre / N’espargniez homme, je vous prie / Car vieilles n’ont ne cours nē estre / Ne que monnoye qu’on descrye” (ibid., vv. 537–540). “Take as much as possible, to the left, to the link. Don’t spare any man, I beg you, because old women have neither nobody nor life for themselves, except the money that is disparaged” (own translation).

102 *Les Évangiles des Quenouilles*, ed. by Madeleine Jeay, Paris 1985 (Études médiévales); Anne Paupert, *Sages femmes ou sorcières? Les vieilles femmes des Évangiles aux Quenouilles*, in: *Vieillesse et vieillissement* (see note 6), pp. 265–282.

example shall be mentioned here, namely that of Gautier le Leu's *fabliau* "Li provance de femme".<sup>103</sup> Gautier presents a widow of a certain age who covers her wrinkled cheeks (v. 177). When night comes, her brain warms up and she dreams of a handsome young man who would come to satisfy her desire because "all she needs now is a piece of wood / to cure her kidney ache" ("il ne lui manque plus que le bout de bois / qui guérisse son mal de reins") (vv. 219–220). The lady, worked by her 'Goliath', who "so much harasses and arouses her" (v. 400), ends up luring a young man into her trap. 'The poor one must boldly perform his task' if he wants to be fed, housed, clothed and receive a sum of money, a significant amount of 30 *deniers*. Old men and women have one thing in common in terms of love. André le Chapelain says: "Age is an obstacle, because after 60 years for a man, 50 for a woman, although love is still possible, the pleasures it brings cannot generate love".<sup>104</sup> However, the consequences are quite different. For, if the man loses his potency, all that remains, as Andrew says, is "the consolation of eating and drinking". However, the woman is driven by an inextinguishable lust.

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

In the formation of European mentalities, the medieval period serves as a bridge to modern times, having created representations that have proven to be particularly durable in many fields (myths, religion, superstition, morality etc.). In this paper, I have tried to give an overview of ideas that contributed to the shaping of Western Christian European perceptions of old age. How old age is viewed today leans on this basis. The preceding development did not follow certain aims and showed fluctuations. In fact, it is linked to the nature of a given society and is dependent on the political, religious, legal, and moral views of specific historical periods. Compared to the Middle Ages, ageing takes place in a radically changed context today: gerontology and geriatrics are established fields of research and support systems for elderly people have been created. It would be of great interest to study the evolution of the representation of old age and ageing in literature using an interdisciplinary approach, in particular with regard to legal texts.

103 Gautier le Leu, *Li provance de femme*, in: *Fabliaux érotiques. Textes de jongleurs des XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. by Luciano Rossi, Paris 1992, pp. 301–343.

104 "L'âge est un obstacle, car passé soixante ans pour un homme, cinquante pour une femme, bien que les rapports amoureux soient encore possibles, les plaisirs qu'ils procurent ne peuvent engendrer l'amour" (André le Chapelain, *Traité de l'amour courtois*, ed. by Buridant [see note 86], p. 51).

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This aspect was not included in the framework of this paper, which means that the perspective presented is necessarily limited.

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## II Social Interactions



# Ageing and Old Age

## Socio-Gerontological Concepts and Approaches

### Abstract

In pre-industrial societies, the social position of the elderly was often related to their control over (communal) land and their family situation (single, married, widowed). In modern societies, social and health differences among older men and women are strongly influenced by their level of education. Modern socio-gerontological concepts and theories (disengagement theories, life cycles approaches or concepts of active ageing) refer to societies with high life expectancies and socially structured retirement from work for a large part of the population. In affluent milieus of prosperous societies, old age is increasingly viewed as a process that can be actively counteracted (for example by means of active participation in sport, life-long learning or anti-ageing interventions). Ageing processes are rapidly changing in historically new ways. Nonetheless, there is one main socio-gerontological observation that is pertinent for analysing old age in pre-industrial societies: chronological age is generally a poor indicator for ageing processes as people age differently, depending on their gender, economic status, biographical experiences and health behaviour. The situation of elderly men and women is also influenced by cohort effects, in the sense that people born earlier or later experience different societal conditions, particularly in rapidly changing societies or during wars, economic crises or epidemics.

### 1 Old Age as a Social Topic and the Societal Consequences of Longevity

In most societies, old age is characterized by ambivalent images. On the one hand, the elderly are seen as experienced or even wiser persons. On the other hand, old age is associated with functional deficits and nearness to death.<sup>1</sup> To define the onset of old age, two kinds of measurements have traditionally been used: On the one hand, old

1 Gerd Göckenjan, *Das Alter würdigen. Altersbilder und Bedeutungswandel des Alters*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000 (Suhrkamp Wissenschaft 1446).

age is characterised by negative physical symptoms (e. g. loss of strength and declining cognitive capacities). Representations of old age often use the symbol of a walking stick (as illustrated in the Riddle of the Sphinx solved by Oedipus). In other cases, hearing aids, grey hair or dementia are used to describe old age, and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the onset of old age for women was defined by the menopause.<sup>2</sup> Historically more recent – with the development of a welfare state – is a social definition of old age: old age starts with retirement from work and the right to claim an old age pension. On the other hand – particularly in more bureaucratically organized states – chronological age was and is used to define the onset of old age. In some societies (Sparta and the Roman Empire) old age was defined to start at the age of 60.<sup>3</sup> In most modern societies, the age of 65 is used as defining point to represent ageing, for example in measuring demographic ageing (proportion of persons aged 65 and older in relation to the whole population or in relation to the working age population).

Philosophically and culturally, old age has always been an important topic in the history of humanity. Socially, old age (including discussions on old age poverty) only became a relevant and important topic after the decline in fertility and higher life expectancy resulted in an increasing demographic weight of the elderly population. In pre-industrial societies, the proportion of elderly persons (aged 60+) was often relatively low. The number of the elderly was higher during peaceful periods in organised states, and was very low during pandemics and wars. In some rural regions, a relatively high proportion of older men and women relative to the overall population could be found, largely due to the migration of younger adults from the countryside to the cities. However, pre-industrial societies were characterized by strong regional variations of marriage rates, household sizes and demographic structures, resulting in variations of the family situation of older men and women.<sup>4</sup>

In the region of Switzerland, the estimated proportion of men and women aged 60+ relative to the total population remained lower than 10 % until the 17<sup>th</sup> century (see table 1). Only in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century we observe – in some selected towns – 10 % or more of the population being older than 59. A significant increase in the proportion of

2 Stefan Schmorrtte, *Alter und Medizin. Die Anfänge der Geriatrie in Deutschland*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 30 (1990), pp. 15–41.

3 Shulamith Shahar, *Mittelalter und Renaissance*, in: Pat Thane (Ed.), *Das Alter – eine Kulturgeschichte*, Darmstadt 2005, pp. 71–112.

4 Christian A. Neumann, *Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik*, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2018), pp. 387–405; Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages. “Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain”*, London-New York 2004.

the elderly population occurred primarily in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century as result of decreasing fertility rates and increasing life expectancies.

Tab. 1: Elderly People (60+) in Proportion to the Total Population – Some Selected Regions

Region	Period	Estimated Population in %	Source
North Italy (Roman Empire)	1–250	5–7 %	Russel, How Many (see below), p. 123.
West- and North Europe	750–1348	3 %	Ibid., p. 123.
	1348–1500 (plague)	2 %	Ibid., p. 123.
Valais (Switzerland)	1340–1400	1 %	Dubuis, Testaments (see below), p. 236.
	1400–1500	3 %	Ibid., p. 236.
Geneva (town)	1561–1600	5 %	Bickel, Bevölkerungsgeschichte (see below), p. 292.
Zurich (town)	1637	6 %	Daszynska, Zürichs Bevölkerung (see below).
Bern (town)	1764	10 %	Sommer, Beiträge (see below).
Geneva (town)	1798–1816	11 %	Perrenoud, La population, (see below); id., L'inégalité (see below).
Lucerne (town)	1812	10 %	Burri, Die Bevölkerung (see below).
Switzerland	1860	8.5 %	Official statistics
	1900	9.2 %	
	1941	12.9 %	
	2000	20.2 %	
	2018	24.4 %	

Sources: Wilhelm Bickel, Bevölkerungsgeschichte und Bevölkerungspolitik der Schweiz seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters, Zürich 1947; Hans-Rudolf Burri, Die Bevölkerung Luzerns im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert. Demographie und Schichtung einer Schweizer Stadt im Ancien Régime, Luzern 1975; Sophie Daszynska, Zürichs Bevölkerung im XVII. Jahrhundert, in: Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Statistik 25 (1889), pp. 369–415; Pierre Dubuis, Testaments et reprise démographique à la fin du Moyen Age dans un pays de montagne. Le Valais (Suisse), XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles, in: Annales de démographie historique (1991), pp. 221–238; Alfred Perrenoud, La population de Genève du seizième au début du dix-neuvième siècle. Étude démographique, Thèse, Genève 1979; id., L'inégalité sociale devant la mort à Genève au XVII siècle, in: Population 20 (1975), pp. 221–243; Josiah C. Russell, How Many of the Population Were Aged? in: Michael M. Sheehan (Ed.), Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe, Toronto 1990, pp. 119–127; Walter Sommer, Beiträge zur Bevölkerungsterblichkeit. Historisch vergleichende Studie auf Grund der Volkszählungsergebnisse der Stadt Bern 1764, Bern 1945.

To become very old in pre-industrial societies was possible, but rare. Generally, the higher life expectancies in modern societies are primarily the result of less people dying

prematurely than the result of a longer life span.<sup>5</sup> However, the question regarding to what extent the maximal human life span has changed during the last centuries is controversially discussed.<sup>6</sup> Similar controversies concern illnesses associated with old age (such as dementia, osteoporosis and arthritis). It is not clear how far these illnesses of old age have fundamentally changed over time and to what extent medical interventions have changed the symptoms and consequences of age-related illnesses. Recent analysis, for example, indicates decreasing age-specific rates of dementia in modern societies.<sup>7</sup>

In any case, fundamental changes in socio-demographic structures have to be considered when analysing the social situation of the elderly and the ageing processes during different historical periods. A long and secure life expectancy for large parts of the population is historically a relatively new phenomenon, starting in more affluent European regions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but mainly established during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arthur Imhof – a German social historian – interpreted and discussed the change from ‘insecure’ to ‘secure’ life expectancy as being a major societal and cultural change.<sup>8</sup> As early deaths (during childhood or young adulthood) became rare, most people died after a long, and, in many cases, a healthy long life. This development has many societal consequences. For example, to name just a few, wealth transfer by inheritance is postponed (in Switzerland, the mean age of people inheriting wealth is around 60). There has been an increase in the proportion of men and women who are simultaneously confronted with responsibilities for their teenage children and their ageing parents; the so called “generation caught in

5 Reinhard Spree, *Der Rückzug des Todes. Der epidemiologische Übergang in Deutschland während des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Konstanz 1992 (Konstanzer Universitätsreden).

6 Stuart J. Olshansky / Bruce A. Carnes et al., *In Search of Methuselah. Estimating the Upper Limits to Human Longevity*, in: *Science* 250 (1990), pp. 634–640, at p. 640; Anatoli I. Yashin / Ivan A. Iachine, *How Frailty Models Can be Used for Evaluating Longevity Limits. Taking Advantage of an Interdisciplinary Approach*, in: *Demography* 34,1 (1997), pp. 31–48.

7 Sujuan Gao / Heather Burney et al., *Incidence of Dementia and Alzheimer Disease over Time. A Meta-Analysis*, in: *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 67,7 (2019), pp. 1361–1369; Ingmar Skoog et al., *Decreasing Prevalence of Dementia in 85-year Olds Examined 22 Years Apart. The Influence of Education and Stroke*, in: *Scientific Reports* 7,6136 (2017) (DOI: 10.1038/s41598-017-05022-8).

8 Arthur E. Imhof, *Die gewonnenen Jahre. Von der Zunahme unserer Lebensspanne seit dreihundert Jahren oder von einer neuen Einstellung zu Leben und Sterben*, München 1981; id., *Von der unsicheren zur sicheren Lebenszeit. Ein folgenschwerer Wandel im Verlaufe der Neuzeit*, in: *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 71,2 (1984), pp. 175–198.

the middle”.<sup>9</sup> The age of widowhood has significantly increased (in spite of the higher divorce rates, the proportion of long-term marriages has also increased). While at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, about half of the grandparents of a new-born child were no longer living, today most children experience active grandparents even at the age of 20. In modern societies, the number of grandparents that have to take responsibility for grandchildren as a result of the parents’ divorce is much higher than as result of their death.<sup>10</sup>

According to the German sociologist Martin Kohli, the change to a relatively secure life expectancy (in the sense of a very high probability to reach a high age) has two major societal consequences: firstly, it allowed the institutionalisation of structured life cycles for large parts of the population, and the emergence of new life stages like youthful adulthood.<sup>11</sup> Longevity supported normative concepts of career planning and socially regulated old-age pensions for most men and women. Secondly, it allowed for the orientation of social regulations according to chronological age definitions (for example the age at which people can stop working and enjoy work-free old age pensions).<sup>12</sup> In a similar sense, ideas about midlife (and midlife crisis) only make sense in societies with high probabilities of an extended life span.

At the same time, a long and secure life expectancy also reinforced processes of individualisation: when people live longer, it makes sense to invest more in individuals, for example by expanding primary and secondary education and by introducing norms of life-long learning.<sup>13</sup> In a certain sense, long processes of socialisation and education, chronologically structured life-cycles, career and finance planning and new activities after retirement are based on a secure life expectancy. An interesting aspect of modern life expectancy is that ‘longevity risk’ (i. e. to live longer than is financially expected) is an emerging topic, particularly with regard to capital-based pension systems.

9 Allan Puur / Luule Sakkeus / Asta Põldma / Anne Herm, Intergenerational Family Constellations in Contemporary Europe. Evidence from the Generations and Gender Survey, in: Demographic Research 25 (2011), pp. 135–172.

10 François Höpflinger, Großelternschaft im Wandel – neue Beziehungsmuster in der modernen Gesellschaft, Bonn 2016 (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Analysen & Argumente 209).

11 Martin Kohli, Die Institutionalisierung des Lebenslaufs, Historische Befunde und theoretische Argumente, in: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 37 (1985), pp. 1–29.

12 Martin Kohli in this context uses the difficult to translate terms of *Verzeitlichung* and *Chronologisierung* of life, which in fact are two terms that relate to a high degree of planning of individual life cycles (ibid.).

13 Helga Pelizäus-Hoffmeister, Das lange Leben in der Moderne. Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Lebensalter und Modernisierung, Wiesbaden 2011 (*Alter(n) und Gesellschaft* 21).

In the following chapter, three important socio-gerontological elements are analysed. The first part discusses the multidimensional character of (chronological) age from a sociological perspective; demonstrating that chronological age is a poor indicator of ageing processes in many instances. The second part presents a short overview of socio-gerontological theories and modern approaches to old age (active ageing, and differentiation between the third and fourth age). It is clear that these theories primarily refer to modern societies with high life expectancies and socially organized retirement systems for large segments of the population.<sup>14</sup> In the third part, the dimensions of social inequalities in ageing processes are discussed and illustrated. In nearly all societies, the living conditions and social status of older men and women vary markedly according to their financial situation.

## 2 Age. A Multidimensional Concept – and How to Avoid Age-Related Fallacies

In many scientific studies and in most political or demographic discussions of old age, a purely chronological age measurement is used. Demographic ageing is measured by comparing the number of people aged 60 or 65 years and older relative to the total number of persons within a given region. Chronological age (i. e. the number of years lived) is easily asked or – at least in bureaucratically organised societies – easily calculated (for example by looking at birth certificates). However, chronological age includes different dimensions, and simplistic interpretations of differences between age groups result in social or demographic fallacies. Age as the number of years lived reflects four different dimensions that are theoretically clearly defined but empirically difficult to disentangle.<sup>15</sup>

14 In pre-industrial societies, financially secure retirement or pensions were limited to specific groups (clerics, officers); cf. Liliane Mottu-Weber, *Être vieux à Genève sous l'Ancien Régime*, in: Geneviève Heller (Ed.) *Le poids des ans. Une histoire de la vieillesse en Suisse romande*, Genève 1994 (*Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société d'histoire de la Suisse romande. 4 e série 3*), pp. 47–65; Kirsi Salonen, *What Happened to Aged Priests in the Late Middle Ages?*, in: Christian Krötzel / Katariina Mustakallio (Eds.) *On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2011 (*The History of Daily Life 2*), pp. 183–196.

15 François Höpflinger, *Altern und Generationen bei hoher Lebenserwartung*, in: Yasemin Niephaus / Michaela Kreyenfeld / Reinhold Sackmann (Eds.), *Handbuch Bevölkerungssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2016 (*Springer Nachschlagewissen*), pp. 595–616.

First of all, people of the same age belong to the same birth cohort (or social generation). Differences between age groups can reflect not only effects due to chronological age but so called “cohort effects”. In some studies, older men and women were found to be more conservative than younger people. This was interpreted as empirical proof that conservative attitudes become more pronounced with age. However, detailed analysis indicates that age-differences in political values are primarily due to generational differences (older people that were born in historical periods with more traditional values).<sup>16</sup> Observed differences in values and behaviours between younger and older people can relate to the elementary fact that people born and educated in different historical periods have been confronted with different societal situations. Salient historical events – such as epidemics, wars or economic crises – have long-term effects on values and behaviour of different birth cohorts. The same is true for rapid technological and social changes. Older men and women are less used to digital communication than younger generations, resulting in a digital divide between the young and old that primarily represents intergenerational differences and only partially the fact that people disengage from the Internet with increasing age.<sup>17</sup> Younger birth cohorts of elderly experience different ageing processes than earlier birth cohorts in many dimensions. As result of better education, new forms of family formation (and dissolution) and changing socio-economic conditions during the last decades, new generations of elderly men and women have a more active attitude regarding life after retirement than do their parents or grandparents. At least in some European countries, improved social security has reduced poverty rates among the elderly population and retired people of today often remain healthy for longer than earlier generations did.<sup>18</sup> Ideally, the best research strategy on ageing processes is to compare the ageing of different birth cohorts to differentiate between age and cohort effects.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, age corresponds to the length of life lived (in years, months and days). A longer life span is clearly associated not only with biological processes (biological ageing)

16 Johnathan C. Peterson / Kevin B. Smith / John R. Hibbing, Do People Really Become More Conservative as They Age?, in: *The Journal of Politics* 82,2 (2020), pp. 600–611.

17 François Höpflinger / Valérie Hugentobler / Dario Spini (Eds.) *Wohnen in den späten Lebensjahren. Grundlagen und regionale Unterschiede*, Zürich 2019 (Age-Stiftung. Age-Report 4).

18 Rainer Unger, *Lebenserwartung in Gesundheit. Konzepte und Befunde*, in: Niephaus / Kreyenfeld / Sackmann (Eds.), *Handbuch Bevölkerungssoziologie* (see note 15), pp. 565–594.

19 Yang Yang / Sam Schulhofer-Wohl / Wenjiang J. Fu / Kenneth C. Land, The Intrinsic Estimator for Age-Period-Cohort Analysis. What It Is and How to Use It?, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (2008), pp. 1697–1736.

but also with social and psychological life experiences that result in social differences between younger and older people. Some social processes – like the accumulation of wealth or developing a professional career – take time. The same is true for political experience (and the accumulation of power), that in some societies contributes to gerontocracy, as seen in the Venetian Republic.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, some biographical options are limited in time. The possibility of giving birth to a child ends for women after menopause. Later stages in life can be characterized by a diminishing number of options to gather wealth or to change one's lifestyle. Past decisions become more salient than future ones. Philosophically, the inverse relationship between more life experience and less future experience has been a major point of reference in discussing old age.<sup>21</sup> As people experience different life events, biographical duration results in increasing social, economic and psychological heterogeneity between men and women born in the same year. This is reinforced by the fact that biological ageing also varies between people in significant ways.

Thirdly, chronological age is related to specific life phases; for example, growing up, and having small and later adult children. In the first years of life, humans are dependent on parental care. In later life, humans are confronted with ageing parents in need of their help and care. Even in modern societies with individualised life phases, some social transitions are experienced earlier or later in life. Schooling and the first career choice or family formation happen during the younger years, while caring for elderly parents or the experience of widowhood are – at least in modern societies – often experienced in later life. Similar age-related associations are seen regarding family constellations: from being parents of small children to parents of adult children, and eventually becoming grandparents. Being a grandmother or grandfather is an important 'old age-family role' in all cultures and societies, even when the chronological age at which men or women are confronted with the birth of grandchildren may vary.<sup>22</sup> Differences between younger and older people are often related to differences in intergenerational roles within families, at

20 Robert Finlay, *The Venetian Republic as a Gerontocracy. Age and Politics in the Renaissance*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1978), pp. 157–178.

21 This observation resulted in a purely biographical definition of old age: People are old, when no important life options remain or each life decision is strongly determined by past decisions (Herwig Birg/E.-Jürgen Flöthmann/Iris Reiter, *Biographische Theorie der demographischen Reproduktion*, Frankfurt 1991).

22 For a social history of grandparenthood in Europe, cf. Erhard Chvojka, *Geschichte der Großelternrollen vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Wien 2003; Vincent Gourdon, *Histoire des grand-parents*, Paris 2012 (*Tempus* 450).

work or in a neighbourhood.<sup>23</sup> However, in some cases chronological age and life phase can be reversed, for example when older men (or even grandfathers) become the father of a newborn child or when an aunt is younger than a nephew.

Fourthly, a comparison of people of different ages can be significantly influenced by social differences in life expectancies. In many societies, life expectancies are positively related to social status (or to put it more directly, the rich live longer than do the poor). This is true for modern societies but has also been observed in pre-industrial societies. In Geneva in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the probability of celebrating one's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday was much higher for financially secure members of the upper classes than it was for poor workers.<sup>24</sup> A particular social selectivity of survival in modern societies relates to gender-differences with respect to life expectancies. In modern societies, women on average live longer than men, a difference that seems to be historically related to the emergence of industrial forms of production during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With increasing age, the proportion of women in a given population increases; a process known as the 'feminisation of old age'.<sup>25</sup> Gender-related differences in life expectancies combined with gender-specific differences of age at marriage (women marry earlier than men do and often marry men some years older than themselves) result in the fact that more women than men are confronted with the death of a spouse later in life.

The simple and easily measured variable 'age' is a multidimensional variable. A naive interpretation of the differences between younger and older people or of age-related changes without considering the possible effects of cohort changes, differential survival or differences in life transitions and family roles can result in the wrong conclusions being drawn (so called "age-fallacies"). For example, if we find that older people are socially more conservative than young people, it is clearly a fallacy to interpret this as empirical proof that people become more set in their ways in old age. The conservatism of older people can be related to cohort effects (born during periods with more conservative values), survival effects (only conservative people remain in a region characterized by significant emigration) or wealth effects (older men and women who live longer are more often conservative landowners than are young people starting out on an innovative

23 Reinhold Sackmann, *Lebenslaufanalyse und Biografieforschung. Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden 2007.

24 Alfred Perrenoud, *L'inégalité sociale devant la mort à Genève au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Population* 30 (1975), pp. 221–243.

25 Gertrud M. Backes, *Geschlechter – Lebenslagen – Altern*, in: Ursula Pasero/ead./Klaus R. Schroeter (Eds.), *Altern in Gesellschaft. Ageing – Diversity – Inclusion*, Wiesbaden 2007, pp. 151–184.

career path). Estimations of the future number of elderly people with dementia can be misleading when lower incidence rates of dementia among younger birth cohorts are not taken into consideration.<sup>26</sup>

The limitations of chronological age in explaining ageing processes have resulted in a more critical view of traditional measures of demographic ageing (i. e. the elderly population simply being defined as persons aged 65 and above) in recent years. Dynamic measurements of demographic ageing take changing life expectancies into consideration. This indicates that most discussions about an increasing demographic of ageing of modern societies present a distorted and exaggerated view of demographic processes (particularly because they do not take into account that people in many countries do not only live longer but also benefit from much longer life expectancies during which they remain healthy and active).<sup>27</sup>

### 3 Socio-Gerontological Approaches. From Disengagement Theories to Theories of Active Ageing

The development of socio-gerontological approaches to individual ageing is the result of two major changes in the life situation of the elderly population in modern societies. On the one hand, it is important to mention the establishment of retirement policies that secure the economic survival of elderly men and women who are no longer working. Particularly after 1918, European countries introduced old age financial security systems<sup>28</sup> and after World War II social policies for the elderly were further expanded. The result is a financially secure retirement for a large part of the elderly population. On the other hand, life expectancies – and particularly healthy life years – after retirement have increased, resulting in a new life phase after giving up work.<sup>29</sup>

The first prominent sociological theory of life after retirement focused on the concept of disengagement: growing old implies not only a disengagement from work but

26 Skoog et al., *Decreasing Prevalence of Dementia* (see note 7).

27 Hippolyte D'Albis / Fabrice Collard, *Age Groups and the Measure of Population Ageing*, in: *Demographic Research* 29 (2013), pp. 617–640; Warren C. Sanderson / Sergei Scherbov, *Remeasuring Aging*, in: *Science* 329 (2010), pp. 1287–1288; eid., *Prospective Longevity. A New Vision of Aging*, Cambridge MA 2020.

28 Josef Ehmer, *Sozialgeschichte des Alters*, Frankfurt 1990 (Edition Suhrkamp 1541).

29 Franz Kolland / Ruth A. Meyer-Schweizer, *Altern und Wertewandel*, in: *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 45 (2012), pp. 587–592.

also from different social networks. The main aim of the disengagement theory was to promote a positive adaptation to retirement (and not to regret the loss of active work).<sup>30</sup> The disengagement theory implicitly relates to historical philosophical ideas that emphasise disengagement from an active life as being an important development in old age (that is also characterised by an increasing nearness to death). Empirically, the disengagement theory was never clearly supported. For many activities – such as leisure activities or voluntary work – continuity after retirement was more often observed, leading to the formulation of the continuity theory.<sup>31</sup> According to this theoretical approach, the continued participation in significant cultural or social activities after retirement is a sensible strategy to avoid feelings of futility and social isolation in old age. The theoretical approaches with the strongest impact during the last decades have, however, been concepts of ‘active ageing’ or – as introduced by John Rowe and Robert Kahn – concepts of ‘successful ageing’<sup>32</sup>: contrary to more deficit-oriented approaches of individual ageing, concepts of active or successful ageing emphasize the potential of improving biological ageing and social situations even in old age.<sup>33</sup> An active life is seen as a major contributing factor to ensure a long healthy life after retirement.<sup>34</sup> The concept of active ageing has been supported in the last decades by a rapid increase in the amount of empirical studies and practical interventions demonstrating that active strategies of life-long learning can significantly delay cognitive decline in old age.<sup>35</sup>

Regular physical exercise is also an important element of active ageing as physical training can improve grip strength, sense of balance and general health even for people

30 Elaine Cumming/William E. Henry, *Growing Old. The Process of Disengagement*, New York 1961.

31 Robert C. Atchley, *Retirement and Leisure Participation. Continuity or Crisis?*, in: *The Gerontologist* 11 (1971), pp. 13–17.

32 John W. Rowe/Robert L. Kahn, *Successful Aging*, in: *The Gerontologist* 37 (1967), pp. 433–440.

33 The idea that a healthy and morally sound life can improve old age has a long tradition, at least among elites. Treatises on ‘successful ageing’ were for example published during the late Renaissance. For Zerbi’s “*Gerontocomia*” and Cornaro’s “*Trattato della Vita Sobria*”, cf. Chris Gilleard, *Renaissance Treatises on ‘Successful Ageing’*, in: *Ageing and Society* 33,2 (2013), pp. 189–215.

34 Stefanie Klott, *Theorien des Alters und des Alterns*, in: Stefanie Becker/Hermann Brandenburg (Eds.), *Lehrbuch Gerontologie. Gerontologisches Fachwissen für Pflege- und Sozialberufe*, Bern 2014, pp. 37–74.

35 Anne Eschen/Jaqueline Zöllig/Mike Martin, *Kognitives Training*, in: Hans-Werner Wahl/Clemens Tesch-Römer/Jochen P. Ziegelmann (Eds.), *Angewandte Gerontologie. Interventionen für ein gutes Altern in 100 Schlüsselbegriffen*, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 279–284.

aged 90 and above. To be socially active – including regular contacts with friends and family members or being engaged in volunteer work after retirement – has been shown to improve well-being and mental health in later life.<sup>36</sup> The potential for a long healthy life after the age of 65 in Europe has improved, and the lifestyles of newer cohorts of retired men and women are evolving in the direction of more active lifestyles, at least among affluent European retirees. The German ageing surveys (from 1996 onwards) show that on nearly all social dimensions, significant changes in life perspectives and lifestyles of the elderly population can be observed.<sup>37</sup> Positive trends (less isolation and better cognitive capacities) have even been observed among recent cohorts of German centenarians.<sup>38</sup>

The structural changes of individual ageing in modern societies have resulted in important conceptual developments: firstly, individual ageing is no longer perceived as a process to endure passively, but rather as a process that can be actively formed and shaped. A radical consequence of an active attitude towards ageing is the emergence of an anti-ageing approach to medicine with the aim to prevent, or at least to slow down, biological ageing.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, subjective and chronological age differ significantly as new generations define themselves as being much younger than their chronological age.<sup>40</sup> Many retired persons define themselves as not being “really old” as long as they live at home without extensive help.<sup>41</sup> In pre-industrial societies too, perceived age and chronological age could diverge, as mentioned in an analysis of old age during the Roman Empire: “Poorer people on the whole have ‘looked older’ at early chronological

36 Christian Deindl/Karsten Hank/Martina Brandt, Social Networks and Self-rated Health in Later Life, in: Alex Börsch-Supan/Martina Brandt/Howard Litwin/Guglielmo Weber (Eds.), *Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations in Europe. First Results from SHARE after the Economic Crisis*, Berlin-Boston 2013, pp. 301–310.

37 Katharina Mahne/Julia K. Wolff/Julia Simonson/Clemens Tesch-Römer (Eds.), *Altern im Wandel. Zwei Jahrzehnte Deutscher Alterssurvey*, Wiesbaden 2017.

38 Daniela S. Jopp et al., *Zweite Heidelberger Hundertjährigen-Studie. Herausforderungen und Stärken des Lebens mit 100 Jahren*, Stuttgart 2013.

39 Astrid Stuckelberger, *Le guide des médecines anti-âge. De la prévention aux traitements. Techniques de pointe et ressources pour la longévité, la santé et la beauté*, Lausanne 2012.

40 Berner Generationenhaus, *Altersbilder der Gegenwart. Haltung der Bevölkerung zum Alter und zur alternden Gesellschaft*, Bern 2019.

41 Stefanie Graefe/Silke van Dyk/Stephan Lessenich, *Altsein ist später. Alter(n)snormen und Selbstkonzepte in der zweiten Lebenshälfte*, in: *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 5 (2011), pp. 299–305.

ages than those who are better off, who also had the means to disguise the process of ageing".<sup>42</sup>

In the last decades, a distinction of at least two different types of older persons became popular and in ageing research the traditional notion of old age bifurcates between a new and rapidly expanding population of healthy and independent 'young old' (third age) and a frail or dependent population of 'old-old' (fourth age).<sup>43</sup> The term 'young-old' was first used by the American gerontologist, Bernice Neugarten,<sup>44</sup> and later developed into an elaborate theory of a third age by Peter Laslett<sup>45</sup>. While the beginning of the third age is characterised by a socially important transition (retirement), the concept of the fourth age remains more ambivalent, as the start of the fourth age is not structurally defined.<sup>46</sup> The concept of fourth age refers either to people aged over 80 or alternatively to frail or dependent elderly persons. The transition from third to fourth age is often characterized by decreasing functional health and increasing frailty.<sup>47</sup> The main advantage of such a conceptualization is the possibility of a clear empirical classification of persons. The disadvantage is a primarily deficit-oriented perspective of the fourth age. The German gerontologist Ludwig Amrhein puts forward the thesis that the social upgrading of the third age in modern societies is complementary to a social devaluation of the fourth age.<sup>48</sup> While the 'young-old' are perceived as active subjects, the 'old-old' are still primarily seen as passive recipients of help and care. In a certain sense, the now popular distinction of 'young-old' versus 'old-old' reflects the societal difficulties in dealing with changes of ageing processes and using traditional concepts of age.

42 Mary Harlow / Ray Laurence, *Viewing the Old. Recording and Respecting the Elderly at Rome and in the Empire*, in: Krötzl / Mustakallio (Eds.), *On Old Age* (see note 14), pp. 3–24, at pp. 3–4.

43 Paul B. Baltes / Jacqui Smith, *New Frontiers in the Future of Aging. From Successful Aging of the Young Old to the Dilemmas of the Fourth Age*, in: *Gerontology* 49 (2003), pp. 123–135.

44 Bernice L. Neugarten, *Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old*, in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 415 (1974), pp. 187–198.

45 Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life. The Emergence of the Third Age*, London 1989. The concept of third age was first practically applied in 1975 in Lyon (France), when the first "University of the Third Age" (*Université du troisième âge*) was founded.

46 Martin Kohli, *Alter und Altern der Gesellschaft*, in: Steffen Mau / Nadine Schöneck (Eds.), *Handwörterbuch zur Gesellschaft Deutschlands*, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 11–23.

47 Christian Lalive d'Épinay / Dario Spini (Eds.), *Les années fragiles. La vie au-delà de quatre-vingts ans*, Québec 2008 (*Sociologie Contemporaine*).

48 Ludwig Amrhein, *Die soziale Konstruktion von ‚Hochaltrigkeit‘ in einer jungen Altersgesellschaft*, in: *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 46 (2013), pp. 10–15.

#### 4 Healthy Ageing. Contextual and Social Differences

Culturally, both positive and negative stereotypes regarding old age have a long tradition and have been observed in many historical and modern societies. Positive images relate to the experience and wisdom of the elderly, while negative images associate old age with functional and cognitive decline (dementia). Regarding the social status of older men and women, we find significant heterogeneity and inequality. In most historical and modern societies, the social status of older men and women varies according to their wealth and intergenerational family situation (son / daughter, father / mother or grandfather / grandmother). In many societies, social status and intergenerational family position are more important dimensions for determining the social situation of older men and women than are general cultural images of old age. While in many pre-industrial societies the social status of the elderly was primarily related to their level of control over (communal) land and their family situation (single, married or widowed), in modern societies social and health differences among older men and women are more strongly related to private income after retirement and to their educational level, while their family situation (single, married or widowed) is statistically no longer seen as being very significant.

Healthy ageing (as the major basis for active ageing) is primarily the privilege of more financially secure elderly persons in affluent regions of the world. This is clearly the situation in modern European countries, as illustrated in the following table (see table 2). The proportion of elderly persons who define themselves as healthy is markedly higher in wealthier European countries. And, within countries, the proportion of healthy elderly positively correlates to their financial situation.<sup>49</sup> In a certain sense, the modern socio-gerontological concepts of ageing (healthy and active ageing and differentiation between the third and fourth age) primarily relate to the affluent elderly (in many poorer countries there is still only a minority of older men and women relative to the overall population). While deficit-oriented images of ageing – often based on traditional stereotypes of decline in older age – are oriented towards the past (i. e. to societal situations or generations that no longer exist), the competence-oriented concepts of ageing often relate to an idealised future.

49 Significant differences in healthy ageing also relate to the level of education achieved (not shown).

**Tab. 2: Healthy Ageing – Subjective Health in Selected Countries Declared as Being Good or Very Good and Financial Situation in 2018.**

Country	No.	All	Financial Situation of Household		
			Good	Medium	Bad
Switzerland	337	71 %	79 %	68 %	49 %
Norway	308	65 %	70 %	56 %	44 %
Belgium	389	63 %	72 %	61 %	52 %
United Kingdom	518	61 %	72 %	53 %	21 %
Netherlands	375	55 %	61 %	51 %	45 %
Austria	575	53 %	66 %	49 %	36 %
Germany	578	49 %	58 %	45 %	16 %
Finland	494	48 %	55 %	46 %	40 %
France	516	46 %	56 %	44 %	37 %
Czech Republic	439	36 %	60 %	37 %	27 %
Italy	801	35 %	50 %	35 %	22 %
Hungary	466	29 %	48 %	33 %	21 %
Poland	336	26 %	44 %	31 %	14 %
Serbia	539	25 %	41 %	27 %	16 %
Bulgaria	767	22 %	67 %	39 %	17 %
Persons aged 65+ Financial situation of household: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Good: living comfortably on present income</li> <li>● Medium: coping on present income</li> <li>● Bad: difficult or very difficult to live on present income</li> </ul> Source: European Social Survey Data 2018, Data file edition 1.0, Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway, data archive and distributor of ESS data.					

## 5 Conclusions for Historical Research

Philosophically, ageing is a general human experience affecting all men and women in a fundamentally similar way (and in this view Cicero's "De Senectute" is today as important as it was in his time). From a sociological point of view, however, individual ageing is strongly embedded in and affected by demographic, social, economic and cultural structures of society. Within a given society, the status of elderly women is determined

by general social inequalities. Historical research on old age therefore has to take into account the specific societal conditions of a region during a given period or, to put it more directly: an ahistorical analysis of old age (and particularly regarding the status of elderly persons) in preceding decades and centuries makes no sense. A large part of previous and current research on ageing or on older persons can be classified as being ahistorical research, in the sense that the social and historical context of given empirical observations or cohort effects were and are still neglected. The main consequence is that empirical relationships observed in a given context over a given period cannot be validated by later research or by research looking at older people in culturally different contexts. As individual ageing is immanently related to intergenerational relationships and intergenerational changes, cohort effects and family situation (child, parent or grandparent) are often just as important as other ageing effects.

Regarding socio-gerontological approaches to ageing, their use for historical research is limited, as those concepts are primarily valid for modern societies with organised retirement systems and a relatively long (healthy) life expectancy after retirement. Some concepts (active ageing and successful ageing) are to some extent more oriented toward the future of ageing than to the past. As illustrated, active and healthy ageing, even today, is primarily a reality for more affluent and highly educated men and women in wealthier parts of the world. In pre-industrial societies modern socio-gerontological approaches to ageing can, however, be used in reflecting the ageing of selected elites (for example as front-runners of more active perspectives on ageing processes).

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# Perspectives on Ageing and Old Age in the Old Testament

## Abstract

In recent years, an increasing interest in anthropological topics can be observed in Old Testament scholarship. In this context, the topic of “age and ageing” has also gained considerable importance in the field of Old Testament anthropology. This article provides an overview of the subject and the images of ageing and old age on the basis of selected passages from the various text genres of the Old Testament including narrative texts, wisdom literature, legal texts, or poetic literature. Three aspects of old age and ageing are considered: (1) chronological aspects: the division of life into stages and human life expectancy, (2) biological aspects: the physical ageing process with physical and mental changes, and (3) social aspects: the social position of aged and wise people and the care for the elderly.

## 1 Introduction

“He or she has reached a biblical age”, is what is proverbially said to this day when someone grows very old or dies at an advanced age. This phrase is mainly rooted in the biblical narratives about the extreme old age of the primeval figures, among them the most famous old man, Methuselah. According to biblical tradition, he reached an age of 969 years and thus became a kind of prototype of longevity, so that his name is still used in a figurative sense today to describe someone who is very old.<sup>1</sup> However, the topic of old age in the Old Testament literature is not exhausted in these high, symbolic ages that are reported in the narratives and genealogies of the book of Genesis. Rather, the topic of ageing and old age occurs in various textual genres of the Old Testament, such as the wisdom writings, poetic literature, legal or narrative texts. In contrast to Greek

1 Cf., e.g. “Das Methusalem-Komplott” which is a book that deals with the ageing of society (Frank Schirrmacher, *Das Methusalem-Komplott*, München <sup>s</sup>2004), or, in the “Asterix” comic series, the name “Methusalix” for the oldest inhabitant in the small Gaelic village.

and Roman antiquity, there are no comprehensive treatises or philosophical reflections on ageing and old age in the Bible. Only some texts explicitly focus on the aged or the human ageing process.<sup>2</sup> More often, it is only a few verses within a text from which conclusions can be drawn about the perception of old age in biblical times. In terms of everyday life in ancient Israel, the sources can only be evaluated to a limited extent, as these texts in many cases reflect the view of a certain social class, namely the scribal elites.<sup>3</sup>

When looking at the texts of the Old Testament, we find a great variety of images of old age and different attitudes towards ageing and old people. In order to classify and examine this diversity, Old Testament scholarship can benefit from the categorisations and different perspectives on old age and ageing in the field of gerontological research.<sup>4</sup> In my paper on old age in Old Testament literature, I would like to focus on three selected aspects:<sup>5</sup> Firstly, chronological aspects such as the human life expectancy, or the division of life into stages; then, biological aspects such as the biological ageing process, which comprise both physical and mental changes, and finally, social aspects including the position of aged and wise people in the society of ancient Israel as well as how the elderly were cared for. In the Old Testament, all these issues are permeated by the theological aspect, to which I will return separately at the conclusion.

2 Cf. e. g. 2 Sam. 19:32–41.

3 Beate Wagner-Hasel, *Alter in der Antike. Eine Kulturgeschichte*, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2012, p. 14.

4 For an overview, cf. e. g. Paul M. Balthes/Jürgen Mittelstraß/Ursula M. Staudinger (Eds.), *Alter und Altern. Ein interdisziplinärer Studententext zur Gerontologie*, Berlin-New York 2018; Andreas Kruse/Hans-Werner Wahl, *Zukunft Altern. Individuelle und gesellschaftliche Weichenstellungen*, Heidelberg 2010; Hans-Werner Wahl/Vera Heyl, *Gerontologie – Einführung und Geschichte*, Stuttgart 2015 (*Grundrisse Gerontologie 1*).

5 Stephanie Ernst, *Segen – Aufgabe – Einsicht. Aspekte und Bilder des Alterns in den Texten des Alten Israel*, St. Ottilien 2011 (ATS.AT 93), pp. 15–17; Rolf Knierim, *Age and Aging in the Old Testament*, in: William M. Clements (Ed.), *Ministry with the Aging*, San Francisco-London 1981, pp. 21–36.

## 2 Chronological Aspects

### 2.1 Phases of Life

The division of life into different stages is widespread in the ancient Near East and is also known in Old Testament literature.<sup>6</sup> In most cases, human life is divided into three (childhood, adulthood, old age), four (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age), or, less frequently, five stages (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and extreme old age), without these being delimited by certain age limits.<sup>7</sup> Compared to Greco-Roman antiquity, however, there is only limited evidence in the ancient Near East literature of a stage model of life phases. The texts known so far presuppose a decimal system, and, in some cases, indicate the beginning of the phase of “old age”.<sup>8</sup> As far as the Old Testament is concerned, only a kind of a stage model is preserved in Leviticus 27:1–8, a post-exilic appendix to the law of holiness (Leviticus 17–26):<sup>9</sup>

1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When a person makes an explicit vow to the Lord concerning the equivalent for a human being, 3 the equivalent for a male shall be: from twenty to sixty years of age the equivalent shall be fifty shekels of silver by the sanctuary shekel. 4 If the person

6 Moshe Weinfeld, *The Phases of Human Life in Mesopotamian and Jewish Sources*, in: Eugene Ulrich / John W. Wright / Robert P. Carroll / Philip R. Davies (Eds.), *Priests, Prophets and Scribes. Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp*, Sheffield 1992 (JSOT.S 149), pp. 182–189; Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years. A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel*, New York 2011 (LHBOTS 464), pp. 44–57.

7 Deut. 32:25; Jer. 6:11, 51:22; Ezek. 9:6; Thomas Pola, *Vom Kleinkind bis zu den “Ältesten”. Zu den Lebensaltern im Alten Testament*, in: *ThBeitr* 42 (2011), pp. 127–142; Eng, *Days* (see note 6), pp. 52–57.

8 For Mesopotamia cf. the short list on the Sultantepe tablet from the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE (STT 400; Rivkah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia. The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Literature*, Oklahoma 2000, pp. 28–30); for Egypt cf. the instruction of “Papyrus Insinger” from the Ptolemaic period (Rosalind M. Janssen / Jac. J. Janssen, *Growing Up and Getting Old in Ancient Egypt*, London 2007, p. 197; Abraham Malamat, *Longevity. Biblical Concepts and Some Ancient Near Eastern Parallels*, in: *AfO.B* 19 [1982], pp. 215–224, at p. 216). Cf. also Eng, *Days* (see note 6), pp. 44–50.

9 For Lev. 27 cf. Thomas Pola, *Eine priesterschriftliche Auffassung der Lebensalter*, in: Michaela Bauks / Kathrin Liess / Peter Riede (Eds.), *“Was ist der Mensch, dass du seiner gedenkst”* (Psalm 8,5). *Aspekte einer theologischen Anthropologie. Festschrift für Bernd Janowski zum 65. Geburtstag*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2008, pp. 389–408, at pp. 390–392, 405–408; Thomas Hieke, *Leviticus*, 2 vols., Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2014 (HThKAT 6,1–2), vol. 2: 16–27, pp. 1108–1111.

is a female, the equivalent is thirty shekels. 5 If the age is from five to twenty years of age, the equivalent is twenty shekels for a male and ten shekels for a female. 6 If the age is from one month to five years, the equivalent for a male is five shekels of silver, and for a female the equivalent is three shekels of silver. 7 And if the person is sixty years old or over, then the equivalent for a male is fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels' (Lev. 27:1–8).<sup>10</sup>

This text presents a classification of life phases from a priestly perspective and lists the amounts of money required for the release of people who have dedicated their lives to the sanctuary in a vow, distinguishing four phases of human life: children between the ages of one month and five years, young people from the ages of five to 20 years, adults from the ages of 20 to 60 years and, finally, men and women over the age of 60. The criterion for the money to be given to the sanctuary is human labour. Men and women aged between 20 and 60 have the highest value (50 and 30 shekels respectively), because this phase of life is considered to be the time of greatest productivity; for those aged over 60, on the other hand, less money has to be given due to their reduced ability to work (15 and 10 shekels respectively). According to this list, the age of 60 marks a significant caesura in human life and can, in a sense, be regarded as the beginning of old age. However, this age caesura does not apply without exception, as is shown by another priestly text that sets a lower age limit of 50 years as marking the end of the priests' service in the sanctuary (Num. 4:3.23.47; cf. 8,25).

## 2.2 Life Expectancy

The life expectancy in ancient Israel is difficult to determine based on the available sources. In general, drawing on archaeological evidence, e. g. in the necropolises of Jericho or Megiddo, one can assume a maximum average age of approximately 30 to 40 years, which means that only a small percentage of the population may have reached the age of 60 years or even more.<sup>11</sup> Considering the literary sources such as the Deuteronomistic

10 All translations of biblical texts are based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

11 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Life Expectancy in Ancient Palestine*, in: *SJOT* 11 (1997), pp. 44–55; Douglas A. Knight, *Perspectives on Aging and the Elderly in the Hebrew Bible*, in: *Interpretation* 68 (2014), pp. 136–149, at pp. 139–141; Kathrin Liess, *Zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit. Lebensalter und Lebenserwartung im Alten Testament*, in: Malte Cramer / Peter Wick (Eds.), *Alter und Altern in der Bibel. Exegetische Perspektiven auf Altersdiskurse im Alten und Neuen Testament*, Stuttgart 2021, pp. 31–57.

History (i. e. the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), the average age for kings is about 46.<sup>12</sup> However, it must be taken into account that kings had, due to their social status and life circumstances, a much higher life expectancy than the average population, who lived and worked under worse economic conditions.

From the average life expectancy in Old Testament times the very long lifespans of primeval figures – such as the already mentioned ancestor Methuselah or the protagonist of the flood narrative, Noah – deviate to a large extent, for their age by far exceeds the human life limit. In the genealogies of the book of Genesis, Genesis 5 and 11, the mythical ages of the ancestral figures before the flood range from 365 (Enoch) to 969 years (Methuselah). The postdiluvian period, by contrast, is characterised by decreasing ages of the characters in the narratives in Genesis 12–50 (the patriarchal narratives and the story of Joseph), which are nevertheless still higher than the average lifespan (Abraham: 175, Sara: 127, Isaac: 180, Jacob: 147, and Joseph: 110 years).<sup>13</sup>

The idea of extreme old ages of the ancestors is shared by the Old Testament with its ancient Near Eastern environment. An important parallel is represented, for example, by the Sumerian King List, which offers a comparable distinction between a time before and after the flood with the same concept of a decreasing life span in postdiluvian times. As in the Sumerian List, the high ages reported in the biblical narratives are not to be taken literally but rather have a symbolic meaning. In the genealogy Genesis 5, they connect the first humans to the mythical primeval times of the world and indicate a close connection of the ancestors of mankind with the divine sphere.<sup>14</sup> In the case of the progenitors of Israel (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob), their mythical ages are an expression of divine blessing as well as of an exceptional closeness to God. Some numbers also have symbolic value: 365 years (Enoch) correspond to the days of the solar year, 110 years (Joseph) represent the Egyptian ideal age,<sup>15</sup> and 120 years (Moses) symbolise perfection according to the sexagesimal system common in Mesopotamia.<sup>16</sup>

12 Pola, *Auffassung* (see note 9), p. 404; Wolfgang Zwickel, *Alt werden in Israel. Das durchschnittliche Lebensalter in der antiken Welt*, in: *WUB* 61 (2011) pp. 76–77.

13 Gen. 25:7 (Abraham), 35:18 (Isaac), 47:28 (Jacob); Gen. 50:26 (Joseph).

14 Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, “Aber Abraham und Sarah waren alt, hochbetagt...” (Gen. 18:11). *Altersdarstellungen und Funktionen von Altersaussagen im Alten Testament*, in: Angelika Berlejung/Jan Dietrich/Friedrich Wilhelm Quack (Eds.), *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im Alten Israel, in Ägypten und um Alten Orient*, Tübingen 2012 (ORA 9), pp. 255–285, at p. 261.

15 Janssen/Janssen, *Growing* (see note 8), pp. 194–203.

16 Harris, *Gender and Aging* (see note 8), pp. 30–31; Jacob Klein, *The “Bane” of Humanity. A Lifespan of One Hundred Twenty Years*, in: *ASJ* 12 (1990), pp. 57–70.

In contrast to the extreme old ages of the prehistoric figures, Psalm 90, a psalm influenced by wisdom theology, mentions a realistic life expectancy from today's perspective: "The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away ... So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart" (Ps. 90:10–12). Compared to the average life expectancy in ancient Israel, 70 to 80 years represent a very long lifespan that only very few were granted. Nevertheless, the psalm is dominated by a negative view of life and the psalmist laments transience and death. Faced with life's fleeting nature, he turns to God as a teacher with an urgent plea, asking for a wise way of dealing with life's brevity.<sup>17</sup> His insistent request to learn "to count the days" is aimed at developing awareness of each day of life. The psalmist strives to gain a "wise heart" that enables a realistic worldview that affirms reality, even that of death. Consequently, the petition of Ps. 90:12 reflects a wisdom-oriented attitude to life that focuses on the preciousness of each day in the face of human transience and mortality.<sup>18</sup>

The number 70, mentioned in Psalm 90 as the limit of a life in years, has a symbolic meaning as it denotes completeness and perfection. A lifetime of 80 years goes even beyond that and is therefore a sign of strength. However, apart from the figures of Israel's prehistory such as Methuselah, Noah, or Abraham and Sarah, people who reached or even exceeded the age of 70 or 80 remain the exception in Old Testament narratives. Examples include, among others, early leaders of the people (Moses: 120 years [Deut. 34,7]; Aaron: 123 years [Num. 33:39]; Joshua: 110 years [Josh 24:29]) or figures central to the early Israelite kingdom such as the ideal king David, who reached the perfect age of 70 but nevertheless suffered from old age (1 Kgs. 1:1–4), or Barzillai the Gileadite, his servant, who retires from active life at the age of 80 and prepares for death (2 Sam. 19:32–41).

17 Walter Brueggemann / William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, Cambridge 2014 (NCBC), pp. 392–393.

18 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld / Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2000 (HThKAT 26), p. 612; Christine Forster, *Begrenztes Leben als Herausforderung. Das Vergänglichkeitsmotiv in weisheitlichen Psalmen*, Zürich-Freiburg 2000, p. 191; Hubert Irsigler, *Psalm 90. Der vergängliche Mensch vor dem ewigen Gott*, in: id., *Vom Adamssohn zum Immanuel. Gastvorträge Pretoria 1996, St. Ottilien 1997 (ATS.AT 58)*, pp. 49–67, at p. 65. For the interpretation of Psalm 90, cf. also Theodor Seidl, *Allgemeine Klage über die Vergänglichkeit oder Bittgebet in individueller Not. Zur kontroversen Auslegung von Psalm 90*, in: Andreas Michel / Nicole Katrin Rüttgers (Eds.), *Jeremia, Deuteronomismus und die Priesterschrift. Beiträge zur Literatur- und Theologiegeschichte des Alten Testaments. Festschrift für Hermann-Josef Stipp zum 65. Geburtstag*, St. Ottilien 2019 (ATS.AT 105), pp. 233–262.

Two other very old characters are priests, Eli reached the age of 98 (1 Sam. 4:15), and Jehoiada reached the age of 130 years (2 Chr. 24:15).

While Psalm 90 limits life to 70 or 80 years, two other Old Testament texts presuppose an even longer lifespan. According to Sir. 18:9, a human being can only live to be a hundred years old, and in Gen. 6:3, the human lifetime is limited to the symbolic 120 years: “Then the Lord said: ‘My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years’” (Gen. 6:3). According to the Old Testament only Moses, who is *the* central figure in Israel’s history as the leader of the Exodus from Egypt and the mediator between God and his people, reached this ideal age of 120 years. Remarkably, he did this without showing any physical signs of old age (Deut. 34:7). For the eschatological times, prophetic literature hopes for a transgression of the limitation of lifetime. As promised in Isaiah 65, the usual division of life phases will be shifted, for those who die at 100 are still considered “young men”: “No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed” (Isa. 65:20).

### 3 Biological aspects

#### 3.1 Physical Signs of Old Age

Ageing is a biological process that affects both the human body and mind. As in many cultures, in Old Testament literature the physiognomy of old age is determined by bent posture and grey or white hair. Even in the time of eschatological salvation, old people will need a stick to walk (Zech. 8:4). Since the second characteristic, grey hair, is such an important topos of old age, the term used in ancient Israel for old people is derived from it: the Hebrew *šēbāh* has two meanings, “grey hair” and “old age”. However, grey hair can also be regarded positively as a sign of honour and the righteous living of old and wise people, as two passages from the book of Proverbs illustrate:<sup>19</sup> “Grey hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life” (Prov. 16:31) and “The glory of youths is their

19 Arndt Meinhold, *Beginn und Bewertung des Greisenalters*, in: id., *Zur weisheitlichen Sicht des Menschen. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Leipzig 2002 (ABIG 6), pp. 79–116, at pp. 105–107; Kathrin Liess, “Der Glanz der Alten ist ihr graues Haar” (Spr 20,29). *Alter und Weisheit in der alttestamentlichen und apokryphen Weisheitsliteratur*, in: Bernd Janowski / Kathrin Liess (Eds.), *Der Mensch im Alten Israel. Neue Forschungen zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2009 (HBS 59), pp. 453–484, pp. 456–467.

strength, but the beauty of the aged is their grey hair” (Prov. 20:29). In addition to the physiognomy of old age such as grey hair and a stooped posture, age-related symptoms and discomforts are described, particularly in narratives. Among the most important texts are the stories of the 80-year-old Barzillai the Gileadite (2 Sam. 19:32–41), the narratives of the ancient progenitors of Israel, Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:9–15), or the story of the 70-year-old king David (1 Kgs. 1:1–4).

At an advanced age Barzillai, who once served at the royal court, sees himself as a burden to king David, afflicted as he is from physical and mental limitations, such as the loss of hearing and taste as well as the lack of discernment between good and evil (2 Sam. 19:36).<sup>20</sup>

32 Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. 33 The king said to Barzillai: ‘Come over with me, and I will provide for you in Jerusalem at my side.’ 34 But Barzillai said to the king: ‘How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? 35 Today I am eighty years old; can I discern what is good and what is evil? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? 36 Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king recompense me with such a reward? 37 Please let your servant return, so that I may die in my own town, near the graves of my father and my mother’ (2 Sam. 19:32–37).

Not only the servant, but also king David himself suffers from symptoms of old age, since his frail body does not get warm (1 Kgs. 1:1–4). About the ancestors Abraham and Sarah it is reported that they are infertile due to their advanced age until God ends their childlessness (Gen. 18:11–12, cf. 17:17). Beyond these narratives, the Old Testament literature mentions other physical characteristics of ageing such as, for instance, the loss of eyesight (Gen. 27:1; 48:10; 1 Sam. 3:2, etc.), a disease of the feet (1 Kgs. 15:23), limited physical mobility (Sir. 25:20), or decreasing strength (Ps. 71:9, 18). In addition to the physical changes, there are cognitive impairments such as the lack of knowledge and cognition (2 Sam. 19:36), decline in memory, and loss of insight and understanding (Eccl. 4:13; Sir. 3:13; 25:2).

20 For this text cf. Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, Barsillai, der Gileaditer. Überlegungen zu Bedeutung und Funktion der Altersaussagen in 2 Samuel 19, 32–41, in: Bauks/Liess/Riede (Eds.), “Was ist der Mensch” (see note 9), pp. 375–388; Ernst, Segen (see note 5), pp. 45–56.

### 3.2 Counter-Images to the Physical Ageing Process

The above examples show that in Old Testament literature the description of the ageing process is characterised by loss, both of physical and mental abilities. But, on the other hand, there are numerous texts in the wisdom literature that consider ageing as a mental maturation process and emphasise the wisdom of the aged.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the biblical literature occasionally presents ideal counter-images to the physical ageing process. Thus, the main characters of the early biblical history described in the books of Genesis and Exodus to Deuteronomy are exempted from the typical signs of ageing. Through God's promise, Abraham and Sarah's age-related infertility is reversed, and Sarah gives birth to a child despite her old age (Gen. 18:9–15; 21:1–7). Moses, the central figure of the Exodus, is not subject to age-related diseases; rather, "his eyes had not grown dim, and his vigour had not waned" (Deut. 34:7), when he died at the ideal age of 120. Remarkably, these extraordinary characters each stand at the beginning of a decisive stage in Israel's history: with the old couple Abraham and Sarah, after the primeval history (Gen. 1–11), the history of Israel's ancestors begins (Gen. 12–50), and with Moses the history of Israel as a nation commences (Exodus-Deuteronomy). At the same time, the old Moses is at the end of an era, for he retires and dies at the border of the promised land as a very old but still vital man. While these early characters were spared the typical physical complaints of old age (Moses), or their physical limitations of old age were overcome by divine promises (Abraham and Sarah), other figures, such as the patriarch Isaac, the ideal king David or Eli the priest, reached a ripe old age but nevertheless suffered from the symptoms of ageing (Gen. 27:1; 1 Sam. 4:15; 1 Kgs. 1:1–4).

As for the individual, in the book of Psalms the righteous and pious are promised a good old age without weakness and disease. This is described particularly impressively in Psalm 92, a thanksgiving psalm, which uses plant motifs to sketch a picture of the fullness of life and vitality of the righteous unto old age, living in faithful relationship with God:<sup>22</sup> "The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap" (Ps. 92:12–14). But

21 See the following section on social aspects.

22 For Ps. 92 cf. W. Dennis Tucker, "The Ordered World of Psalm 92", in: OTE 32 (2019), pp. 358–377, at pp. 368–372; Kathrin Liess, "Jung bin ich gewesen und alt geworden." Lebenszeit und Alter in den Psalmen, in: Thorsten Fitzon/Sandra Linden/ead./Dorothee Elm (Eds.), *Alterszäsuren. Zeit und Lebensalter in Literatur, Theologie und Geschichte*, Berlin-Boston 2012, pp. 131–170, at pp. 138–144.

these ideal counter-images described in Ps. 92 or Deut. 34:7 remain the exception; much more often the Old Testament presupposes typical, cross-cultural characteristics of old age such as declining physical abilities.

## 4 Social Aspects

The social status of the elderly, their role in society and the care for the elderly are closely related to the biological aspects of ageing. On the one hand, the increase in life experience and knowledge can have a positive impact on social status: old people, because of their wisdom, deserve a special dignity. On the other hand, old age is, as described above, characterised by increasing physical and mental limitations. This also affects the position of the elderly in society: weakened by age, old people may be exposed to a lack of appreciation by younger generations. Moreover, due to their declining capacity for labour, they need support and material care from other members of society. Both sides of the social perception of old people – respect and dignity on the one hand, contempt and dependence on the other – have found their expression in Old Testament literature. Whereas the topic of wisdom of old persons plays a central role in biblical wisdom writings, the lack of respect for the older generations and the care for the elderly are mainly the subject of the legal texts, and also of the wisdom writings.

### 4.1 Wisdom and Dignity

According to the Old Testament writings, wisdom and old age are closely related and lead to a privileged position of wise, old people in society. In many cases, the worldly wisdom of parents and the elderly is emphasised:<sup>23</sup> “How attractive is sound judgment in the grey-haired, and for the aged to possess good counsel! How attractive is wisdom in the aged, and understanding and counsel in the venerable! Rich experience is the crown of the aged, and their boast is the fear of the Lord” (Sir. 25:4–6). The older generation is responsible for teaching and sharing their knowledge with the next generation (Sir. 8:9). Therefore,

23 Meinhold, *Beginn* (see note 19), at pp. 105–107; Rüdiger Lux, *Alter und Weisheit. Reflexionen über die Lebenskunst des Alterns in den biblischen Weisheitsschriften*, in: Kristian Kühl/Gerhard Seher (Eds.), *Rom, Recht und Religion. Symposion für Udo Ebert zum 70. Geburtstag*, Tübingen 2011 (Politika 5), pp. 629–644.

the younger generation is advised to stay in the company of old people (Sir. 6:34) and to consult them in order to learn from them (Job 8:8–9).

The instructions and the wealth of experience of the older generation are preserved in the wisdom collections of the biblical literature, including the late Greek writings such as the book of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. Both the book of Proverbs as well as the later book of Sirach accumulate wisdom sayings to be transmitted from the wise, older generation to the younger generation. This process of transmission is reflected in the prologue of the Greek translation of the book of Sirach. Added by Sirach's grandson, the prologue explicitly introduces and thereby authorises the collection as the words of his wise grandfather. The grandson, in turn, is tasked with translating his grandfather's wisdom and thus passing it on to the contemporary Greek readership:<sup>24</sup>

Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others that followed them, and for these we should praise Israel for instruction and wisdom. Now, those who read the scriptures must not only themselves understand them, but must also as lovers of learning be able through the spoken and written word to help the outsiders. So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that by becoming familiar also with his book those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the law (Prologue, lines 1–14).

In narrative literature, 1 Kings 12 provides an exemplary situation in which the elderly are characterised as being wise and circumspect advisers.<sup>25</sup> When king Rehoboam succeeds Solomon, he disregards the advice of the elderly who had advised his father before, and chooses to follow the false recommendations of his contemporaries instead. The advice of the two generations could not be more contrary to one another. The life-experienced generation of the elders recommends the king to be a “servant of the people”, for then his people will also serve him (1 Kgs. 12:6–8, 13). The young, on the contrary, recommend subjecting the people to harsher servitude (1 Kgs. 12:8–11, 14), which finally leads to

24 For the prologue cf. Georg Sauer, *Jesus Sirach / Ben Sira*, Göttingen 2000 (ATD.A 1), pp. 36–41; Johannes Marböck, *Jesus Sirach 1–23*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2010 (HThKAT 32), pp. 36–45.

25 For 1 Kgs. 12:1–19 cf. Moshe Weinfeld, The Counsel of the “Elders” to Rehoboam and its Implications, in: *Maraav* 3 (1982), pp. 27–53; Ernst Axel Knauf, *1 Könige 1–14*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2016 (HThKAT 14), pp. 375–379; Ernst, Segen (see note 5), pp. 66–86.

separation and division of the united monarchy into the northern and the southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. By describing the negative result, the narrative highlights the wisdom of the older generation in contrast to the young. At the same time, it reveals the problematic relationship between the two generations, for in youthful arrogance the inexperienced king ignores the sage advice of the elders, and thereby questions also their social position and authority.

While 1 Kings 12 emphasises the wisdom of the elders as advisers, an increasingly critical evaluation of the connection between wisdom and old age can be observed in the later wisdom literature, which also affects the position of the elderly in society.<sup>26</sup> According to classical wisdom tradition a righteous way of life leads to a long life. For those who follow wisdom and righteousness throughout their lives can enjoy a fulfilling life and social dignity (cf. e. g. Prov. 3:1–26; 4:10–27, etc.). But this connection between act and consequence, the so-called *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*, is no longer self-evident in the late post-exilic wisdom writings such as the book of Job or the Wisdom of Solomon illustrate. In fact, these books deal with the suffering and the premature death of the righteous. In the book of Job (5<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) the wisdom of the elderly fails to explain the suffering of the innocent and righteous Job. Whereas Job's three friends refer to the wisdom of the old people (Job 15:10), Job himself emphasises the elusiveness of wisdom. Wisdom can only be found in God, who can also withdraw it from the elderly: "Is wisdom with the aged, and understanding in length of days? With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding ... He deprives of speech those who are trusted, and takes away the discernment of the old people" (Job 12:12–13, 20).

In the "Elihu speeches" (Job 32–37), a part of the book of Job added in later times, Job's fourth friend, Elihu, as a representative of the younger generation, denies the privilege of the elders to speak first. According to Elihu, wisdom is a gift from God the creator, and can be given to anyone, even to a younger person. Therefore, as a young man, he no longer wants to modestly withhold his view, but to declare his own wise opinion:

6 Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite answered:

'I am young in years, and you are aged;

therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you.'

7 I said, 'Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.'

8 But truly it is the spirit in a mortal,

26 Meinhold, *Beginn* (see note 19), pp. 107–108, Liess, *Glanz* (see note 19), pp. 467–480, Lux, *Alter* (see note 23), pp. 636–643.

the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding.

9 It is not the old that are wise,  
nor the aged that understand what is right.

10 Therefore I say, 'Listen to me;  
let me also declare my opinion' (Job 32:6–10).

The Wisdom of Solomon (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) relativises the relationship of wisdom and old age in view of the early death of the righteous one. The dignity and wisdom of old age can already be attributed to a wise and righteous man who dies young:<sup>27</sup> “But the righteous, though they die early, will be at rest. For old age is not honoured for length of time, or measured by number of years; but understanding is grey hair for anyone, and a blameless life is ripe old age” (Wis. 4:7–9). The reasons why the connection between advanced age and wisdom was relativised in late Old Testament literature are probably to be found in the mental and social changes in late post-exilic times. The hope for an afterlife that emerged during this period shed new light on earthly life, and thus also on ageing and old age. In particular, the hope for eternal life and immortality significantly contributed to a re-evaluation of “old age” or the dignity of old age, as for example described in Wisdom 4. In addition, new challenges and questions arose from the encounter with Greek philosophy and education, to which particularly the younger generation turned.<sup>28</sup> These new challenges of the Hellenistic era could no longer be mastered solely with the wisdom of the elderly.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, this changed context also may have contributed to a critical questioning of the wisdom of the elderly and thus of their social status as well.

Beyond the challenging of their wisdom, the threatening loss of honour and social prestige of the elderly is a well-known problem described in Old Testament literature, both in the legal texts and in the wisdom writings. Weakness, decreasing vitality and mental limitations carry the risk of provoking social disregard. On the one hand, the Old Testament contains exhortations to treat old people with honour and respect and thus the commandment to honour one's father and mother applies especially to the aged parents and probably includes caring for the elderly in general (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; cf. Lev. 19:3; see below). Remarkably, the promise for those who keep this commandment is that they themselves will enjoy a long and fulfilling life. On the other hand, to ameliorate the loss of dignity and authority in old age, there are numerous admonitions addressed to the younger generation not to mock, insult, or despise frail, old people. Even if the

27 Liess, Glanz (see note 19), pp. 471–480; Lux, Alter (see note 23), pp. 640–641.

28 Lux, Alter (see note 23), pp. 640–641.

29 Ibid., p. 638 (note 34).

father's mind diminishes with advancing age, one should not have contempt for him, but be patient with him (Sir. 3:12–13). And the mother should not be despised when she is grown old (Prov. 23:22). These admonitions can be further reinforced by referring to one's own impending ageing: "Do not disdain one who is old, for some of us are also growing old" (Sir. 8:6). In addition, the fear of God is also cited as a motivation to respect and care for the old: "Thou shall rise before the grey hair / the aged, and you shall honour the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God" (Lev. 19:32). Finally, exhortations to honour the elderly may include specific rules for respectful behaviour, such as standing up as a gesture of deference to an old person (Lev. 19:32) or respecting the privilege of elders to speak first at the banquet (Sir. 32:3).

#### 4.2 Working Life and Care for the Elderly

In contrast to modern society, where retirement from working life is regulated by specific age limits, such caesuras are hardly documented in the ancient Near East. In the Old Testament literature, one exception is recorded: the already mentioned caesura of 50 years for leaving the priesthood (Num. 4:3). "Old age" in the sense of a phase of life beyond working life is almost unknown from the ancient Near East. As far as ancient Israel is concerned, there is little information about work in old age. Of course, old people also still play a social role in the Old Testament narratives. Moses remains the leader of the people of Israel until the age of 120, only stepping down shortly before his death (Deut. 31:1–8). Eli, despite his old age, still works as a priest until he finally dies at the age of 98 (1 Sam. 4:15–18), and Samuel is a famous "judge" and prophet in Israel until his old age (1 Sam. 8–12). Old people can still work in the fields (Judg. 19:16) or act as advisers of the king, as elders (1 Kgs. 12). However, the social role of the elders, who were responsible for political or legal tasks such as the jurisdiction in the gate (Num. 5:14), can hardly be limited to old people. Unlike in peasant life, for which one can expect a gradual withdrawal from daily working life due to physical constraints,<sup>30</sup> priestly texts from the exilic and post-exilic period mention specific age limits for the end of professional life by stating that at the age of 50 priests should retire from their active service in the sanctuary (Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 47; 8:25). However, even after their retirement they could still assist

30 Christian Frevel, "Du wirst jemanden haben, der dein Herz erfreut und dich im Alter versorgt" (Rut 4,15). Alter und Altersversorgung im Alten / Ersten Testament, in: Rainer Kampling / Anja Middelbeck-Varwick (Eds.), *Alter – Blicke auf das Bevorstehende*, Frankfurt a. M. 2009 (Apeliotes. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte und Theologie 4), pp. 11–43, at p. 22.

the younger priests (Num. 8:26). The desire for relief may well have been the reason why the old prophet and judge, Samuel, appointed his sons as judges (1 Sam. 8:1). When his political task of establishing the kingship in Israel was finished, he finally withdrew from the judgeship (1 Sam. 12:2), but still retained his prophetic role.

The above-mentioned story of Barzillai the Gileadite (2 Sam. 19:32–41) tells of retirement from active life at the royal court. Aware that he has only a little time left, the 80-year-old Barzillai, who served king David, withdraws from the royal circle and goes back to his homeland (2 Sam. 19:38). Due to his old age, he would, in his own words, only be a ‘burden’ to the king, since he would depend on support. Therefore, he separates himself spatially from the king and refuses any kind of support or care from him (2 Sam. 19:36). In ancient Israel, as in the entire ancient Near East, the care for the elderly was primarily the responsibility of the family, unlike is the case in modern societies.<sup>31</sup> The eldest son was obliged to support his aged parents until their death and to organise their burial (Tob. 4:3–5). Childlessness was therefore a severe problem. In the book of Ruth, there is great joy about the birth of a son, for he ensures that Ruth will be cared for when she grows old: “He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age” (Ruth 4:15).

Besides these two narratives in the books of Tobit and Ruth, the central legal text for the care for the elderly in ancient Israel is the commandment to honour one’s father and mother (in the Decalogue: Exod. 20:12, Deut. 5:16, cf. Lev. 19:3), which is not addressed to adolescents but rather to adult children. Honouring one’s parents includes above all caring for them when they are old. The Hebrew terms “honour” (*kābad* pi., Exod. 20:12, Deut. 5:16) and “fear” (*jare’*, Lev. 19:3) are comparable in meaning to the corresponding terminology in Mesopotamian legal documents, thus supporting the thesis that the parental commandment can be related to care for the elderly.<sup>32</sup> An inner-biblical interpretation of the commandment of the Decalogue is offered by Sir. 3:1–16, which combines the honouring of parents with the care of the elderly:

31 On the topic of “care of the elderly” cf. Frevel, *Alter* (see note 30), pp. 11–43; Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Der Generationenvertrag und das biblische Gebot der Elternehrung*, in: Thomas Klosterkamp/Norbert Lohfink, *Wohin du auch gehst. Festschrift für Franz Josef Stendebach OMI*, Stuttgart 2005, pp. 14–29; Eckart Otto, *Biblische Altersversorgung im altorientalischen Rechtsvergleich*, in: *ZAR 1* (1995), pp. 83–110. For the ancient Near East cf. Marten Stol/Sven P. Vleeming (Eds.), *The Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East*, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1998 (*Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 14*).

32 Rainer Albertz, *Hintergrund und Bedeutung des Elternggebots im Dekalog*, in: *ZAW 90* (1978), pp. 348–374, at pp. 356–364 (= id., *Geschichte und Theologie. Studien zur Exegese des Alten Testaments und zur Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin-New York 2003 [BZAW 326], pp. 157–185).

- 1 Listen, you sons, to the law of the father, and do so that you may be well.  
2 For the Lord has commanded the children to honour their father  
and the sons to respect the rights of their mother  
...  
12 My child, help your father in his old age,  
and do not grieve him as long as he lives;  
13 even if his mind fails, be patient with him;  
because you have all your faculties do not despise him (Sir. 3:1–16).

According to Georg Sauer, the concretisation, or focussing of the parental commandment on the care of the elderly as it is done in the book of Sirach (Sir. 3:12–13; cf 7:27–28) could be viewed against the background of the social and cultural changes in the urban Jewish diaspora in Hellenistic times, from which the Greek translation of Sirach originates.<sup>33</sup>

Many of the texts mentioned in this passage reflect how the young and old generations depend on each other; certainly in the world of ancient Israel even more than is the case today. Because of their weakness, the old depend on their children to provide for them; while on the other hand, the advice of wise, life-experienced old people can assist the young to better cope with their own lives. This interdependence, however, also harbours considerable potential for intergenerational conflicts. This involves, on the one hand, the first point, namely that of wisdom and dignity. Young people, as 1 Kings 12 has shown, reject the advice of wise old people, question their wisdom (Job 32:6–10) or disregard their dignity. On the other hand, this also involves the second point, namely the care for the elderly, as the following admonition from the book of Sirach shows: The old man should preserve his financial independence as far as possible into old age by not distributing his inheritance before his death, for then he runs the risk of being dependent on the (unpredictable) favour of his children (Sir. 32:20–24).

## 5 Conclusion

The Old Testament is characterised by a variety of images and concepts concerning ageing and old age. These can be grouped into different views:

(1) One main characteristic is an *ambivalent* view of old age that affects the three aspects mentioned above. Firstly, the symbolic old age of primeval and ancestral figures in the book of Genesis contrasts the maximum lifespan of 120 years (Gen. 6:3), 100 years

33 Sauer, *Jesus Sirach* (see note 24), p. 64.

(Sir. 18:9), or 70 to 80 years (Ps. 90:10). The average life expectancy in biblical times, however, was considerably lower than these ideal ages suggest. Secondly, the loss of physical strength and other physical and mental constraints in old age stand alongside the increase of wisdom. At the same time, however, the connection between old age and wisdom can be questioned as is the case in the later wisdom writings. Finally, a threatening disregard and contempt is juxtaposed with the honouring of old people. Through this ambivalent and multifaceted view, old age is characterised in the Old Testament as a time of loss, but also of gain; for example, the loss of physical and mental abilities, but also the gain of wisdom and life experience, to name just two important aspects.

(2) If one disregards the extraordinarily high ages of the ancestors, a *realistic view* of old age dominates in many cases in the Old Testament literature. On the one hand, this concerns the position of the old in society and the relationships between the generations (social aspects of ageing). On the other, the realistic view is further reflected in the description of physical and mental constraints and the awareness of the limited nature of the human lifespan (biological aspects of ageing).

(3) The people in the Old Testament deal with the ageing process and the experience of the finiteness of life in different ways. Both a *negative and a positive view* can be found in the texts. In this context, two further important aspects of ageing and old age should be considered, namely the psychological and the theological aspects, which are interwoven with the three aspects mentioned above in a number of ways in Old Testament literature.<sup>34</sup> A more positive view of old age predominates when death ends a long life. Some texts speak in a formulaic way of “dying at a good old age”,<sup>35</sup> and “old and full of days” (lit. “satiated with days”),<sup>36</sup> describing an old person who is not disgusted with life, but rather is at the end of a fulfilled life blessed by God. Other texts reflect a pessimistic view, struggling with ageing and imminent death (Eccl. 11:9–12:8),<sup>37</sup> or lamenting to God about the brevity and transience of life (Ps. 90). For individuals in the Old Testament, an important way to cope with the negative aspects of old age and to

34 Cf. e. g. Psalm 90.

35 Gen. 15:15 (Abraham); Judg. 8:32 (Gideon); 1 Chr. 29:28 (David).

36 Gen. 25:8 (Abraham), 35:29 (Isaac); 1 Chr. 23:1, 29:28 (David); 2 Chr. 24:15 (Joadah the priest), and Job 47:17 (Job).

37 For the interpretation of Eccl. 11:9–12:8 cf. Thomas Hieke, *Das Gedicht über Freude, Alter und Tod am Ende des Koheletbuches*, in: Fitton/Linden/Liess/Elm (Eds.), *Alterszäsuren* (see note 22), pp. 171–191; Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2004 (HTHKAT 29), pp. 526–541; Thomas Krüger, *Kohelet*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000 (BK 19. Sonderband), pp. 346–359.

overcome their pessimistic attitude towards ageing and death is their relationship with God. The theological aspect, which repeatedly permeates the different aspects of ageing and old age mentioned so far, plays an important role especially in the psalms. Psalm 71, for example, speaks of hope and trust in the God's salvation and presence from youth to old age:

17 O God, from my youth you have taught me,  
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.  
18 So even to old age and grey hairs,  
O God do not forsake me,  
until I proclaim your might  
to all the generations to come.  
19 Your power and your righteousness, O God,  
reach the high heavens.  
You who have done great things,  
O God, who is like you?  
20 You who have made me see many troubles and calamities  
will revive me again;  
from the depth of the earth  
you will bring me up again.  
21 You will increase my honour,  
and comfort me once again (Ps. 71:17–21).

Although the psalmist is afraid of being forsaken in his old age, he trusts in God, who has accompanied and saved him throughout his life. Therefore, his lifelong relationship with God can comfort the faithful one until old age. At the same time, the experience of God's presence and benevolence into old age gives the old person an important task: to praise him and proclaim his saving deeds to the next generation.

A kind of inner-biblical answer to the plea for God's lifelong presence into old age, for which the petitioner of Psalm 71 asks, is offered by God's promise in Isa. 46:3–4. The confidence to be carried by him into old age results from the promise of his steadfastness:<sup>38</sup>

3 Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the house of Israel,

38 Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2008 (HThKAT 37), pp. 454–460.

who have been borne by me from your birth,  
carried from the womb.

4 Even to your old age I am he,  
even when you turn grey I will carry you.

I have made, and I will bear;

I will carry and will save (Isa. 46:3–4).

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# Generation Conflicts and the Crisis of the Late Roman Republic

Remarks on Sallustius and Cicero

## Abstract

This short paper takes its starting point from modern theoretical discussions of ‘generations’ (age groups or historical cohorts mainly based on common experiences?). After a brief overview of modern scholarship regarding the late Roman Republic (the leading question is: can the crisis of the late Roman Republic from 133 to 44 BC be regarded as a manifestation of generational conflicts?) we will look for evidence of generational consciousness, generational attributions and generational self-concepts (especially of the elderly) in late Republican literature. The second part of the paper will concentrate on texts and letters of Sallustius and Cicero and on the question whether and – if applicable – to what extent the crisis of the late Roman Republic can be understood as being the result of generation-based conflicts and diverging generational interests.

## 1 Generations, Old Age and Socio-Historical Analysis

Not only in Germany has the category “generation” become a prominent and fruitful analytical tool in the historical disciplines of premodern times during the past twenty years.<sup>1</sup> The theoretical background of these research activities was strongly influenced

1 In Bamberg an interdisciplinary research group worked for ten years (2004–2014) on a common project under the title “Generational Awareness and Generational Conflicts in Antiquity and the Middle Ages”, directed by Hartwin Brandt. Cf. the following volumes of collected papers: Hartwin Brandt/Maximilian Schuh/Ulrike Siewert (Eds.), *Familie – Generation – Institution. Generationenkonzepte in der Vormoderne*, Bamberg 2008 (Bamberger historische Studien 2); Hartwin Brandt/Katrin Köhler/Ulrike Siewert (Eds.), *Genealogisches Bewusstsein als Legitimation. Inter- und Intragenerationelle Auseinandersetzungen sowie die Bedeutung von Verwandtschaft bei Amtswechseln*, Bamberg 2009 (Bamberger historische Studien 4); Hartwin Brandt et al. (Eds.), *genus & generatio. Rollenerwartungen und Rollenerfüllungen im Spannungsfeld der Geschlechter und Generationen in Antike und Mittelalter*, Bamberg 2011 (Bamberger historische Studien 6); Hartwin

by two fundamental key concepts: firstly, the concept of “generational interrelations” (“Generationszusammenhänge”, proposed in the year 1928 by Karl Mannheim),<sup>2</sup> and secondly, the idea that a common kind of generational experience is a characteristic of a specific generation (“Erfahrungsraum”, as it is called by Reinhart Koselleck).<sup>3</sup>

Following Karl Mannheim, we can distinguish two basic understandings of the concept of “generation”: Firstly, we can identify the “vertical-diachronic” notion: this is a genuine ancient concept, closely linked to the Latin word *generatio*, that means the genealogical sequence of generations within a family (in Latin: a *gens*). It concerns the relationship between grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren etc.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the “horizontal-synchronous” notion which is the main category for Karl Mannheim. According to this concept coherent age groups develop a kind of collective identity, a relatively homogeneous attitude with congruent values, ideas and rules. But age alone is not the decisive factor – it is possible, according to Mannheim, that among the same age cohorts different generational units emerge with different codes, interests, attitudes and lifestyles. The Mannheim-based model has often been used for macro-sociological studies.<sup>5</sup>

With these introductory remarks we now cross over to the Roman Republic and to the questions Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp deals with in his recent book “Reconstructing the Roman Republic”.<sup>6</sup> Hölkeskamp tries to decipher collective political, social and moral codes, and he looks for the ways in which political groupings came into being; hence

Brandt/Benjamin Pohl/W. Maurice Sprague/Lina K. Hörl (Eds.), *Erfahren, Erzählen, Erinnern. Narrative Konstruktionen von Gedächtnis und Generation in Antike und Mittelalter*, Bamberg 2012 (Bamberger historische Studien 9).

2 Karl Mannheim, *Das Problem der Generationen*, in: id., *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk*, Berlin 1964 (Soziologische Texte 28), pp. 509–565.

3 Reinhart Koselleck, “Erfahrungsraum” und “Erwartungshorizont” – zwei historische Kategorien, in: id., *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt a. M. 192017 (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 757), pp. 349–375.

4 Ohad Parnes/Ulrike Vedder/Stefan Willer, *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte*, Frankfurt a. M. 2008 (Suhrkamp Taschenbücher Wissenschaft 1855); Andreas Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein, Generationenwechsel und Generationenkonflikte in der Aristokratie des spätrepublikanischen Roms*, Hamburg 2012 (Studien zur Geschichtsforschung des Altertums 25), pp. 15–25.

5 Parnes/Vedder/Willer, *Generation* (see note 4), pp. 260–290 (especially pp. 274–279: “Altersgruppen und Lebensphasen”).

6 Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic. An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research*, Princeton 2010.

he investigates collective mentalities and the key elements of collective identities. For example, the *mos maiorum* is one of the fundamental key concepts of the aristocratic-senatorial *nobilitas*, and it includes basic values like *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *honos*.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, the following questions arise:<sup>8</sup> is the formation of political groupings in Republican Rome connected to specific experiences, codes and feelings of age-dependent coherence? Is it possible to observe and to describe homogeneity in various age cohorts in late Republican Rome? And, finally, can the fatal crisis of the late Roman Republic be conceived as being the result and outcome of generational conflicts on the basis of Karl Mannheim's vertical-diachronic and / or horizontal-synchronous notions of generations? Before coming to these points, we first have to clarify and to explain the age-dependent socio-political units – especially that of the young and the old. The best way to do this is to consult Tim Parkin's excellent book on old age in the Roman world, chapter one: "Roman Definitions and Statements of Age".<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Old and Young in Late Republican Rome

Let us start with the elderly: the Latin *senex* normally means "old person" – in most cases "old man" – but can we link this to a specific number of years? The *senatus*, the dominant political institution in Republican Rome, is etymologically linked to *senes*, but by no means all or even most members of the senate were, for example, over the age of sixty years.<sup>10</sup> Roman society was not (and had never been) a gerontocracy (as, for

7 Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing* (see note 6), p. 17. "The most important concept was of course *mos maiorum*. The literal translation of this term – ancestral custom – is (at best) rather vague. Its range of reference and meanings was almost unlimited and indeed, as it were, defied limitation: any modern attempt to narrow it down must fail to grasp its true constitutive importance" (*ibid.*).

8 Elena Isayev discusses these and other questions in her brilliant paper: Elena Isayev, *Unruly Youth? The Myth of Generation Conflict in Late Republican Rome*, in: *Historia* 56 (2007), pp. 1–13. The present contribution owes much to Isayev's article, based on a talk presented at Bamberg in June 2004.

9 Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World. A Cultural and Social History*, Baltimore-London 2003 (*Ancient Society and History*), pp. 15–35, with the review of Parkin's book by Hartwin Brandt (Hartwin Brandt, *Review of "Old Age in the Roman World. A Cultural and Social History by Tim G. Parkin*, in: *Gnomon* 78 [2006], pp. 470–472); cf. also *id.*, *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*, Munich 2002 (Beck's Archäologische Bibliothek), pp. 117–153.

10 Marianne Bonnefond-Coudry, *Le sénat de la république romaine de la guerre d'Hannibal à Auguste. Pratiques délibératives et prises de décision*, Rome 1989 (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises

example, the archaic and classical Sparta in Greece definitely was).<sup>11</sup> Rome rather was a patriarchal society, with a legally grounded, on all sides respected dominant position of the *pater familias* which did not, however, include leadership of the *senes*. According to the famous author and scholar Marcus Terentius Varro, who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, *senectus* commences at the age of sixty.<sup>12</sup> However, there are many other positions and opinions to be found in Roman texts. In the military context age limits are much clearer: between seventeen and forty-five years the Roman citizen was a *iunior*, and between forty-six and fifty-nine years he was called a *senior* – only afterwards he became a *senex*.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, sixty years can be used as a heuristic boundary, but much more important for the present context is the question regarding whether certain attitudes and images were seen as ‘typical’ for the elderly. A key text in this respect is Cicero’s “Cato maior de senectute” written in 44 BC, shortly before the murder of Caesar on the Ides of March in 44 BC. When reading this treatise, we should be aware of the fact that this is a highly subjective text, written from the ideological, conservative, and aristocratic standpoint of a former consul (*vir consularis*), a man of the highest socio-political rank in Rome. The whole text is a praise of the advantages of old age that gives old men *auctoritas* and the freedom for intellectual pursuits. In the eyes of Cato (and Cicero) a generational conflict would be absurd because the good and wise *patres* were the true and unchallengeable leaders of Roman society.

The perspective of the younger people was, of course, a different one. But how ‘young’ were the members of the Roman ‘youth’ actually? Even a man of about forty years is called a *iuuenis* in Latin texts, normally young men between 17 and approximately 30 years are regarded as *iuvenes* in modern scholarship. Emiel Eyben, author of an influ-

d’Athènes et de Rome 273); ead., Le sénat républicain et les conflits de générations, in: Mélanges d’École Française de Rome 94 (1982), pp. 175–225.

11 For Sparta, cf. Brandt, Wird auch silbern (see note 9), pp. 43–48; Winfried Schmitz, Nicht ‚altes Eisen‘, sondern Garant der Ordnung – Die Macht der Alten in Sparta, in: Andreas Gutsfeld/Winfried Schmitz (Eds.), Altersbilder in der Antike. Am schlimmen Rand des Lebens?, Göttingen 2009 (Super alta perennis 8), pp. 87–112.

12 Emiel Eyben, Die Einteilung des menschlichen Lebens im römischen Altertum, in: Rheinisches Museum 116 (1973), pp. 150–190, at pp. 172–178. Parkin objects: “Because this is in line with some modern conceptions of the onset of old age in ancient times, Varro’s system is regularly adopted by modern scholars as definitive of Roman (and Greek) reality. But there is no good reason for this, since Varro’s figures are only one set in a long tradition, and ... the system ... is Varro’s, not Rome’s” (Parkin, Old Age [see note 9], p. 17).

13 Jan Timmer, Altersgrenzen politischer Partizipation in antiken Gesellschaften, Berlin 2008 (Studien zur Alten Geschichte 8), pp. 242–249.

ential book on the youth of ancient Rome, argues that generational conflicts between young and old were in fact “unavoidable” and that the rebellious Catiline himself in his uprising in the years 63 and 62 BC regarded his fight as being the result of a “conflict” between different generations.<sup>14</sup> Even if we accept such an interpretation, we have to ask with Elena Isayev: <sup>15</sup> was there really a homogeneous Roman ‘youth’, with common experiences that were decisive for building more than a life-phase-cohort? Which common experiences took place at what point in time? Did these experiences really occur or were they only patterns of ex-post-interpretations? What was it that connected those *iuvenes* – was it more than the lack of power and of political influence and the desire to spend as much money as they liked for private purposes? In sum: who were the “barbatuli iuvenes”, “the young men with small beards”, of Cicero?

### 3 “Barbatuli Iuvenes”

Early in the year 61 BC, Cicero wrote one of his numerous letters to his close friend Pomponius Atticus, and told him some details about a senatorial decree against a man named Publius Clodius Pulcher who had committed a religious offence, which was the so-called “Bona Dea scandal”. In the assembly of the people, which resulted from that event, this Clodius Pulcher, who was the leader of a group of followers (*factio*), mobilised his supporters against the senatorial (and Ciceronian) position, and Cicero described these supporters as follows:

“Nam cum dies venisset rogationi ex senatus consulto ferendae, concursabant barbatuli iuvenes, totus ille grex Catilinae duce filiola Curionis, et populum ut antiquaret rogabant.” (“For when the day came for proposing the bill in accordance with the vote of the senate, a crowd of our dandies with their chin-tufts assembled, all the Catiline set, with Curio’s girlish son at their head, and implored the people to reject it.”)<sup>16</sup>

14 Emiel Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*, London 1993, pp. 47–65; Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 2 (notes 7–8).

15 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 8–11.

16 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, ed. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, Cambridge, Mass. 1999 (The Loeb Cassical Library 7), vol. 1, letter 14.5; for an English translation: URL: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0022:text=A:book=1:letter=14;29.7.2022>; Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 11.

A few months later, in July of 61 BC, in another letter to Atticus, Cicero again mentioned these *barbatuli iuvenes*: “*isti commissatores coniurationis, barbatuli iuvenes*” (“these boon companions of the conspiracy, the young chin-tufts”).<sup>17</sup>

Who were these gangs of youths who tried to win influence over the most important institutions in late Republican Rome? A few years ago, Jan Timmer tried to shed more light on these youngsters, and he argues that they only appear in the contemporary sources in contexts of emerging violence, and thus in situations of political disruption, when the political system of the Roman Republic, that was based on the finding of consensus, was not able to create a political settlement.<sup>18</sup> Those *iuvenes* were not, according to Timmer, a separate generational cohort, with a specific common experience and common ideas, but a heterogeneous crowd of young men who were canvassed by the dominating political players, conservative-senatorial *optimates* (who tried to realise their political aims in the senate) as well as *populares* (senators who counted on the support of the assemblies of Roman citizens). In short: unruly *barbatuli iuvenes*, young green-horns and wine-loving dandies, were not a product of a structural generation conflict but rather a symptom, an indication of the increasing inability of Roman politics to keep the balance and to organise a peaceful debate of political opinions.

Another political episode, the so-called “Vettius scandal” of the year 59 BC, confirms this interpretation of Timmer. The scandal took place when Caesar was *consul* for the first time and attacked the *tribunus plebis* Curio, perhaps with the help of a man named Vettius. The conspiracy was exposed and Vettius argued that a plot of *iuvenes* led by Curio had been planned. The details are not important here, but remarkable is the fact that the assertion that *iuvenes* intended to organise a violent political conspiracy was regarded as plausible.<sup>19</sup>

It becomes clear that in the political communication between late Republican protagonists *iuvenes* or *adulescentes* were regarded as an identifiable group and as part of the supporters of leading senatorial *patroni*. They are mainly mentioned in the sources in the context of conflicts, in connection with violence, scandals and hot political controversies. The *iuvenes* surely were not connected to certain political programmes or ideas. In all relevant sources, the *iuvenes* do not emerge as a “horizontal-synchronous” generation

17 Cicero, Letters to Atticus (see note 16), letter 16.11 (English translation: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0022:text=A:book=1:letter=16; 29. 7. 2022>).

18 Jan Timmer, *Barbatuli iuvenes* – Überlegungen zur Stellung der „Jugend“ in der späten römischen Republik, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 13 (2005), pp. 197–219.

19 Karl Christ, *Krise und Untergang der römischen Republik*, Darmstadt 1979, pp. 299–300; Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 8–11.

with congruent values, ideas and rules, but rather and simpler as a “vertical-diachronic” generation, mainly described and characterised from the standpoint of the elderly. This also holds true for the *coniuratio Catilinae* to which we come now.

#### 4 Sallustius and Catiline

The most prominent specific event readily seen as a manifestation of the conflict of generations in late Republican Rome is the famous Catilinarian conspiracy.<sup>20</sup> Often the Catiline group is regarded as a kind of ‘protesting youth movement’ pitted against the old senatorial establishment.<sup>21</sup> But one of the main problems is that the relevant sources are altogether composed from this conservative standpoint: Sallustius’ “Catilina”, Cicero’s Catilinarian speeches, and Plutarch’s “Life of Cicero”. We can find a short overview of the events in the words of Elena Isayev:

“Catiline was a charismatic politician and leader, who in 64 BC unsuccessfully ran for the consulship against Cicero. To sustain his power, Catiline energetically increased his following by targeting various groups, and among them the youth, who were an important pawn for the politicians. In their desperation in 63 BC Catiline and his followers conceived a plot to use revolutionary means to bring down the Republic. The plot was uncovered by Cicero, allowing him to claim that he had saved the Republic. After the creation of an atmosphere of fear, much debate followed at the outcome of which it was decided, with strong support from Cicero, that the captured conspirators should be put to death without trial. Catiline, seeing that he had lost all hope of pursuing his political ends, fled Rome and tried to gather forces on the periphery, but he was eventually killed, trapped between two Roman armies in 62 BC.”<sup>22</sup>

So far, these are the pure facts. It is remarkable that neither Cicero nor Plutarch, but only Sallustius identifies the youth as a distinguishable supporter group of the rebel, especially in the following passage:

20 Modern scholarship concerning Catiline and his conspiracy is abundant; still useful is Christ, *Krise* (see note 19), pp. 262–268.

21 For Sallustius, the conspiracy and generational relationships, cf. Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein* (see note 4), pp. 87–130.

22 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 8–9.

“Sed maxume adulescentium familiaritates adpetebat; eorum animi molles etiam et fluxi dolis haud difficulter capiebantur. Nam ut cuiusque studium ex aetate flagrabat, aliis scorta praebere, aliis canes atque equos mercari, postremo neque sumptui neque modestiae suae parcere, dum illos obnoxios fidosque sibi faceret.” (“But most of all Catiline sought the intimacy of the young; their minds, still pliable as they were and easily moulded, were without difficulty ensnared by his wiles. For carefully noting the passion which burnt in each, according to his time of life, he found harlots for some or bought dogs and horses for others; in fine, he spared neither expense nor his own decency, provided he could make them submissive and loyal to himself.”)<sup>23</sup>

It is again to be stressed, that these young *adulescentes* were not an entirely homogeneous group – there were some young lads among them who were much more radical than others:

“Nam postquam Cn. Pompeio et M. Crasso consulibus tribunicia potestas restituta est, homines adulescentes, summam potestatem nacti, quibus aetas animusque ferox erat, coepere senatum criminando plebem exagitare, dein largiundo atque pollicitando magis incendere, ita ipsi clari potentesque fieri.” (“For after the tribunician power had been restored in the consulship of Gnaeus Pompeius and Marcus Crassus, various young men, whose age and disposition made them aggressive, attained that high authority; they thereupon began to excite the commons by attacks upon the senate and then to inflame their passions still more by doles and promises, thus making themselves conspicuous and influential.”)<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, in the eyes of Sallustius all *adulescentes* had one thing in common: they shared a fundamentally anti-senatorial attitude. As a consequence, Sallustius puts the following words into the mouth of Catiline who tries to encourage and to spur on his supporters:

“Verum enim vero, pro deum atque hominum fidem victoria in manu nobis est; viget aetas, animus valet; contra illis annis atque divitiis omnia consenuerunt.” (“Assuredly

23 Gaius Sallustius Crispus, *Catilina*, in: Sallust, ed. by. John C. Rolfe, London 1971 (The Loeb Classical Library 116), pp. 20–148; at 14, 5–6; this and all other English translations from Sallustius’ “*Catilina*” are taken from the cited edition; cf. also for this and further relevant passages from Sallustius: Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 9–11; Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein* (see note 4), pp. 95–112.

24 Sallustius, *Catilina* (see note 23), 38.1; Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein* (see note 4), p. 104.

[I swear it by the faith of gods and men!] victory is within our grasp. We are in the prime of life, we are stout of heart; to them, on the contrary, years and riches have brought utter dotage.”<sup>25</sup>

Of course, we do not know whether such arguments and strategies were really used in the messages that Catiline addressed to his young followers, but it is significant that Sallustius is using this set-up in order to make understandable what had happened. Evidently this figure of thought, based on the generation gap and on the contrast of interests between the youth and the elderly, worked as a plausible explanatory model in the eyes of Sallustius – and this alone is significant, because Sallustius obviously could expect that his listeners or readers would regard this explanation as being plausible and adequate.

The same holds true for the supposed ‘secret plan’ of the Catilinarians that was discovered and delivered to the senate:

“sed filii familiarum, quorum ex nobilitate maxuma pars erat, parentis interficerent; simul caede et incendio percussis omnibus ad Catilinam erumperent.” (“The eldest sons of several families, the greater number of whom belonged to the nobility, were to slay their fathers. Then, when the whole city was stunned by the bloodshed and the fire, they were all to rush out and join Catiline.”)<sup>26</sup>

Again: regardless of the question of authenticity – probably this alleged bloody plan of the conspirators is an invention of Sallustius, because Cicero in his anti-Catiline speeches does not mention it – the fact that Sallustius has this dramatic escalation of the generational conflict in his scenario, is remarkable.

Nowhere in Sallustius’ work is it “suggested that the (late Republican) youth had a common cause of their own”<sup>27</sup> – with the single exception that they had all “dissociated themselves”<sup>28</sup> from their families, and from the traditional rules and norms of Roman politics. They did not (according to Sallustius) feel any commitment to the *patria*, to the *mos maiorum*, to *dignitas* and to *honos*. But, and this is the crucial point: all these impressions form part of a literary construction, put into place by intellectuals like Sallustius or Cicero who transformed political and social conflicts into a conflict

25 Ibid., 20.10; *ibid.*, p. 107 with note 565.

26 Sallustius, *Catilina* (see note 23), 43. 2.

27 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 10.

28 Ibid., p. 10.

between generations, between old and young, and between right and wrong. Thus, we have to ask at the end of this short contribution: what does the literary construction of deep generational conflicts contribute to the understanding of the crisis and the failure of the Roman Republic?

## 5 The Crisis of the Roman Republic

The family (*gens*), the ancestors (*maiores*) and the *patria potestas* were key elements of Roman Republican society. When a famous member of an aristocratic *gens* had died, public celebrations were organised to highlight the glorious history not only of a single person, but also of the whole family. In the public funeral speech (*laudatio funebris*) and during the funeral procession (*pompa funebris*) wax masks of the ancestors were carried by family members, *honores* and glorious actions (*res gestae*) of the ancestors were brought to mind, family trees and genealogical presentations underlined the meaning of the family; the inner familiar harmony and the prestige of the *gens* functioned as symbolic and political capital.<sup>29</sup> What kind of impression did such manifestations of the dominance of the elderly make on the youth? Without any doubt, they learnt that the rules of making a career were fixed and remained inflexible – tradition regulated the future. Peter Scholz in his excellent book “Den Vätern folgen” (“Following the Fathers”) analysed the strict code of the *imitatio patris* in detail.<sup>30</sup> This was the leading norm of the relationship between fathers and sons. An instructive document of this fundamental principle is one of the famous sepulchral inscriptions of the Scipiones, for Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Hispanus, praetor 139 BC, contemporary of Scipio Aemilianus and of the Gracchi brothers:<sup>31</sup>

“Cn(aeus) Cornelius Cn(aei) f(ilius) Scipio Hispanus / pr(aetor) aid(ilis) cur(ulis) q(uaestor) tr(ibunus) mil(itum) II, X vir s(t)l(itibus) iudik(andis) / X vir sacr(is) fac(-iundis). / virtutes generis meis moribus accumulavi / progeniem genui, facta patris petiei. / maiorum optenui laudem, ut sibi me esse creatum / laetentur: stirpem nobilitavit honor.” (“Gnaeus Cornelius, son of Gnaeus, Scipio Hispanus, *praetor*, *cu-*

29 For all this and similar aspects, cf. Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing* (see note 6), *passim*.

30 Peter Scholz, *Den Vätern folgen. Sozialisation und Erziehung der republikanischen Senatsaristokratie*, Berlin 2011 (*Studien zur Alten Geschichte* 13).

31 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (= CIL), vol. 1,1: *Fasti consulares ad a. u. c. DCCLXVI. Elogia clarorum virorum. Fasti anni Iuliani*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen/Wilhelm Henzen, Berlin 1893, inscription no. 15 (abbreviated reference: CIL 1 I 15).

*rule aedile*, military tribune twice, member of the board of ten men regulating the legal position of persons, member of the board of ten men regarding the organization of cult rituals. I have augmented the virtues of my *gens* by living according to the customs, I have created a progeny, I have emulated the deeds of my father. I have preserved the praise of my ancestors, so that they could be happy because of me having been born. Public approval has refined my parentage.”)

This inscription is a poetic document of the compulsory generational code. Due to this code, young aristocrats who loved the ‘*dolce vita*’ could easily come into conflicts with their severe fathers. But on the other hand, they realised during the last decades of the Roman Republic that this code had become pure ideology. For it was one of the fundamental experiences of late Republican youth that the *nobiles* themselves, from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC onward, continually broke traditional rules, their own rules: long-term extraordinary military commands, violence against co-magistrates, illegal iteration of *honores* are only few key phenomena of this general process of disintegration of the Roman aristocracy and of the whole political system. As a consequence, the youth learnt and realised that the *mos maiorum* had become an empty phrase, and even aristocratic *adulescentes* were no longer always willing to accept the prescribed way of *patres sequi*, of “following their fathers”. Hence, an increasing generation gap was a serious and important symptom of the dramatic crisis of the late Roman Republic – but it was definitely not the reason for this crisis.

Additionally, a generational conflict, that from the peer’s view was the result of increasing deviation from the norms on the part of the youth, was an interpretative pattern, readily used by the peers for explaining why things had taken a turn for the worse. It was comfortable for the old to blame the young for breaking the rules and to ignore their own misconduct. Sallustius and other authors show a kind of generational awareness and they use the complicated relationship between young and old as an explanatory model for a better understanding of the fact that the social and political consensus no longer remained uncontroversial. The crisis of the Roman Republic, however, was a more complex phenomenon; to say it again with Elena Isayev: “This turbulent period affected all age groups, young and old, and hence by definition the experience was intergenerational. Generational conflict is not what drove or resulted from these turbulent years”.<sup>32</sup>

The situation of the elderly remains a key topic in the social relations during the following six centuries of the Roman Empire, and it is still not clear whether Tim Parkin’s

32 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 12.

formula of “the marginality of old age” gets to the heart of the matter.<sup>33</sup> Conflicts between generations did not stop with the end of the Roman Republic: Conflicts within families, especially between fathers and sons, were typical phenomena of Roman society, and “the potentially more serious conflict of the younger generation of a society with the elder members is a public one that breaks out in particular during times of crisis”.<sup>34</sup> We know of many crises under Roman emperors – there is still much to do for scholars of various disciplines.

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33 Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 9), pp. 239–272; Brandt, *Wird auch silbern* (see note 9), pp. 157–171.

34 Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 9), p. 227.

# Old Age and Generations in Monastic Communities in Northwest Spain

## Abstract

The monasteries of medieval Galicia (Northwest Spain) comprised, like those of the West as a whole, intergenerational societies. Children, adolescents, adults and the elderly lived together in them. Children are only documented as having lived in Spanish monasteries until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The older monks maintained a role of vigilance with the *oblato* and with the monks of other ages, ensuring internal order. Within the monasteries, elderly people could be found who can be grouped into different categories: Firstly, there were the monks who had reached old age. But there were also lay people who, having reached an advanced age, decided to enter a monastery to spend there their last years of life, thanks to the formula of the *familiaritas*. The reasons that led them to make this decision varied and could include the desire for improved personal security, health care and spiritual care. This makes monasteries a kind of precedent for modern nursing homes. The panorama is somewhat different in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The *familiaritas* has disappeared but, instead, we can show that a number of the monks managed to reach an advanced age. In this case, we can even compare the life expectancy of monks and nuns by studying the length of the mandates of abbots and abbesses. From this analysis, we can conclude that the nuns lived longer than the monks.

## 1 Introduction

Those familiar with the Early Middle Ages know how important monastic documentation is. It is, without a doubt, our main window for attempting to visualise society during those centuries. A window which, however, is still only precisely that. A viewpoint that focuses on only part of the landscape, without encompassing an image of society as a whole. Starting with this caution may seem unnecessary and exaggerated. I would rather, however, prefer to err on the side of caution than to make the mistake of assimilating the part with the whole. Monastic sources, for example, have a clear social bias. Most monasteries were aristocratic foundations, and their members were often also members of these elite groups. In their documents, simple peasants and other humble people are

mentioned but, when they are, it is normally to record a relationship of domination, and never as them being the protagonists of the documented information. I would like to proceed with a second introductory caution, in this case of a spatial type. I am not going to refer to the whole of the medieval West but rather to a specific area: the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, more specifically present-day Galicia. This region possibly sheltered the first 'Germanic' kingdom that emerged in the territory of the Western Roman Empire: the *Regnum Suevorum*.<sup>1</sup> A Galicia which, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, became increasingly known in Christendom for housing the supposed remains of the Apostle Saint James. In medieval studies concerning Galicia, the economic and social aspects of monasticism have been the centre of interest. The other dimensions of monastic life, however, have received less attention. Among these neglected issues are the topics of old age and intergenerational relationships, the analysis of which has only recently started.

## 2 The Early Middle Ages. Oblates and Elderly Monks

Individuals of all ages were present in monastic communities. Perhaps most surprisingly, seen from our modern perspective, was the presence of children as a part of monastic life. Many of them would have entered the monasteries as *oblato*.<sup>2</sup> They were children offered to the Church by their parents at a tender age, usually at the age of seven, in the hope that when they reached maturity, they would opt for their future life as monks. These minors had a very similar lifestyle to that of the adult monks, although they had more relaxed schedules and were not as strictly subject to fasting and other food restrictions. These little 'apprentice monks' were linked to the older members of the community in several ways: For example, the children's dormitory was guarded by elderly monks, and the children served and helped the older members of the community in the refectory.

Trained as monks and by monks, the children who lived in the mediaeval monasteries were still precisely that, namely children. On occasions, monastic written records refer to their behaviour as 'naughty', or at least 'reckless'. A recklessness which, at times, had serious consequences. One of these cases, which has frequently been mentioned, consisted of starting a fire that led to the destruction of the monastery. One of several scenarios that could arise, is described in the preserved documents of the small Galician monastery of San Pedro de Rocas, that was located in the province of Ourense. The

1 Pablo C. Díaz, *El reino suevo (411–585)*, Madrid 2011 (Akal universitaria).

2 Mayke de Jong, In Samuel's Image. Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West, Leiden-New York-Köln 1996 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 12).

document dates from 1007 and was written on the occasion of the restoration of the monastery.<sup>3</sup> The writer describes, as is usual in this type of text, a history of the monastery and in it we find the information that interests us. The monastery had to be rebuilt and repopulated by monks, because it had been destroyed by fire. The text speaks for itself in describing the circumstances surrounding the event: “per negligentiam puerorum qui ibi in scola aduc degentes literas legebant, domus ipse ab igne de nocte est succensa” (“due to the negligence of the children that learned their letters there in the school, the house was destroyed by fire during the night”). It goes on to state that the monastery was completely destroyed, including the historic texts conserved in the archive. Children started to be mentioned more rarely and only on very singular occasions from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward. The main reason for this, is that entry into the monastery was delayed until adolescence, with novices taking over from the oblates as the youngest members of the community.<sup>4</sup> As a result, children, teenagers, adults, and the elderly all made up monastic societies. It is this last group, the elderly, that will be the focus of our attention from now on.

Some of the elders who lived under the protection of medieval monasteries were, of course, the monks themselves who had grown old. The monastic rules are very detailed in terms of the information they contain about them, referring to their diet as well as to the demands of their schedule. Both with respect to diet and schedule, they received a gentler treatment than did the rest of the community. For example, in the Order of Saint Fructuosus, established in the northwest Iberian Peninsula in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it is specified that the oldest monks have to sleep in their own cells, the access to which was forbidden to the rest of the community. In it, the elderly could even eat their meals away from the community.<sup>5</sup> Far from being perceived as a means of alienation, this can be considered a privilege, as a sign of the special treatment that elderly monks should receive.

The Benedictine Order, in turn, paid a little less attention to old monks. They are equated with children and given the special treatment they require.<sup>6</sup> In spite of this

3 El monasterio de San Pedro de Rocas y su colección documental, ed. by Emilio Duro Peña, Ourense 1973 (Publicaciones del Instituto de Estudios Orensanos “Padre Feijóo” 2), p. 134.

4 José Miguel Andrade Cernadas, Las edades del hombre en los monasterios benedictinos y cistercienses. De la infancia a la vejez, in: José Angel García de Cortazar / Ramon Teja (Eds.), El ritmo cotidiano de la vida en el monasterio medieval, Aguilar de Campóo 2015, pp. 111–142, at p. 136.

5 Julián Campos, Santos Padres españoles. San Leandro, San Isidoro y San Fructuosus, Madrid 1971.

6 Georges Minois, Histoire de la vieillesse de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance, Paris 1987, p. 125.

common consideration, the attention given to the elderly by the Benedictine Order was much less than that given to children. However, we know that they were regarded as special advisers to abbots, and as experts of the collective and institutional memory of their monasteries. In addition, they sometimes played a very important role in certain lawsuits and judicial disputes. Finally, they were considered as guarantors of certain virtues and the maintenance of order, as evidenced by their role as watchmen in the common bedroom, or the role they played in introducing adolescents to the rules of the community. The 63<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the Benedictine Rule contains a paragraph worth mentioning: “Iuniores igitur priores suos honorent, priores minores suos diligant. In ipsa appellatione nominum nulli liceat alium puro appellare nomine, sed priores iuniores suos fratrum nomine, iuniores autem priores suos nonnos vocent, quod intelligitur paterna reverentia”.<sup>7</sup>

An example of the old monk embodying the authorized voice of the community can be found in a hagiographic text written in 12<sup>th</sup> century Galicia. I here refer to the “Vita Rudesindi”, which narrates the life and miracles of Saint Rudesind.<sup>8</sup> The protagonist of this story was a Galician bishop in the 10<sup>th</sup> century who was, besides many other activities, an active founder of monastic houses, with one standing out above all the rest: Celanova, a powerful institution from the outset, where Rudesind himself lived for most of his life.<sup>9</sup> In one of the accounts of his miracles, it is said that a nobleman had taken possession of Celanova and subjected its monks to all kinds of hardships. One day, the nobleman decided that the community would not receive the usual dinner, which greatly angered the monks. The protest was led and embodied by a very old monk, who went to the tomb of Saint Rudesind and hit it with his cane, pleading and demanding that the saint come to the aid of his monks. That same night, the violent nobleman died in great pain, and his followers quickly abandoned the monastery. The old monk was regarded as being closer to God. Therefore, his voice was better heard and the saint intervened quickly and favourably.

7 *Regula sancti patris Benedicti*, ed. by Edmund Schmidt, Regensburg 1880 (*Vita et regula sancti patris Benedicti 2*), ch. LXIII, p. 65. “The juniors, therefore, should honour their seniors, and the seniors love their juniors. In the very manner of address, let no one call another by the mere name; but let the seniors call their juniors Brothers, and the juniors call their seniors Fathers, by which is conveyed the reverence due to a father” (own translation).

8 Ordoño de Celanova, *Vida y milagros de San Rosendo*. Edición, traducción y estudio, ed. by Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz / María Virtudes Pardo Gómez / Daría Vilariño Pintos / José Carro Otero, A Coruña 1990 (*Galicia histórica*).

9 José Miguel Andrade Cernadas / Manuel Castiñeiras / Francisco Singul (Eds.), *Rudesindus. San Rosendo. Su tiempo y su legado*, Santiago 2009.

It is possible that the presence of elderly monks may be seen as a reflection of the average life expectancy of monks, which was higher than that of the rest of society at the time. One can assume that they were better nourished than most of their contemporaries: it is no coincidence that all monastic rules deal with matters relating to food in great detail.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, and as I will explain shortly, they received considerably more meticulous medical and welfare supervision than did most of their contemporaries. In addition, we imagine that they were more protected, in principle, from violence or war. All this leads us to surmise that the monastic communities would have had a percentage of elderly people among their members that was clearly higher than the average for their society.

But while all this is relevant, what is most significant in historical terms is the role that monasteries acquired from an early stage on as, in the words of Minois, “the first blueprint for an old people’s home, a shelter and a ghetto at the same time”.<sup>11</sup> Many of the Spanish monasteries prior to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century were what we could roughly define as “family monasteries”. Abbeys were founded, and in one way or another led, by aristocratic groups with a half patrimonial and half spiritual purpose.<sup>12</sup> This type of monastery also used to serve as a place of retreat for the elders of the founding family. The case of the widows of these aristocratic groups has been studied in particular detail. Many of them were integrated into a kind of specific clerical category, the “order of widows”, *ordo viduarum*, while others passed into the category of *famula Dei*, which was something like the equivalent of nuns.<sup>13</sup> This allowed them to be near the place of burial of their predecessors, to remain close to their families with whom there must have been regular contact, as the cloistering was far from strict, or to have guaranteed medical care and assistance. All this was in addition to their very important function as establishers

10 Antoni Riera i Melis, Alimentación y ascetismo en la Edad Media. Génesis de la dietética benedictina, in: Marina Miquel i Vives/Margarida Sala (Eds.), *Tiempo de monasterios. Los monasterios de Cataluña en torno al año Mil*, Barcelona 2000, pp. 140–167.

11 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 6), p. 186.

12 For information on Galician monasteries it is worth reading, Ermelindo Portela/María del Carmen Pallarés Méndez, Elementos para el análisis de la aristocracia altomedieval de Galicia. Parentesco y patrimonio, in: *El Museo de Pontevedra* 43 (1989), pp. 39–54.

13 Emmanuelle Santinelli, *Des femmes éplorées? Les veuves dans la société aristocratique du haut Moyen Âge*, Villeneuve-d’Ascq 2003 (*Histoire et civilisations*).

of monasteries and churches and curators of the memory of the family, which are topics that have recently been studied in some depth.<sup>14</sup>

It should be remembered that, well into the 11<sup>th</sup> century, monasteries were practically the only places where medicine was studied and practiced with a minimal academic basis.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of medical schools such as those in Salerno or Montpellier, the reception of Arab-Islamic medicine and, finally, the emergence of universities, would put an end to the monopoly of the monastic cloisters on medicine. In spite of this, especially in many of the European regions lacking a university of reference or an urban framework of minimum size, the role played by the monks and their monasteries in terms of medical knowledge and care continued to be the only alternative to traditional medicine and quackery. This characteristic is undoubtedly one of the reasons why many people decided to spend the last years of their lives under the protection of the monastic orders. Besides this, there can be no doubt that reasons of a strictly spiritual nature should also be taken into account. In other words, confidence in the unique value of the monks' prayers and assimilation into their community in the final stages of life was seen as being beneficial: being able to profess as monks and nuns was considered to be a good credential for a smooth transition to the Hereafter. Finally, it should be remembered that many of the elderly who chose to seclude themselves in monasteries did so because, like so many of our elders today, they probably lacked a family of their own, or because the family they had was unwilling or unable to care for them. And so, the 'monastery option', considered as a care home *ante litteram*, was the best way for many people to ensure that they had access to food, clothing, and both physical and spiritual care.

The system by which these elders entered the monasteries was known as *familiaritas*, meaning that they became a part of the monastic family. It was a contractual relationship, by which the people who intended to enter a community gave part of their belongings (and in rare cases, all of them) to the monastery and were welcomed as brothers and sisters, relatives, partners or *prebendarii*.<sup>16</sup> The family member then went on to have the doors of the community open for religious life. Even so, this situation did not separate him or her fully from the lay life outside the cloister, although he or she had the possibility of finally taking holy orders as a monk or nun. In this case we are talking about

14 Therese Martin (Ed.), *Reassessing the Role of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, 2 vols., Leiden-Boston 2012 (*Visualising the Middle Ages* 7).

15 Guenter B. Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls. A History of Hospitals*, New York-Oxford 1999, p. 104.

16 Charles de Miramon, *Embrasser l'état monastique à l'âge adulte (1050–1200)*. Étude sur la conversion tardive, in: *Annales* 54 (1999), pp. 825–849.

a “late vocation”, a formula that became consolidated and expanded from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

We will now turn to the documentation from the northwest Iberian Peninsula, to see how this situation was embodied in specific cases. Few references for the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries have been found: in fact, there are only seven. Four are from the documentary archive of the monastery of Samos,<sup>17</sup> two from the collection of the abbey of Celanova,<sup>18</sup> and one from the “Liber Fidei” from the Cathedral of Braga in Portugal.<sup>19</sup> Two of these examples refer to married couples and inheritance. In the year 931, Elarino and Gundilo, a couple who presented themselves as “exigui serui uestri”, made a donation in favour of the abbey of Samos. In the preamble to the document, and as a justification for their action, they stated that “deuenimus in senectute absque filios” (“we have reached old age, without having had children”).<sup>20</sup> A very similar case was the donation made in 978 by Hermenegildo, who refers to himself as the *famulus* of the monastery of Samos, and his wife Eldonza. This couple had been married for a long time (“essemus in coniugio per annos plurimos”) and, like the previous couple, had no children. For this reason, and relying on what the “Lex Gotica” specified in this regard, they could freely dispose of their patrimony, which they intended to donate to the above-mentioned monastery.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, we can infer that the donors expected more from Samos than the intermediation of the monks through their prayers. In the case of two elderly, childless couples, the option of joining a monastery, or taking part in its welfare and clientele network, seems to have been the most plausible reason.

Much more precise, in this respect, are our third and fourth examples. Both date from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and it comes as no surprise that this was the period when the effective establishment of many of these elders in monasteries, in different ways, is most clearly noted. The first of these documents is from around the year 1080. Pelayo Velasco, who describes himself as “exiguus et inutilis”, makes a donation of half of his possessions to the abbey of Samos. Although he is not clearly identified as being an old man, the fact that he is already a grandfather could indicate this. In addition, the *quid pro quo* that Pelayo hopes to obtain from the monastery that receives his donation, also seems to endorse the fact that he was an old man. What were his intentions? He asks to be admitted

17 El Tombo de San Julián de Samos (siglos VIII–XII), ed. by Manuel Lucas Álvarez, Santiago 1985.

18 O Tombo de Celanova, ed. by José Miguel Andrade Cernadas, Santiago 1995.

19 Liber Fidei Sanctae Bracarensis Ecclesiae, ed. by Avelino de Jesús da Costa, Braga 1978.

20 El Tombo, ed. by Lucas Álvarez (see note 17), p. 119.

21 Ibid., p. 132.

to the monastery, where he will receive temporary sustenance in the form of food and clothing: "... pro quod me colligitis in ipsum monasterium ... ad habitandum ... et pro eo quod mihi datis subsidium temporale, tegumentum et victum".<sup>22</sup> This latter request is clearly detailed in the document, and provides us with information on the variety of clothes and fabrics available to the members of the monastic communities, and the power of attraction they could have had for the lay people who joined them. Equally precise were the demands of a woman called Meirina. According to a Portuguese document dating from 1072, she made a gift to the monastery of Santo Estêvão de Faiões, situated close to the city of Chaves. In exchange for her gift, she requests of the monks that "gubernetis et vestiatis me in mea senectute et sepelliatis",<sup>23</sup> in other words, that they attend to her and dress her in her old age and attend to her burial.

Not only lay people used these formulas of familiarity; they can also be found among the priests. An example is that of the Father Ermorigo. In 1090 he made a donation to a church belonging to the monastery of Celanova. The explanation of his act is due "pro post beneficia que mihi in hunc locum in senectute mea vigarii de Cellanova faciunt".<sup>24</sup> In other words, the representatives or curates of the monastery would have looked after the old man, who wished to compensate them with his donation. Finally, it seems clear that the choice of this formula had a clear social bias. Apart from spiritual motivations, it seems that those who took advantage of it had some kind of patrimony to offer to the monasteries. At the very least, only the monasteries have left behind written evidence. The fate of the majority of the elderly in these centuries is simply unknown to us and, as Homet recalled, the percentage of those cared for by their families is impossible to determine.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 The "Golden Age" of the Elderly? The Late Middle Ages

If we move forward in time and examine the Late Middle Ages, we find an era in which the elderly lived what Georges Minois has defined as their "golden age".<sup>26</sup> The percentage

22 Ibid., pp. 309–310.

23 Liber Fidei, ed. by da Costa (see note 19), p. 360.

24 O Tombo, ed. by Andrade Cernadas (see note 18), p. 609.

25 Raquel Homet, *Los viejos y la vejez en la Edad Media*. Sociedad e imaginário, Rosario 1997, p. 120.

26 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 6), p. 278.

of elderly people in society as a whole grew in comparison to previous periods<sup>27</sup>. In addition, the demographic calamity of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which seemed to have been especially vicious to the young, meant that the opinions and knowledge of the elderly were especially valued. Considering this background, we should turn our attention to the monasteries once again. Thanks to the fact that late medieval documentation is much more abundant and diversified, it is possible to learn more about the life of the people of that time. The records tell us how long the abbots and abbesses were in charge, and from this one can assess how long they lived. This, in turn, permits us to confirm that there were relatively frequent cases of office holders with great longevity.

It is true that, as previously mentioned, the general living conditions of the members of the monastic communities were considerably better than those of most of the population. However, on the other hand, it seems that they were much more exposed to the spread of some of the serious illnesses that had plagued the West since the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century than was the rest of society. By this time, both male and female monasticism were clearly defined and differentiated, allowing us to compare the average duration of the terms of office of abbots and abbesses in monasteries and in nunneries. In order to ascertain the average length of the terms of office of abbots in monasteries, we have used the cases of the Benedictine communities of Celanova<sup>28</sup> and Samos<sup>29</sup> plus the Cistercian community of San Clodio do Ribeiro<sup>30</sup>. For the nunneries, we have used the documentation of the Benedictine nunnery of San Pedro de Ramirás<sup>31</sup> and that of the Cistercian nuns of Santa María de Ferreira de Pantón<sup>32</sup>. The details, broken down by centuries, are shown below. Findings from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries are compared with those from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (see table 1).

27 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 6), p. 277–327; Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*. “Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain”, London-New York 1997, p. 33.

28 Colección diplomática do Mosteiro de San Salvador de Celanova (ss. XIII–XV), ed. by María Beatriz Vaquero Díaz, Santiago 2004.

29 Ernest Zaragoza i Pascual, *Abadologio del monasterio de San Julián de Samos* (ss. VIII–XX), in: *Estudios Mindonienses* 12 (1996), pp. 469–503.

30 *El monasterio de San Clodio do Ribeiro en la Edad Media. Estudio y documentos*, ed. by Manuel Lucas Álvarez/Pedro Lucas Domínguez, Sada 1996 (Galicia medieval. Fontes).

31 *San Pedro de Ramirás. Un monasterio femenino en la Edad Media. Colección diplomática*, ed. by Manuel Lucas Álvarez/Pedro Lucas Domínguez, Santiago de Compostela 1988.

32 *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Santa María de Ferreira de Pantón*, ed. by José Ignacio Fernández de Viana, Lugo 1995.

Tab.: Average Years of Tenure of Abbots and Abbesses in Galician Monasteries (10<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

Name of Monastery/Nunnery	Average Years of Tenure of Abbots/ Abbesses (10 <sup>th</sup> Century)	Average Years of Tenure of Abbots/ Abbesses (11 <sup>th</sup> Century)	Average Years of Tenure of Abbots/ Abbesses (14 <sup>th</sup> Century)	Average Years of Tenure of Abbots/ Abbesses (15 <sup>th</sup> Century)
Samos (Benedictine monastery)	19	9	20.8	11.2
Celanova (Benedictine monastery)	25	18	9.5	37
San Clodio do Ribeiro (Cistercian monastery)	–	–	9.8	29.5
Santa María de Ferreira de Pantón (Cistercian nunnery)	–	–	15	44.5
San Pedro de Ramirás (Benedictine nunnery)	–	–	18	24
Mean: Average Years of Tenure (monasteries)	22	13.5	13.4	25.9
Mean: Average Years of Tenure (nunneries)	–	–	16.5	34.3

The comparison between the two periods is not as striking as one would expect in principle. Only the data from the 15<sup>th</sup> century indicate that the longevity of the abbots was clearly superior to that of the early medieval period.

When focusing on the Late Middle Ages, it is important to start by noting that the data from the 14<sup>th</sup> century should be interpreted with some caution. In several of the monasteries studied, this was a time of great turbulence. For much of this century, San Clodio, for example, was almost totally dependent on a noble family, in this case, the powerful Sarmiento family. This loss of independence, together with a clear relaxation of the observance of their spiritual rules, led to the decline of the various functions of the abbey, for example the care for the sick and elderly. Something similar must have happened in Celanova. Throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there were twelve different abbots, one after another, and one finds fewer periods in which there is no abbot mentioned in the documentation, as opposed to others, when there were two abbots at the same time. The case of Samos is virtually the opposite; the abbots succeeded each other without interruptions, and two of the abbots of that period were in office for more than 30 years, while another was in power for more than 20. It should also be noted that the two abbots who were in power following the arrival of the Black Death of 1348, Rui González (1343–1367) and Arias González (1368–1403), were precisely among the longest serving of the

century.<sup>33</sup> This may well indicate that the disease did not have very harmful effects on this community, if indeed it was affected in any way at all.

The image of the selected nunneries is also one of remarkable stability and relative longevity. In both cases, the average tenure of the abbesses is far greater than that of the abbots, although only during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This perceptible difference allows us to address the question of whether women lived longer than men in the late Middle Ages. There are several authors who speak of an early medieval period in which men seemed to live longer, while they noted an increase in the lifespan of women in the final part of the medieval period.<sup>34</sup> Several demographic studies confirm this trend in female longevity. It is now more than 30 years since David Herlihy revealed how in several urban areas of Switzerland, France and Germany, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the female population surpassed the male population with ratios ranging from 109–120 women per 100 men.<sup>35</sup>

In the specific case of gender-differentiated longevity within the monastic world, diet could be one of the possible causes for this difference. The male communities of the Late Middle Ages lost, to a large extent, the healthy and austere dietary rules imposed by the Benedictine Order. On the contrary, they went on to eat in a very similar way to the secular nobility: high levels of consumption of animal proteins, high fat intake, and increased levels of alcohol consumption. Barbara Harvey, studying the Benedictine community of Westminster during the medieval period, observes how the variety and quantity of meat dishes consumed by the monks is something that equates them with the aristocrats of the time.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it is not only a question of quality but also of quantity. The copious diet and the lack of physical activity of the monks lead to the assumption that a significant part of the community would have suffered from obesity and, consequently, from the health problems resulting from it.

Without having the same abundance of sources used by Harvey, we can assert that the dietary behaviour of the Galician monks during the period in question coincides, basically, with what we have described above. On the contrary, the female communities, although less well studied in dietary aspects, seem to have maintained a more balanced and healthy diet than that of the monks, which could have undoubtedly had repercussions for a general state of health that was much more favourable to reaching old

33 Zaragoza i Pascual, *Abadologio* (see note 29), p. 476.

34 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 6), p. 294.

35 David Herlihy, *Life Expectancies for Women in Medieval Society*, in: Rosemary T. Morewedge (Ed.), *The Role of Woman in the Middle Ages*, Albany 1975, pp. 1–22, at pp. 12–13.

36 Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England. 1100–1540. The Monastic Experience*, Oxford 1995, p. 52.

age. Furthermore, it should be considered that, without necessarily offering an image of extreme cloistering, the nunneries had less contact with the outside world, which would have protected them, to a greater extent than the monks, from possible infection and disease. Finally, we should also take into account that the nunneries suffered less than the monasteries from the wave of violent incidents, especially those involving the Galician nobility, which affected cloistered life during most of the Late Middle Ages. Beyond the average lifespan of abbesses, we find some unique cases of longevity. For example, the last two medieval abbesses of Ferreira de Pantón bear witness to this. Constanza Pérez controlled the nunnery for 39 years, while her successor, María López, was abbess for half a century.<sup>37</sup> In Ramirás we find similar cases. The first abbess of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, María Fernández IV, is documented as being such between 1295 and 1339, i. e. almost 44 years. The most remarkable case of longevity, however, is found in the life of Ona Beatriz Álvarez, who headed the community of Ramirás between June 1420 and June 1472, meaning that she was abbess for 52 years.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

The increasing numbers of the elderly and the profound changes in society as a consequence of the crisis of the Late Middle Ages, affected what up until that point had been the traditional means of providing care for and attention to the elderly<sup>39</sup>. The greater social influence of the elderly was not always accompanied by a parallel effort to better care for them: for example, monastic institutions seem to have abandoned or at least relaxed their option to provide charity and shelter to the elderly in the later centuries of the Middle Ages. For all these reasons, it is not surprising that, at that time, new ways of caring for the elderly appeared, for example new forms of contracts and hospitals, and other forms of caregiving became more widespread, for example within the family. Most of them no longer had anything to do with the monastic world, in contrary to the situation in the previous five centuries. The presence of elderly people in monasteries, with the exception of the monks themselves, became a memory of the past. The monasteries of modern and contemporary times lost their welfare character and caregiving functions that had been typical of them for much of the medieval period. The closure to the

37 Colección diplomática, ed. by Fernández de Viana (see note 32), p. 346.

38 San Pedro de Ramirás, ed. by Lucas Álvarez/Lucas Domínguez (see note 31), p. 619.

39 Cf., for example, Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound. Peasant Families in Medieval England*, New York-Oxford 1986, p. 232.

secular world and a high degree of seclusion marked the monastic panorama during the centuries that followed the Middle Ages.

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# Old Age and Rulership

## King James I of Aragon and Venetian Doge Marin(o) Falier(o)

### Abstract

Although kingship represents a classic topic of historical research, systematic studies are nevertheless rare. So far, certain aspects related to old age have been dealt with in the context of several studies that link political history with the history of culture and medicine. Due to the systemic differences between various kinds of political regimes, the analysis of the period of old age starts from rather diverse scenarios. While kings often ascended the throne by succession in their youth or middle age and grew old while exercising their office, the late medieval Venetian doges were usually not elected until they were on average about 65 years old. In this paper, two case studies of different political systems will be analysed in a comparative view based primarily on narrative, but also on administrative sources: a hereditary monarchy, namely that of King James I of Aragon (1208–1276, r. 1213–1276, who died at the age of 68); and a republic using electoral procedures as in the case of the Venetian Doge Marin(o) Falier(o) (1280 or 1285–1355, r. 1354–1355, who died at the age of 70 or 75). The study highlights aspects of old age that are common to both case studies such as for example health and illness, compensation, sexuality, and the preparation for death, as well as aspects that are unique to each case, such as warriorship and the perceptions of old age in a situation of discord and antagonism.

### 1 Introduction

Although kingship is a classic topic of historical research, systematic studies are still rather uncommon.<sup>1</sup> Important areas of study include, for instance, sacrality, consensual rule,

1 For example, cf. Hans K. Schulze, *Grundstrukturen der Verfassung im Mittelalter*, vol. 4: *Das Königtum*, Stuttgart 2011 (Kohlhammer-Urban-Taschenbücher 464).

rituals, and ceremonial aspects, and most recently warriorship and masculinity.<sup>2</sup> With regard to Venetian dogeship, in addition to an approach that concentrates on the persons of the doges – taking up the tradition of the *vitae ducum* – a systematic approach was also chosen. In this context, important topics include election, the ducal duties and tasks, representation and ceremony, the dogaressas (the wives of the doges) as well as death and tombs.<sup>3</sup> Robert Finlay's contribution from the late 1970s, which is dedicated to the topic of old age, should especially be highlighted in this case.<sup>4</sup> Certain problems concerning the ageing of rulers have so far been dealt with in studies that combine political with cultural and medical history.<sup>5</sup> Another topic addressed in the research is the retreat of

2 For example, cf. Martin Clauss/ Andrea Stieldorf/ Tobias Weller (Eds.), *Der König als Krieger. Zum Verhältnis von Königtum und Krieg im Mittelalter*, Bamberg 2015 (Bamberger interdisziplinäre Mittelalterstudien – Vorträge und Vorlesungen 5); Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*, Darmstadt 2013; Katherine J. Lewis, *Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*, London 2013; Franz-Reiner Erkens (Ed.), *Die Sakralität von Herrschaft. Herrschaftslegitimierung im Wechsel der Zeiten und Räume*, Berlin 2002; Yves Sassier, *Royalauté et idéologie au Moyen Âge. Bas-Empire, monde franc, France (IV<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris 2002 (Collection U. Histoire); Bernd Schneidmüller, *Konsensuale Herrschaft. Ein Essay über Formen und Konzepte politischer Ordnung im Mittelalter*, in: Paul-Joachim Heinig/ Sigrid Jahns/ Hans-Joachim Schmidt/ Rainer Christoph Schwinges/ Sabine Wefers (Eds.), *Reich, Regionen und Europa in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Peter Moraw*, Berlin 2000 (Historische Forschungen 67), pp. 53–87.

3 For a systematic approach, cf. Giorgio Ravegnani, *Il doge di Venezia*, Bologna 2013 (Universale paperbacks Il mulino 654); Gino Benzoni (Ed.), *I Dogi*, Milano 1982; Bartolomeo Cecchetti, *Il doge di Venezia*, Venezia 1864. For an approach focusing on the single doges, cf. Andrea Da Mosto, *I dogi di Venezia*, Venezia 2003. On the dogaressa: Holly S. Hurlburt, *The Dogaressa of Venice. 1200–1500. Wife and Icon*, New York 2006 (The New Middle Ages); Staley Edgcumbe, *The Dogaressas of Venice*, London 1910. On the doges' death and their tombs: Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*, Cambridge 2000; Andrea Da Mosto, *I dogi di Venezia con particolare riguardo alle loro tombe*, Venezia 1939.

4 Robert Finlay, *The Venetian Republic as a Gerontocracy. Age and Politics in the Renaissance*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1978), pp. 157–178. The Venetian political system of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is analysed as a gerontocracy. Through this focus, the individual doges fade into the background. An important prerequisite for the emergence of the Venetian gerontocracy was the constitution of the nobility after the *serrata* ("closure") which made membership hereditary. On this topic: Stanley Chojnacki, *Social Identity in Renaissance Venice. The Second Serrata*, in: *Renaissance Studies* 8 (1994), pp. 341–358; Gerhard Rösch, *Der venezianische Adel bis zur Schließung des Großen Rats. Zur Genese einer Führungsschicht*, Sigmaringen 1989 (Kieler historische Studien 33). On the relationships between patricians and common people: Dennis Romano, *Patrizi e popolani. La società veneziana nel Trecento*, Bologna 1993 (Biblioteca storica).

5 Achim Thomas Hack, *Alter, Krankheit, Tod und Herrschaft im frühen Mittelalter. Das Beispiel der Karolinger*, Stuttgart 2009 (Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 56); Agostino Para-

(elderly) rulers to monasteries.<sup>6</sup> Elderly rulers and characters have also been the subject of studies in literary history.<sup>7</sup>

The following two case studies will focus on the rulers' old age and the related aspects thereof. The fundamental questions are: (1) Which aspects of ageing and old age can be studied by them?, (2) What role does the difference of the political systems play?, (3) How significant are context and perspective for the evaluation of old age?, (4) Which connections to modern gerontological theories and concepts can be drawn?

With regard to the Crown of Aragon, King James I (1208–1276, r. 1213–1276) is one of the best known and most well-studied kings. Three major congresses have already been dedicated to him and the period he lived in.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, several monographs and numerous articles on specific aspects of James's personality and reign have been published.<sup>9</sup> To varying degrees, the sovereign's ageing has been important, but not as a

vicini Bagliani, *Der Leib des Papstes. Eine Theologie der Hinfälligkeit*, München 1997 (C. H. Beck Kulturwissenschaft); Paul E. Dutton, *Beyond the Topos of Senescence. The Political Problems of Aged Carolingian Rulers*, in: Michael McMahon Sheehan (Ed.), *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, Toronto 1990 (Papers in Mediaeval Studies 11), pp. 75–94.

6 Nicholas J. Higham, *The Shaved Head That Shall Not Wear the Crown*, in: Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Ed.), *Royal Authority in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford 2013 (BAR. British Series 584), pp. 7–16; Jonathan R. Lyon, *The Withdrawal of Aged Noblemen into Monastic Communities. Interpreting the Sources from Twelfth-Century Germany*, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.): *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Berlin-Boston 2007 (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 2), pp. 143–169.

7 For example, cf. Sonja Kerth, *Wolframs Greise. Alter(n) im "Parzival", "Titurel" und "Willehalm"*, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und Literatur* 144 (2015), pp. 48–76; Solveig Kristina Malatrait, *Le vieillard sous l'armure ou le paradoxe du vieux guerrier*, in: Christoph O. Mayer/Alexandra-Kathrin Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen. Alter(n) in romanischem Mittelalter und Renaissance*, München 2012 (Mittelalter und Renaissance in der Romani 5), pp. 137–160; Thijs Porck, *Vergrijzing in een Oudengels heldendicht. De rol van oude koningen in de Beowulf*, in: *Madoc. Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen* 26 (2012), pp. 66–76; Jean E. Jost, *Age-Old Words of Wisdom. The Power of the Aged in Grail Literature*, in: Classen (Ed.), *Old Age* (see note 6), pp. 263–298; Helen Adolf, *Le vieux roi, clef de voûte du Conte del Graal*, in: Fred Dethier (Ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Rita Lejeune*, Gembloux 1969, pp. 945–955.

8 Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració del VIII centenari del naixement de Jaume I*, 2 vols., Barcelona 2011–2013 (Memòries de la Secció Històrico-Arqueològica 91–92); *Jaime I y su época. X Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragon*, 3 vols., Zaragoza 1979–1982 (Publicación de la Institución 'Fernando el Católico' 675); *I Congrès d'Historia de la Corona d'Aragó dedicat al Rey en Jaume I y a la seua época*, 2 vols., Barcelona 1913.

9 Ernest Belenguier, *Jaume I i el seu regnat*, Lleida 2007; Stefano Maria Cingolani, *Jaume I. Història i mite d'un rei*, Barcelona 2007 (Biografies i memòries 68); Ferran Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I el Conqueridor*, Barcelona 1958 (Biblioteca catalana 14); Charles de Tourtoulon, *Études*

topic in its own right.<sup>10</sup> A rare testimony for the Middle Ages is the “Llibre dels Fets”, a chronicle ‘dictated’ by James himself, which makes it highly autobiographical.<sup>11</sup> Presumably, the work was written from a retrospective viewpoint during his old age.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the “Llibre” is practically always considered for research on James I, the archival records

sur la maison de Barcelone. Jacme Ier le Conquerant, Roi d’Aragon, 2 vols., Montpellier 1863–1867. On James’s personality and his old age: Xavier Renedo i Puig, La bona mort dels reis d’Aragó segons Ramon Muntaner, in: *Mot so razo 14* (2015), pp. 39–52; Josep Antoni Aguilar Àvila, ‘The Lion in Winter’. La figura de Jaume I. Del ‘Llibre dels feits’ a la ‘Crònica’ de Ramon Muntaner, in: Albert Guillem Hauf Valls (Ed.), *El ‘Llibre dels feits’. Aproximació crítica*, Valencia 2013, pp. 211–238; Ricard Urgell Hernández, Els fills de Jaume I i la política successòria, in: Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 1, pp. 599–608; Ernest Marcos Hierro, La croada a Terra Santa de 1269 i la política internacional de Jaume I, in: Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 1, pp. 509–522; Cynthia L. Chamberlin, The ‘Sainted Queen’ and the ‘Sin of Berenguela’. Teresa Gil de Vidaure and Berenguela Alfonso in Documents of the Crown of Aragon. 1255–1272, in: Paul E. Chevedden / Larry J. Simon (Eds.), *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages. Studies in Honor of Robert I. Burns S. J.*, 2 vols., Leiden-New York-Köln 1995–1996, vol. 1, pp. 303–321; Robert I. Burns, The Spiritual Life of Jaume the Conqueror King of Arago-Catalonia. 1208–1276. Portrait and Self-Portrait, in: *Jaime I* (see note 8), vol. 2, pp. 323–357.

10 Hans-Werner Wahl / Andreas Kruse, Lebenslaufforschung – ein altes und neues interdisziplinäres Forschungsthema, in: id. (Eds.), *Lebensläufe im Wandel. Entwicklung über die Lebensspanne aus Sicht verschiedener Disziplinen*, Stuttgart 2014, pp. 16–36; Jaber F. Gubrium / James A. Holstein, *Constructing the Life Course*, New York 2000 (The Reynolds Series in Sociology); Christian Alexander Neumann, Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2018), pp. 387–405, at pp. 400–403.

11 *Les Quatre grans Cròniques*, vol. 1: *Llibre dels feits del rei En Jaume*, ed. by Ferran Soldevila, rev. by Jordi Bruguera / Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, Barcelona 2008 (*Memòries de la Secció Historico-Arqueològica* 73). An English translation: *The Chronicle of James I King of Aragon, surnamed the Conqueror*, transl. by John Forster, 2 vols., London 1883. For evaluations of the “Llibre”, cf. for example: Barbara Schlieben, Von der Schwierigkeit, alles anders als der Vater zu machen. Worte, Werke, Amt und “Selbst” im *Llibre dels Fets* Königs Jakobs von Aragón (1213–1276), in: *Viator Multilingual* 43 (2012), pp. 117–132, at pp. 117–118; Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 345, 347; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 309–310. Perhaps Jaume Sarroca, bishop of Osca and notary of the king, finished the ‘Llibre’, which will be mentioned later on (Damian J. Smith, *James I and God. Legitimacy, Protection and Consolation in the ‘Llibre dels Fets’*, in: *Imago temporis. Medium Aevum* 1 [2007], pp. 105–119, at pp. 107, 109; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* [see note 9], pp. 326–328). ‘Dictation’ is not to be understood as a verbatim reproduction of the king’s words. Rather, what was recounted and remembered verbally was written down (Renedo i Puig, *La bona mort* [see note 9], p. 92; Stefano Maria Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis. Les quatre grans cròniques i la historiografia catalana. Des del segle X fins al XIV*, Barcelona 2008, pp. 33, 50).

12 Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), pp. 33–35; Smith, *James I* (see note 11), pp. 107–108; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), pp. 326–327. Cingolani assumes that the king devoted himself to the work especially from the 1270s onwards and suggests that after the failed crusade of

are less intensively used.<sup>13</sup> Researchers have been, and continue to be, generally positive in their evaluations of his long reign. In recent decades, however, more differentiated judgements have increasingly been observed.<sup>14</sup>

Marin(o) Falier(o) (1280 or 1285–1355, r. 1354–1355) has a special position in Venetian history as he was the only doge to be beheaded under the accusation of wanting to overthrow the existing regime.<sup>15</sup> During the period of the “ducal monarchy” during the first centuries after the emergence of Venice, violent deaths of doges were quite frequent.<sup>16</sup> In the course of the restrictions imposed on their power from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the dynastic transmission of the office was prohibited and replaced by a complex electoral system.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the doges became increasingly older. For those who reigned between 1400 and 1600, Finlay gives an average age of 72 at the time of their election.<sup>18</sup> In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the election of old men was already so firmly established

1269 he had reached a time in his life where he could reflect on his successes and failures (Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* [see note 11], pp. 34–35).

13 This is certainly due to the fact that a considerable amount of available material has not yet been systematically edited. On this, cf. for example: Alberto Torra Pérez, *Los registros de la cancillería de Jaime I*, in: Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 1, pp. 211–230, at p. 213. On James’s registers in the Archive of the Crown of Aragon, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 211–230.

14 Josep Maria Salrach i Marés, *Jaume I. Una valoració del regnat*, in: Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 2, pp. 837–854, at p. 847; Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, *Jaume I. Vida i gestes*, in: ead. (Ed.), *Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 1, pp. 11–36, at p. 35. Josep Maria Salrach points out that historians from the different former kingdoms of the crown developed their own traditions of evaluating James’s reign. These views can be traced back to the differences in the relationships the king had with the respective kingdoms; Salrach i Marés, *Jaume I.* (see above), pp. 847–851.

15 Daniele Dibello, *La stabilità delle istituzioni veneziane nel Trecento. Aspetti politici, economici e culturali nella gestione della congiura di Marino Falier*, in: *Reti Medievali Rivista* 19,2 (2018), pp. 86–129, at pp. 4–5; Giorgio Ravegnani, *Il traditore di Venezia. Vita di Marino Falier doge*, Bari 2017 (*Storia e società*), pp. 75–108.

16 Stefano Gasparri, *The First Dukes and the Origins of Venice*, in: Sauro Gelichi / id. (Eds.), *Venice and Its Neighbors from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Century. Through Renovation and Continuity*, Leiden-Boston 2018 (*The Medieval Mediterranean* 111), pp. 5–26; Gherardo Ortalli, *Il travaglio d’una definizione. Sviluppi medievali del dogado*, in: Benzoni (Ed.), *I Dogi* (see note 3), pp. 13–44.

17 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 21–76. Ugo Tucci, *I meccanismi dell’elezione dogale*, in: Benzoni (Ed.), *I Dogi* (see note 3), pp. 107–124.

18 Finlay, *The Venetian Republic* (see note 4), pp. 157, 169. This development can be seen as being part of a general trend of decline of violent deaths of rulers in Europe between 600 and 1800. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the rate of regicide dropped significantly. Rulers who died a natural death reached their 53<sup>th</sup> year of life on the average (Manuel Eisner, *Killing Kings. Patterns of Regicide*

that deviations from this rule required justification.<sup>19</sup> The “doge monarchs” of the early Middle Ages had become office-holders, although certainly not ordinary ones, because they were highly respected, possessed a sacred aura as representatives of Saint Mark and, despite all the restrictions, had a certain power to influence politics.<sup>20</sup> Falier’s ‘conspiracy’ was intensively studied, particularly in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially by Vittorio Lazzarini whose research is still fundamental.<sup>21</sup> The events of April 1355 are recounted in greater or lesser detail in almost every book on the history of Venice.<sup>22</sup> After decades of inactivity, a renewed interest in the topic has arisen in recent years.<sup>23</sup> As far as the sources are concerned, the Venetian ruling class propagated its ‘official’ version immediately after the events. In the administrative documents, there is almost no information on the happenings of 1355, because this information should not be writ-

in Europe. AD 600–1800, in: *The British Journal of Criminology* 51 [2011], pp. 556–577). Against this backdrop, too, Falier’s case is an exception and James I reigned for an unusually long time.

19 Ravegnani, *Il doge* (see note 3), pp. 38–43. This was the case, for example, when Andrea Dandolo was elected doge in 1343 while being in his mid-30s.

20 Ravegnani, *Il doge* (see note 3), pp. 29, 36; Ortalli, *Il travaglio* (see note 16), p. 37; Alberto Tenenti, *La rappresentazione del potere*, in: Benzoni (Ed.), *I Dogi* (see note 3), pp. 73–106, at pp. 76, 79.

21 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), p. 78. Above all, cf. Vittorio Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura*, in: *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 13 (1897), pp. 5–107, 277–374; id., *Marino Faliero avanti il dogado*, in: *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 5 (1893), pp. 95–197; id., *Genealogia del doge Marino Faliero*, in: *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 3 (1892), pp. 181–207. Many of his studies were combined into a monograph in the 1960s: id., *Marino Faliero*, Firenze 1963 (Biblioteca storica Sansoni. Nuova serie 39). Since Falier’s wife, Aluica (Ludovica) Gradenigo, also became part of the legends, she was given considerable attention as well. On this topic: Bartolomeo Cecchetti, *La dote della moglie di Marino Falier*, in: *Archivio Veneto* 29 (1885), pp. 202–204; id., *L’ultimo testamento di Lodovica Gradenigo. Vedova di Marino Falier*, in: *Archivio Veneto* 20 (1880), pp. 347–350; id., *La moglie di Marino Falier*, in: *Archivio Veneto* 1 (1871), pp. 364–370. In the following, the single quotation marks around ‘conspiracy’ (or similar terms) are omitted because it has been mentioned that this is a specific interpretation.

22 For example, cf. Frederic C. Lane, *Seerepublik Venedig*, München 1980, pp. 275–279; Roberto Cessi, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, vol. 1., Milano 1981, pp. 315–316; Samuele Romanin, *Storia documentata di Venezia*, vol. 3, Venezia 1912, pp. 176–193.

23 Dibello, *La stabilità* (see note 15), pp. 86–129; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15). Furthermore, a contribution by Giovanni Pillinini from 1970 should be referred to: Giovanni Pillinini, *I “popolari” e la “congiura” di Marino Falier*, in: *Annali della facoltà di lingue e letteratura straniere di Ca’ Foscari* 9 (1970), pp. 63–71.

ten down – “non scribatur”.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, narrative texts inform about the conspiracy, although they must be read critically. As for the sources of both case studies, they reveal insights into both discourses on old age and how it was dealt with in practice. Especially narrative texts, which prevail here, move between these two levels when they speak about specific rulers.<sup>25</sup>

## 2 King James I of Aragon

James I was born on 1 February 1208.<sup>26</sup> After the unexpected death of his father in the Battle of Muret in 1213, he came to the throne while still a child. His mother also died in the same year. James therefore grew up as an orphan in the circle of the Knights Templar in Montsó (Monzón). According to Antoni Riera i Melis, he was raised to be a “warrior king”.<sup>27</sup> Due to his early accession to the throne, his reign extended over 63 years. During his minority, a regency council under his great-uncle Sanç led the affairs of state until 1218.<sup>28</sup> The king comments that as a child he did not know how to rule his kingdom and was therefore dependent on the guidance and advice of others.<sup>29</sup> In the first chapters of the “Llibre”, James frequently mentions that he was ‘only a child or a youth’ – that is, actually still too young to be a ruler – but that even in his youth he had shown unusual

24 Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. *La congiura* (see note 21), p. 5. On the other hand, the persecution of the supporters of the conspiracy is documented.

25 Amy J. Cuddy/Susan T. Fiske/Michael I. Norton, *The Old Stereotype. The Pervasiveness and Persistence of Elderly Stereotype*, in: *Journal of Social Issues* 61 (2005), pp. 267–285; Gerd Göckenjan, *Das Alter würdigen. Altersbilder und Bedeutungswandel des Alters*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000 (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1446). Among other issues, narrative gerontology deals with these questions, for example, as described in Gary M. Kenyon/Phillip G. Clark/Brian De Vries (Eds.), *Narrative Gerontology. Theory, Research, and Practice*, New York 2001.

26 Ferrer i Mallol, *Jaume I* (see note 14), pp. 13–16; Antoni Riera i Melis, *Jaume I i la seva època. Anàlisi breu d'un important llegat polític i cultural*, in: *Catalan Historical Review* 1 (2008), pp. 163–170, at pp. 163–164; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), pp. 324–325.

27 Riera i Melis, *Jaume I* (see note 26), p. 164.

28 Ferrer i Mallol, *Jaume I* (see note 14), pp. 13–15; Vicente García Edo, *La monarquia de Jaume I*, in: Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 1, pp. 45–58, at p. 46. For the period of minority, in particular cf. Salvador Sanpere y Miquel, *Minoría de Jaime I*, in: *I Congrès* (see note 8), vol. 2, Barcelona 1913, pp. 580–691.

29 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 16, p. 74; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, ch. 16, p. 29.

bravery and an aptitude for governing.<sup>30</sup> This description brings to mind the *puer senex* motif.

In his “Llibre”, James focuses on his deeds, “fets”, especially his military enterprises, which were intended to serve the glory of God and were desired by God.<sup>31</sup> Although he primarily saw himself as a warrior, James has also been historically regarded as a proficient lawgiver and administrator.<sup>32</sup> In the prologue, which was either dictated by the king himself or written according to his instructions, a moral-religious-didactic function is attributed to the “Llibre”.<sup>33</sup> Both James’s longevity and his exceptionally good health are underlined, showing that length of reign, age and health were aspects of the perception of rulership. Against the background of topical references to the brevity of human life and the transience of everything earthly, James’s long life is interpreted as a sign of divine grace.<sup>34</sup> Through his pious deeds, James proved that he was pleasing to God, and at the end of his life he turned fully to Him by entering the Cistercian monastery of Poblet. His good health is also regarded as being a God-given gift. Consequently, illness is seen as a

30 For example, cf. *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 16, p. 74; ch. 20, p. 77; ch. 21, p. 82; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, ch. 16, p. 31; ch. 20, p. 36; ch. 21, p. 39; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 356; cf. also the contribution by Monica Ferrari in this volume.

31 Schlieben, *Von der Schwierigkeit* (see note 11), pp. 119–120, 123, 130, 132; Smith, *James I* (see note 11), p. 106; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 334.

32 Salrach i Marés, *Jaume I* (see note 14), pp. 843, 845; Donald J. Kagay, *The Line between Memoir and History. James I of Aragon and the “Libre dels Feits”*, in: id., *War, Government, and Society in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, Aldershot et al. 2007 (*Variorum Collected Studies Series 861*), pp. 165–176, at pp. 174–175; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 328. On this topic in more detail, cf. García Edo, *La monarquía* (see note 28), pp. 221–253; Marta VanLandingham, *Transforming the State. King, Court and Political Culture in the Realms of Aragon (1213–1387)*, Leiden-Köln 2002 (*The Medieval Mediterranean 43*). Burns describes James’s spirituality as idiosyncratic. In his way of thinking, God-pleasing deeds could compensate for worldly sins; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), pp. 356–357.

33 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), *Pròleg*, pp. 47–49; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, *Preface*, pp. 1–3; Josep Antoni Aguilar Àvila, *Introducció a les Quatre Grans Cròniques*, Barcelona 2011, pp. 17–18; Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), p. 34. Since the reference is to ‘listeners’, the communication should primarily occur by word of mouth.

34 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), *Pròleg*, pp. 47–48; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, *Preface*, pp. 1–3. “E quan nostre Senyor Jesucrist, que sap totes coses, sabia que la nostra vida s’allongaria tant ...” (*Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila [see note 11], *Pròleg*, p. 47). “And as Our Lord Jesus Christ, who knows all things, knew that our life would be prolonged so that ...” (*The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, *Preface*, p. 1).

punishment by the Lord, “en manera de castigament”, and compared to the punishment of a son by his father, which is supposed to have an educational purpose.<sup>35</sup>

In the “Llibre”, illnesses and injuries are very rarely mentioned. Although it is not impossible that the king remained in extraordinarily good health throughout his life with almost no exceptions, this would be surprising in light of the constant battles he was involved in and the many journeys he undertook.<sup>36</sup> He only became seriously ill in his final days, and thus this illness will be discussed together with his death. There is no description of James’s physical appearance in the “Llibre”. The only contemporary representation dates from around 1259, when he was about 50–55 years old, and is included in the “Cantigas de Santa María” of Alfonso X of Castile.<sup>37</sup> James is depicted as having a short, greyish-white beard and hair of the same colour. His stature is slender and upright.<sup>38</sup> He is therefore portrayed as an elderly ruler who shows no age-related impairments; on the contrary, his hair colour confers him with dignity. From the “Llibre” it becomes evident that the king was aware that he could die at any moment, regardless of age.<sup>39</sup> In July 1237, when James was about 30 years old and conquering the Kingdom of Valencia, he was not in good health for a certain period of time and remained in one place.<sup>40</sup> A disease of the eyes is described, which the king was only able to open by using warm water.<sup>41</sup> Shortly afterwards, he was wounded on the forehead by an arrow fired off by Muslim soldiers.<sup>42</sup> In his old age, the king still demonstrated considerable physical strength: at the age of almost 60, James succeeded in conquering the Muslim Múrcia in alliance

35 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), Pròleg, p. 48; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, Preface, p. 2. On the *cura corporis*, cf. also the contributions by Daniela Santoro and Daniel Schäfer in this volume.

36 Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), p. 71; Joaquim Miret i Sans, *Itinerari de Jaume I “el Conqueridor”* Barcelona 1918 (Institut d’Estudis Catalans 8), pp. 538, 542.

37 Belenguier, *Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 331; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 325.

38 The examination of James’s skeleton showed that he was quite tall compared to his contemporaries; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 325.

39 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 140, pp. 231–232; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, ch. 140, pp. 237–238; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 340.

40 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 213, pp. 286–287; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 1, ch. 213, pp. 319–320.

41 *Ibid.*, ch. 257, p. 323; ch. 257, pp. 370–371.

42 *Ibid.*, ch. 266, pp. 329–330; ch. 266, pp. 380–381. The wound must have remained visible because it was still clearly recognisable when the king’s mortal remains were examined; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), pp. 325, 341.

with Alfonso X (1265–1266).<sup>43</sup> In 1269, the Aragonese king organised a crusade to the Holy Land, which he himself abandoned when he left the fleet in Aigues-Mortes.<sup>44</sup> For its organisation, he had travelled through his entire kingdom on horseback. The king's devotion to the enterprise might well be connected with old age, because he saw in the crusade the pinnacle of his works for the glory of God and may have expected a corresponding reward in the afterlife.<sup>45</sup> In the "Llibre", in a rather extensive and partly dramatic narration, James describes violent storms, which he interprets as a divine sign that he should not continue his journey.<sup>46</sup> Some contemporaries saw the real reason in the fact that he had not wanted to part from his lover, Berenguela.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the young woman was always by his side, as administrative documents prove.<sup>48</sup> Even two years before his death, James still displayed his physical capacity and fitness for war, which contrasts with the negative old-age stereotype of physical weakness. In 1274, he went to the Second Council of Lyon. There he had his horse perform tricks with him as the rider, which so impressed the attending French nobles that they said "Lo, the king is not so old as people said! He could still give a Turk a good lance-thrust".<sup>49</sup>

43 Marcos Hierro, *La croada* (see note 9), p. 519; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 259–265.

44 Aguilar Àvila, *Introducció* (see note 33), pp. 58–64; Marcos Hierro, *La croada* (see note 9), pp. 509–522; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 266–270; Reinhold Röhrich, *Der Kreuzzug des König Jacob I. von Aragonien (1269)*, in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 11 (1890), pp. 372–395; Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, pp. 395–399.

45 Marcos Hierro, *La croada* (see note 9), p. 519. For the king's travels, cf. Esther Redondo García, *Mapes de l'itinerari de Jaume I (1208–1276) durant tota la seva vida*, in: Ferrer i Mallol (Ed.), *Jaume I. Commemoració* (see note 8), vol. 2, pp. 857–876, at p. 872.

46 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), capp. 482–490, pp. 471–478; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 482–490, pp. 600–607; Chamberlin, *The 'Sainted Queen'* (see note 9), p. 320; Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, pp. 395–399.

47 Chamberlin, *The 'Sainted Queen'* (see note 9), p. 320. The cleric Guillaume de Puylaurens, from what is now Southern France, criticised the fact that James, burning with love, abandoned his crusade on the advice of a woman, "consilio mulieris" (Guillaume de Puylaurens, *Chronique* [1203–1275]. *Chronica magistri Guillelmi de Podio Laurentii*, ed. by Jean Duvernoy, Paris 1976 [Sources d'histoire médiévale], ch. 48, pp. 196–197; Tourtoulon, *Études* [see note 9], vol. 2, p. 396). On the author: Guillaume de Puylaurens, *Chronique*, ed. by Duvernoy (see above), pp. 1–9.

48 Chamberlin, *The 'Sainted Queen'* (see note 9), pp. 320–321.

49 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), capp. 523–542, pp. 500–509; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 523–542, pp. 638–655; Belenguier, *Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 318; Burns, *The Spiritual Life* (see note 9), p. 356. "El rei no és tan vell con hom desia,

During his long life, the king had two official wives who were queens and one common-law wife, Teresa Gil de Vidaure, who did not have the official status of a queen; as well as numerous lovers or mistresses.<sup>50</sup> In the “Llibre”, the ladies at his side appear only rarely. The following comments may offer a possible explanation for this. James spent approximately the last ten years of his life with the Castilian Berenguela (or Berenguera) Alfonso de Molina, who died in 1272, and then with the (young) Catalan noblewoman Sibil·la de Saga.<sup>51</sup> Berenguela was much younger than James.<sup>52</sup> In the eyes of the Church and Pope Clement IV, it was impossible for James to divorce Teresa Gil de Vidaure, and the king’s behaviour was sinful and inappropriate because he acted like a *senex amans* by being in a relationship that was unequal with regard to age.<sup>53</sup> Among other things, the pope admonished him by saying that he should rather focus on the afterlife and refrain from sins of the flesh, especially in light of the fact that his life would probably not continue much longer.<sup>54</sup> He should not “pollute the last years of his life” (“nec te decet extrema polluere vitae tuae”). The judgement of some historians is comparable, as they regard James’s relationship with Berenguela as being “an old man’s folly”, and

que *encora* poria doner a un turc una gran lancea” (Llibre dels Feits, ed. by Soldevila [see note 11], ch. 535, p. 507; The Chronicle of James I, transl. by Forster [see note 11], vol. 2, ch. 535, p. 650).

50 Nikolas Jaspert, Indirekte und direkte Macht iberischer Königinnen im Mittelalter. “Reginale” Herrschaft, Verwaltung und Frömmigkeit, in: Claudia Zey (Ed.), Mächtige Frauen? Königinnen und Fürstinnen im europäischen Mittelalter (11.–14. Jahrhundert), Ostfildern 2015 (Vorträge und Forschungen 81), pp. 73–130, at pp. 87, 126; Belenguier, Jaume I (see note 9), pp. 265, 276–277, 336; Chamberlin, The ‘Sainted Queen’ (see note 9), pp. 303–321; Burns, The Spiritual Life (see note 9), p. 349; Soldevila, Vida de Jaume I (see note 9), pp. 244–253; Joseph Soler y Palet, Un aspecte de la vida privada de Jaume I, in: I Congrés (see note 8), vol. 2, pp. 536–579, at pp. 539, 556.

51 Belenguier, Jaume I (see note 9), p. 277; Burns, The Spiritual Life (see note 9), pp. 343, 349; Soldevila, Vida de Jaume I (see note 9), pp. 248–253; Soler y Palet, Un aspecte (see note 50), pp. 554, 557–565, 568–573.

52 Chamberlin, The ‘Sainted Queen’ (see note 9), p. 314. “... for this Castilian noblewoman young enough to have been his daughter, if not his granddaughter ...” (ibid.).

53 Shulamith Shahar, The Middle Ages and Renaissance, in: Pat Thane (Ed.), A History of Old Age, Los Angeles 2005, pp. 71–111, at pp. 94–95, 102–103; Chamberlin, The ‘Sainted Queen’ (see note 9), p. 311; Soler y Palet, Un aspecte (see note 50), pp. 556–557; Röhrlich, Der Kreuzzug (see note 44), pp. 372–373, 380; Tourtoulon, Études (see note 9), vol. 2, pp. 359–360. On the relationships between James I and the popes: Smith, James I (see note 11), pp. 523–536.

54 Thesaurus novus anecdotorum, ed. by Edmond Martène/Ursin Durand, vol. 2, Paris 1717, epistola 322, cols. 362–363; Chamberlin, The ‘Sainted Queen’ (see note 9), p. 316.

criticise the king's weakness for women.<sup>55</sup> Despite this harsh exhortation, James did not change his ways. Nevertheless, the "Llibre" does describe his apparent concerns for his salvation, although it is not always clear whether these are just rhetoric. He describes his relationship with Berenguela as a "worldly sin" from which he either cannot or will not desist.<sup>56</sup> James believes that he can free himself from this sinfulness by means of God-pleasing deeds, above all by conquering Muslim territories. James's last lover Sibil·la did not express any aspirations for marriage, which may also be related to the king's advanced age.<sup>57</sup> In 1274 (confirmed in 1275), the king gave the city and castle of Tàrbena (Kingdom of Valencia) to her as an allodium to be passed on to their children after her death.<sup>58</sup> Therefore even at the age of 66, the king still considered it possible to father children. Apart from his lovers, in his old age James was also close to two members of his court entourage: the bishop of Osca (Huesca), Jaume Sarroca, and the judge and legal expert Albert de Lavània.<sup>59</sup> Sarroca probably had more influence than de Lavània, as not only was he a scribe, ultimately becoming chancellor of the royal chancery, but was also a witness to important matters and a procurator of financial transactions.

During his long life, the king wrote several wills. The first one was made in 1232 and proclaimed James's son Alfonso – from his first marriage with Eleanor of Castile – as heir.<sup>60</sup> After his divorce, the king married Violant of Hungary in 1235. From this union, the Infant Peter was born in 1240. A second will was therefore drawn up in 1242,

55 Chamberlin, *The 'Sainted Queen'* (see note 9), p. 304, Soler y Palet, *Un aspecte* (see note 50), pp. 578–579.

56 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 426, pp. 436–437; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 426, p. 548–550; Smith, *James I* (see note 11), p. 118; Soler y Palet, *Un aspecte* (see note 50), pp. 554–555.

57 Belenguier, *Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 277; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 252.

58 Soler y Palet, *Un aspecte* (see note 50), pp. 569–571.

59 Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* (see note 36), pp. 535, 539–542. On Sarroca in detail: Ricardo Del Arco y Garay, *El obispo Don Jaime Sarroca. Consejero y gran privado del rey Don Jaime el Conquistador (noticias y documentos inéditos)*, in: *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 9 (1917–1920), pp. 65–91. On Sarroca in the "Llibre": *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 563, p. 525; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 563, p. 673; Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* (see note 36), pp. 540, 542.

60 Ricard Urgell Hernández, *Jaume I. Les disposicions testamentàries i la creació de la corona de Mallorca*, in: *L'últim testament de Jaume I (Montpeller, 26 d'agost de 1272)*, ed. by id., Barcelona 2018, pp. 9–66, at pp. 19–20; Alfonso García Gallo, *El derecho de sucesión del trono en la Corona de Aragón*, in: *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* 36 (1966), pp. 5–187, at p. 27.

according to which the territories of the Crown were to be divided between both sons.<sup>61</sup> After the birth of further sons, two of whom were to receive possessions, a third will was drawn up in 1248, which divided the lands between the four sons alive at the time.<sup>62</sup> Between 1251 and 1262, two of his sons and both wives died.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, in 1262, the ruler had a new, fourth will written.<sup>64</sup> In it, he divided his kingdom between his two sons, Peter and James, with the intention of establishing two independent kingdoms.<sup>65</sup> The king also included this division in his fifth – and final – will of 22 August 1272.<sup>66</sup> In the will, only a few references to old age are found in a formulaic way: on the one hand, at the beginning, a reference is made to the transience of all earthly things and, somewhat later, the legally relevant phrase that the king is still in good physical and mental health can be found.<sup>67</sup> The ruler designated the Cistercian monastery of Poblet as his desired final resting place.

During another revolt of the Muslims in the Kingdom of Valencia, which began in 1275 and only ended after James's death in 1277, he became seriously ill, and his condition deteriorated rapidly.<sup>68</sup> By the summer of 1276, he was already noticeably weakened and

61 Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, doc. 5, pp. 556–559; Urgell Hernández, *Els fills* (see note 9), p. 602; García Gallo, *El derecho* (see note 60), pp. 27–29.

62 Urgell Hernández, *Els fills* (see note 9), p. 602; Riera i Melis, *Jaume I* (see note 26), p. 169; García Gallo, *El derecho* (see note 60), pp. 29, 31.

63 Urgell Hernández, *Jaume I* (see note 60), pp. 21–23; Soler y Palet, *Un aspecte* (see note 50), p. 555.

64 Urgell Hernández, *Jaume I* (see note 60), pp. 22–23; García Gallo, *El derecho* (see note 60), pp. 30–31.

65 Aragon, Valencia and Catalonia were assigned to Peter, while Mallorca, the Roussillon and the Cerdagne, the Conflent, the Vallespir and Montpellier were to pass to James. Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol and Antoni Riera i Melis regard this decision as the king's greatest mistake against the backdrop of an otherwise impressive reign (Ferrer i Mallol, *Jaume I* [see note 14], p. 33; Riera i Melis, *Jaume I* (see note 26), pp. 169–170). Urgell Hernández emphasises that James did not want to leave his younger son without an inheritance (Urgell Hernández, *Jaume I* [see note 60], pp. 18–25).

66 *El Testament de Jaume I del 1272*, in: *L'últim testament*, ed. by Urgell Hernández (see note 60), pp. 125–152; Urgell Hernández, *Els fills* (see note 9), pp. 605–606; Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), pp. 35–36; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 299.

67 *El Testament de Jaume I del 1272*, ed. by Urgell Hernández (see note 66), pp. 127, 129.

68 Aguilar Àvila, 'The Lion in Winter' (see note 9), pp. 222–223; Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 366–367; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 295–296. The number of his journeys and the travelled distances reduced significantly during the last two years of his reign; Redondo García, *Mapes* (see note 45), p. 875.

his followers therefore strongly advised him not to go into battle.<sup>69</sup> James reluctantly gave in to their request. Perhaps it saved the king's life, because the Catalans suffered a heavy defeat.<sup>70</sup> After departing from Xàtiva to Alzira, James's health further declined.<sup>71</sup> By 9 July, the king could no longer engage in the fighting and gave Infant Peter the permission to man the castles in the Kingdom of Valencia.<sup>72</sup> In view of his dwindling strength, James made his last confession and received Holy Communion.<sup>73</sup> The illness from which he died is not known. He called on Peter to come to him in his final days. In his speech in the presence of the royal council, he not only exhorts him to take an example from his life, but also looks back on his long reign.<sup>74</sup> He sees himself as having been guided and blessed by God in his actions and regards his reign of more than 60 years as a sign of divine grace, because no previous king had ruled for that long. As a specific comparison, James chooses the biblical kings David and Solomon. According to the Book of Kings, both rulers reigned for 40 years and therefore reached old age.<sup>75</sup>

69 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 558, pp. 521–522; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 558, p. 668–670; Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 366–367; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 296.

70 Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 366–367; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 297; Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, pp. 505–506.

71 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 560, p. 523; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 560, p. 671; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 297.

72 ACA (= *Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó*), *Reial Cancelleria, registres, Jaume I, reg. 22, fol. 48r*; Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* (see note 36), p. 534.

73 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 560, p. 523; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 560, p. 671; Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 369; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 299.

74 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 562, p. 524; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 562, p. 672; Ferrer i Mallol, *Jaume I* (see note 14), p. 34; Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 369; Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, pp. 507–508. "... e en qual manera nostre Senyor nos havia feit regnar al seu serviï pus de seixanta anys, més que no era en memòria, ne trobava hom que negun rei, de David o de Salamó ençà ..." (*Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila [see note 11], ch. 562, p. 524). "... and how He had made me reign in His service more than sixty years, longer than in the memory of man any king since David and Solomon had reigned ..." (*The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster [see note 11], vol. 2, ch. 562, p. 672). On both kings, see also the contribution by Kathrin Liess in this volume.

75 *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. by Bonifatius Fischer, vol. 1, Stuttgart 1969, III Rg. 2, 11, p. 459, III Rg. 11, 42, p. 480. This length of reign can also be found, for example, in the "Etymologies" by Isidore of Seville and in the "Trésor" by Brunetto Latini (*Isidorus Hispalensis, Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay, Oxford

James exhorts both of his sons to “love and honour each other”.<sup>76</sup> He gives his eldest son the more extensive and important inheritance, so that he can be satisfied with it and “no quarrel will arise”. Consequently, Peter was clearly favoured. Towards the end of the “Llibre”, numerous events are told in which father and son act together and their actions take place in concord.<sup>77</sup> In the last two years, father and son fought battles against rebellious nobles and Muslims.<sup>78</sup> On 20 or 21 July 1276, the king abdicated and died a few days later on 27 July in Valencia.<sup>79</sup> Previously, James had confirmed his will in two codicils (20 and 23 July).<sup>80</sup> In the first one, the ruler’s illness is dealt with in formulaic words and his still robust mental health is emphasised.<sup>81</sup> Among the witnesses of the confirmation were the aforementioned Sarroca and de Lavània.<sup>82</sup> On the same day, the

1911, vol. 1, lib. V, 38–39; Brunetto Latini, *Trésor*, ed. by Pietro G. Beltrami, Torino 2008, lib. 1, 41, pp. 76–77, 44–45, pp. 78–81).

76 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 563, p. 524; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 563, p. 673.

77 Schlieben, *Von der Schwierigkeit* (see note 11), p. 130. In the previous years, when James’s illegitimate son Ferran Sanxis de Castre was still alive, whom the king favoured for some time, the relationship between the king and his firstborn was tense. Ferran joined the ranks of rebellious nobles and thus became a ‘traitor’ in his father’s eyes. During a battle, Ferran was murdered by Peter’s men in 1275 (Ferrer i Mallol, *Jaume I* [see note 14], pp. 33–34; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* [see note 9], pp. 246, 281, 284–288). After James’s death, Peter was to see to it that his father’s body would be transferred to Poblet (*Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila [see note 11], ch. 564, p. 526; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster [see note 11], vol. 2, ch. 564, p. 675).

78 Schlieben, *Von der Schwierigkeit* (see note 11), pp. 130–131; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 283–284. After the king’s death, the royal seals were given to a procurator of the Infant (ACA, Reial Cancelleria, registres, *Jaume I*, reg. 22, fol. 65v; Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* [see note 36], p. 536).

79 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), capp. 565–566, p. 527; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 565–566, p. 675–677; Cingolani, *Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 369–370; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), pp. 301–302; Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* (see note 36), pp. 535, 537.

80 ACA, Reial Cancelleria, pergamins, *Jaume I*, Serie general, no. 2287. The first codicil: Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, doc. 21, pp. 605–608. The second codicil: *ibid.*, doc. 22, pp. 609–612; Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), p. 41; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 301; Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* (see note 36), p. 535; Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, pp. 508–509.

81 Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, doc. 21, p. 605.

82 *Ibid.*, doc. 21, p. 608; doc. 22, p. 612. Regarding possible legal actions or claims related to his functions at court, the king granted Sarroca immunity (20 July) (ACA, Reial Cancelleria, registres, *Jaume I*, reg. 22, fol. 64r; Miret i Sans, *Itinerari* [see note 36], pp. 535, 540). Furthermore, James

king assigned several castles and towns to the monastery of Poblet.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, James settled numerous financial matters.<sup>84</sup> In Valencia, James confessed his sins and put on the monk's habit, but without ultimately reaching Poblet.<sup>85</sup>

This part of the article will conclude with an examination of how James's old age was portrayed in later chronicles, using Ramon Muntaner's particularly informative work as an example.<sup>86</sup> Muntaner was an ardent supporter of the Aragonese royal house.<sup>87</sup> For the chronicler, James I represented an exemplary, almost saintly monarch.<sup>88</sup> He describes him as always being physically and mentally healthy up to the point that he fell so seriously ill

recommended his person to the Infant in a special way (*Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila [see note 11], ch. 563, p. 525; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster [see note 11], vol. 2, ch. 563, p. 673; *Miret i Sans, Itinerari* [see note 36], p. 542).

83 ACA, Reial Cancelleria, registres, Jaume I, reg. 22, fols. 65r–v; *Miret i Sans, Itinerari* (see note 36), p. 535. This is also mentioned in the second codicil: *Tourtoulon, Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, doc. 22, p. 611.

84 *Miret i Sans, Itinerari* (see note 36), pp. 536–537.

85 *Llibre dels Feits*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 11), ch. 566, pp. 527–528; *The Chronicle of James I*, transl. by Forster (see note 11), vol. 2, ch. 566, p. 676; *Miret i Sans, Itinerari* (see note 36), p. 537. His mortal remains first rested in Valencia Cathedral. In 1278 they were transferred to Poblet; *Miret i Sans, Itinerari* (see note 36), p. 538.

86 Since Ramon Muntaner's chronicle, in comparison with the works of Bernat Desclot and Pere Marsili, deals with James's old age in greater detail (*Ramon Muntaner, Crònica de Ramon Muntaner*, ed. by Ferran Soldevila, rev. by Jordi Bruguera / Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, Barcelona 2011 [*Memòries de la Secció Historico-Arqueològica* 86]), only this work will be discussed here due to the limited scope of this article (*Bernat Desclot, Crònica de Bernat Desclot*, ed. by Ferran Soldevila, rev. by Jordi Bruguera / Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, Barcelona 2018 [*Memòries de la Secció Historico-Arqueològica* 80], ch. 73, pp. 152–153; *Petrus Marsilii, Liber gestorum sive Chronice illustrissimi Regis Aragonum Domini Iacobi victorissimi principis*, in: id., *Petri Marsilii Opera Omnia*, ed. by Antoni Biosca i Bas, Turnhout 2015 [*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 273], pp. 1–445, at lib. IV, 56–59, pp. 441–445).

87 Aguilar Àvila, 'The Lion in Winter' (see note 9), p. 211.

88 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 86), ch. 6, pp. 31–32; Ramon Muntaner, *The Chronicle of Muntaner*, ed. by Lady Anna Goodenough, London 1920–1921, ch. 6, pp. 13–14; Renedo i Puig, *La bona mort* (see note 9), p. 42. At the age of nine, the chronicler met or saw the king when he was stopping at the house of Muntaner's father while passing through the town (*Ramon Muntaner, Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 86), ch. 2, p. 25; ch. 23, pp. 60–61; *Ramon Muntaner, Chronicle*, ed. by Goodenough (see above), ch. 2, pp. 5–6, ch. 23, pp. 50–51; Soler y Palet, *Un aspecte* [see note 50], pp. 538–539). However, the chapters devoted to the reign of James I do not focus on him, but on the Infant Peter.

at the end of his life and became immobile.<sup>89</sup> This account corresponds to the spirit of the “Llibre”. Going beyond this, Muntaner stresses that even in his old age, the king always rode horses, enjoyed hunting, and personally visited his lands. Furthermore, Muntaner portrays the image of a grandfather who visited his daughters-in-law and grandchildren, gave them presents and had a joyful time with them.<sup>90</sup> Physicians who cared for the king are mentioned without being specified. The chronicler puts his age at more than 80 years, which is not correct, and comments that “at that age one cannot recover as quickly as a young person”.<sup>91</sup> According to Josep Antoni Aguilar Àvila’s interpretation, Muntaner intended to make the king appear even wiser and more venerable than he was.<sup>92</sup> Cingolani also recognises an increase in sacrality in this portrayal.<sup>93</sup>

The period of the ruler’s illness and immobility is portrayed as being precarious. According to Muntaner, when the king learned of the defeat of the Catalans by rebellious Muslim forces, he cried out, while lying in bed, that his horse should be brought to him and that he should be equipped for battle. He raised his hands and asked God why he had let him become so powerless, for alone his presence in the litter would help to defeat the Muslims.<sup>94</sup> This scene can neither be found in the “Llibre” nor in any other of the “Great Chronicles”. Muntaner’s portrait of James as a warrior who is unbroken in spirit can be considered legendary.<sup>95</sup> Aguilar Àvila agrees with this assessment and explains, on

89 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 86), ch. 26, p. 63; Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle*, ed. by Goodenough (see note 88), ch. 26, pp. 55–56; Aguilar Àvila, *Introducció* (see note 33), p. 99.

90 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 86), ch. 17, p. 50; Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle*, ed. by Goodenough (see note 88), ch. 17, pp. 38–39; Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), p. 176.

91 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 86), ch. 26, p. 63; Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle*, ed. by Goodenough (see note 88), ch. 26, pp. 55–56.

92 Aguilar Àvila, ‘The Lion in Winter’ (see note 9), p. 213.

93 Cingolani, *La memòria dels reis* (see note 11), p. 176.

94 Aguilar Àvila, ‘The Lion in Winter’ (see note 9), pp. 223–224; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 297; Tourtoulon, *Études* (see note 9), vol. 2, p. 506. “... ‘Ah, Senyor, per què us plau que en aquest punt jo sia així despoderat? Ara tost, pus llevar no em pusc, isca tost la mia senyera e fets portar mi en una anda entrò siam ab ells ...’” (Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila [see note 86], capp. 26–27, pp. 63–64). “‘Lord, why does it please Thee that, at such a juncture, I should be thus disabled?’ But at once he added: ‘As I cannot get up, let my banner go out and let me be carried in a litter, until I reach the insolent Moors ...’” (Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle*, ed. by Goodenough [see note 88], ch. 27, pp. 56–57).

95 Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 297.

the basis of comparable episodes in other chronicles and literary texts, that Muntaner made use of a narrative pattern already used in antiquity with the aim of increasing the dignity of the last days of the king in such a way as corresponds to the relevance of his achievements.<sup>96</sup> James is delighted with Peter's victory over the Muslims, lifts his arms to heaven, kisses his son three times on the mouth and blesses him. This legendary gesture, which may go back to Peter himself, illustrates the transmission of power from the old and seriously ill father to the first-born son as his legitimate successor under divine auspices.<sup>97</sup> The entire court was depressed and worried about the king's poor health. James was "carried" ("portar") from one place to another. In Valencia, the king died a 'good death'.<sup>98</sup> In comparison with the "Llibre" and the administrative sources, it can be seen that the chronicler's depiction of James's old age is rather free and enriched with details and legends.

### 3 Venetian Doge Marin(o) Falier(o)

Marino Faliero or Marin Falier (in Venetian) was born between 1280 and 1285.<sup>99</sup> He descended from a rich noble family with a long tradition. From his first marriage a daughter was born. In 1335 he took Aluica (Ludovica) Gradenigo to be his second wife. There was a considerable age difference between them because Aluica was 25–30 years younger. No children were born of this union.<sup>100</sup> From a young age on, Falier held numerous political and military offices inside and outside Venice and carried out

96 Aguilar Àvila, 'The Lion in Winter' (see note 9), pp. 223–235. According to this motif, a seriously ill or dying hero is carried onto the battlefield to strike fear into the enemy just by his presence. On literary constructions of old age, see also the contributions by Sonja Kerth and Bernard Ribémont in this volume.

97 Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, ed. by Soldevila (see note 86), capp. 27–28, pp. 64–65; Ramon Muntaner, *Chronicle*, ed. by Goodenough (see note 88), ch. 27, p. 57; Soldevila, *Vida de Jaume I* (see note 9), p. 298.

98 Renedo i Puig, *La bona mort* (see note 9), pp. 42, 48–49.

99 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 3–12, 29; Romanin, *Storia* (see note 22), p. 177; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 21.

100 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 81, 84; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 69; Cecchetti, *L'ultimo testamento* (see note 21), p. 348. Falier's first wife Tommasina Contarini had died young and he did not marry again until he was 55 years old (Edgcumbe Staley, *The Dogaressas of Venice*, London 1910, p. 143).

diplomatic missions.<sup>101</sup> The years before his election were also characterised by a high level of activity, so that everything indicates that Falier was in good health at the time of his election. He was elected doge on 11 September 1354, when he was on a diplomatic mission in Avignon to negotiate peace with Genoa.<sup>102</sup> In this context, Rafaino Caresini laments how such an outstanding personality could leave the path of virtue and turn to evil.<sup>103</sup> Pietro Giustiniani and Enrico Dandolo mention Falier's noble and long ancestry, and his immense wealth, generosity, courage and wisdom.<sup>104</sup> In summary, the following criteria for being elected doge can be identified, the majority of which could only be attained at an advanced age: wealth, a long *cursus honorum*, loyalty to the republic and a vast knowledge gained through experience. It should also be noted that Falier had no sons and only one nephew, which was also an advantage because the establishment of a dynasty, which was clearly unwanted, thus seemed (more) unlikely.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the chroniclers

101 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 13–49, 143; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 21–27, 67, 351; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero avanti il dogado* (see note 21), pp. 95–197.

102 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), p. 75; Romanin, *Storia* (see note 22), p. 177; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 36. As he was not present and the office was vacant, the body of the *signoria*, under the leadership of the oldest councillor as vice-doge, took over the government (Marin Sanuto, *Le vite dei dogi*, ed. by Ludovico Antonio Muratori, vol. 22, Milano 1732 [*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 22], cols. 405–1252, at col. 628).

103 Raphaynus de Caresinis, *Raphayni de Caresinis cancellarii Venetiarum Chronica*. Aa. 1343–1388, ed. by Ester Pastorello, Bologna 1966 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 12.2), p. 9. Rafaino Caresini (1314–1390) was notary of the ducal chancellery and finally Grand Chancellor. Bound to the government and being an official chronicler, he followed the official reading (*ibid.*, pp. V–XXXII; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* [see note 15], p. 97; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* [see note 21], pp. 9, 344–355).

104 Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica di Venexia detta di Enrico Dandolo. Origini–1362*, ed. by Roberto Pesce, Venezia 2010 (*Medioevo e Rinascimento. Testi* 2), p. 143; Pietro Giustiniani, *Venetiarum historia vulgo Petro Iustiniano Iustiniani filio adiudicata*, ed. by Roberto Cessi/Fanny Bennato, Venezia 1964 (*Monumenti storici* 18), ch. 50, p. 240; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 28. Enrico Dandolo wrote his vernacular chronicle in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica*, ed. by Pesce [see above], pp. XI–LIII; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* [see note 15], p. 98). Pietro Giustiniani, who remains almost unknown, wrote his chronicle around 1360 (Pietro Giustiniani, *Venetiarum historia*, ed. by Cessi/Bennato [see above], pp. XX–XXXIII; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* [see note 15], p. 98). On wisdom as an important aspect of historical research on old age: Neumann, *Perspektiven* (see note 10), pp. 403–405. On psychological wisdom research, cf. for example: Ursula M. Staudinger/Judith Glück, *Psychological Wisdom Research. Commonalities and Differences in a Growing Field*, in: *Annual Review of Psychology* 62 (2011), pp. 215–241; see also the contribution by Hans-Werner Wahl in this volume.

105 Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 351.

mention that the doge had only a small number of relatives.<sup>106</sup> Falier took up office during extremely difficult times. Venice had already been at war with Genoa since 1350 and had concluded a military alliance with King Peter IV of Aragon for this purpose in 1351.<sup>107</sup> At the beginning of November 1354, the Venetians suffered a devastating defeat against the Genoese in the harbour of the Aegean island of Sapienza (Porto Longo).<sup>108</sup> With large numbers of prisoners being taken, virtually every family in Venice was affected by the aftermath. Daniele Dibello believes that this event had a not inconsiderable influence on the doge's actions.<sup>109</sup> In the following analysis of the description of the conspiracy in narrative texts, a distinction will be made between contemporary and later works, as well as between Venetian and non-Venetian ones, because only in this way can the development of the narrative be clearly traced and the internal and external perspectives be differentiated.<sup>110</sup> Roberto Cessi considers the official narrative to be an invention that aims to obscure the true motives. The 'truth', however, cannot be ascertained.<sup>111</sup>

In comparison with later chronicles, the relative brevity of the narrative in the contemporary Venetian chronicles is striking: Having been seduced by the devil, Falier allied himself with lowly "popolani", i. e. individuals from the common people, especially sailors and craftsmen, to abolish the aristocratic system. All nobles were to be murdered, and

106 Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica*, ed. by Pesce (see note 104), p. 144; Pietro Giustiniani, *Venetiarum historia*, ed. by Cessi/Bennato (see note 104), ch. 50, p. 245.

107 Christian Alexander Neumann, *Venedig und Aragon im Spätmittelalter (1280–1410). Eine Verflechtungsgeschichte*, Paderborn 2017 (*Mittelmeerstudien* 15), pp. 146–256. After about four years and several battles, all parties showed signs of exhaustion and the Venetian-Catalan alliance also started to break up.

108 The battle is mentioned in numerous chronicles, e. g. Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica*, ed. by Pesce (see note 104), p. 143; Pietro Giustiniani, *Venetiarum historia*, ed. by Cessi/Bennato (see note 104), ch. 50, pp. 241–243; Georgius Stella, *Georgii et Iohannis Stellae Annales Genuenses*, ed. by Giovanna Petti Balbi, Bologna 1975 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 172), p. 153. On this battle, cf. Neumann, *Venedig und Aragon* (see note 107), pp. 220–222; Vittorio Lazzarini, *La battaglia di Porto Longo nell'isola di Sapienza*, in: *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 8 (1894), pp. 5–45. Being at anchor in the harbour of Porto Longo, the Venetian fleet led by Nicolò Pisani was surprised by Paganino Doria's fleet and lost almost without a fight. The Venetian ships were seized and about 5 000 Venetians of all social classes were brought to Genoa as prisoners.

109 Dibello, *La stabilità* (see note 15), p. 22.

110 Administrative documents are also included in the analysis to enable a comparison of the information.

111 Cessi, *Storia* (see note 22), pp. 315–316.

Falier intended to make himself Lord of Venice.<sup>112</sup> This type of rule was contemporarily referred to as ‘tyranny’. The doge himself is regarded as the *spiritus rector* of the revolt. Through the miraculous intervention of Saint Mark, the conspiracy was betrayed by some of those involved and could thus still be exposed in time by some nobles.<sup>113</sup> Enrico Dandolo mentions, without giving details, that Falier’s motive resulted from a disgrace that some young nobles had caused him and for which they had only been lightly punished.<sup>114</sup> As will be shown, these few words were later developed into a sub-narrative of its own. Stories about bad omens were also added. According to Alberto Tenenti, the *consiglio dei dieci* encouraged the proliferation of such legends in order to hinder critical reflection from taking place.<sup>115</sup> Although this narrative creates the image of an antagonism between the doge and the commoners on the one hand and the nobility on the other, Falier actually had supporters among the nobility.<sup>116</sup> Donald Queller underlines the efforts of the (quite) unified ruling class after the *serrata* to not let any internal divisions become known to the outside world.<sup>117</sup> The Venetian government reacted swiftly to the plot and thereby consolidated its power.<sup>118</sup> In the doge’s will, it is stated that he was

112 These include the aforementioned works by Rafaino Caresini, Enrico Dandolo, Pietro Giustiniani and the “Chronicon Monasterii S. Salvatoris”. The latter was written around 1377 by the prior Francesco di Grazia (Franciscus de Gratia, *Chronicon Monasterii S. Salvatoris Venetiarum*, Venezia 1756, pp. VII–XI; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* [see note 15], p. 98; Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. *La congiura* [see note 21], p. 345).

113 Raphaynus de Caresinis, *Chronica*, ed. by Pastorello (see note 103), p. 9; Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica*, ed. by Pesce (see note 104), p. 144; Pietro Giustiniani, *Venetiarum historia*, ed. by Cessi/Bennato (see note 104), ch. 50, pp. 241–243; Franciscus de Gratia, *Chronicon* (see note 112), p. 73.

114 Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica*, ed. by Pesce (see note 104), p. 144; Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. *La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 345–346.

115 Tenenti, *La rappresentazione* (see note 20), p. 73.

116 Dibello, *La stabilità* (see note 15), pp. 8, 12–14; Donald Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate. Reality versus Myth*, Chicago 1986, p. 245; Romanin, *Storia* (see note 22), pp. 188–189. Among these were Bertuccio Falier and Pietro Badoer, although little is known about their fate. Bertuccio Falier was a distant relative of the doge, but nevertheless close to him. He probably did not play a leading role in the events. Pietro Badoer, who was duke of Crete, was banished from the Venetian dominions for life after expressing his sympathies towards Falier (Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. *La congiura* [see note 21], pp. 82–84, 280–282, 355–356; Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate* [see above], p. 245; Pillinini, *I “popolari”* [see note 23], p. 64).

117 Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate* (see note 116), p. 4.

118 Dibello, *La stabilità* (see note 15), pp. 6–7, 11; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 29, 109–133; Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate* (see note 116), p. 4. The persecution of the supporters

“physically weakened by illness, but still mentally healthy”.<sup>119</sup> Could one thus conclude that Falier’s health was affected as a result of the turbulent events and at the prospect of his imminent death? On the steps where he had taken his oath of office, the doge was beheaded – a symbolically charged act.<sup>120</sup> Afterwards, the ducal counsellors and the heads of the *quarantia* conducted the public affairs. It can be seen that the same mechanism was employed after the violent death of a doge as after a natural death.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Venetian officials were immediately sent letters to ensure that they remained loyal to the republic. In the letter to the podestà of Treviso, Lorenzo Celsi, the official narrative was referred to *in nuce* so that “it would not be contradicted by false information”.<sup>122</sup>

After concluding the overview of the contemporary Venetian perspective, the viewpoint of outsiders will now be examined. The Paduan chronicler Guglielmo Cortusi first describes the hardships of the war, which had already been raging for some time. As a reason for the conspiracy, he indicates that the doge promised the people peace with Genoa, but that the nobility wanted to continue the war.<sup>123</sup> Falier is thus portrayed as a peacemaker who understood the needs of the people. The Genoese Giorgio Stella sees the motivation behind the conspiracy not only in the doge’s desire to make himself an absolute ruler with the help of the people, but also in the tribulations of the war, which would have provoked an uprising. He also mentions some nobles as being Falier’s

was harsh and continued for months. Suspected conspirators were imprisoned, sentenced, exiled, or executed. After initial suspicion, however, some were released.

119 Rinaldo Fulin, Due documenti del doge Marino Faliero, in: Archivio Veneto 7 (1874), pp. 99–110, doc. 1, pp. 107–109, at p. 107. “... cum essem corporis infirmitate gravatus sanam tamen habens mentem ...” (ibid.). “... since I am afflicted by a disease of the body, but nevertheless of sound mind ...” (own translation).

120 Enrico Dandolo, Cronica, ed. by Pesce (see note 104), p. 144, Pietro Giustiniani, Venetiarum historia, ed. by Cessi/Bennato (see note 104), ch. 50, pp. 244–245.

121 ASV (= Archivio di Stato di Venezia), Maggior Consiglio, reg. 19 (Novella), fol. 46v; Dibello, La stabilità (see note 15), p. 6. On the vacancy after the election: ASV, Maggior Consiglio, reg. 19 (Novella), fol. 42v; Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. La congiura (see note 21), p. 35. Falier was given a dishonourable burial and his *memoria* as a person was eliminated; however, the conspiracy was commemorated annually through a procession to display a hortatory example (Ravegnani, Il traditore [see note 15], pp. 29–30, 164; Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. La congiura [see note 21], p. 107).

122 Giambattista Verci, Storia della Marca Trevigiana e Veronese, vol. 13, Venezia 1789, doc. 1529, pp. 31–32; Dibello, La stabilità (see note 15), p. 21, Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. La congiura (see note 21), pp. 277–278.

123 Guillelmi de Cortusiis, Chronica de novitatibus Padue et Lombardie, ed. by Beniamino Pagnin, Bologna 1941–1975 (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores 12.5), pp. 130–131; Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. La congiura (see note 21), pp. 11, 346.

supporters, by which the image of a united nobility is altered.<sup>124</sup> The Florentine Matteo Villani was inclined towards the Genoese.<sup>125</sup> Due to hatred for the nobility and frustration over his limited power, Falier intended to make himself the only ruler with the help of the common people. “Out of vileness, his mind, which was actually wise, had left him ...”, “... che ’l savio doge divenuto per viltà fuori del senno ...”.<sup>126</sup> This portrays the image of an old man who was greedy for power and had gone mad because of it.

The most critical reflections on the events are given by the early humanist Francesco Petrarca.<sup>127</sup> Petrarca already knew personally Falier for a long time and always appreciated him for his wisdom. The doge’s striving for power appears even more unlikely after reading Petrarca’s statement that Falier “did not aspire the ducal dignity”.<sup>128</sup> The motives seem unclear to Petrarca and “many ambiguous and different things” (“tam ambiguae et tam variae”) are mentioned.<sup>129</sup> In his reflections, Falier’s old age becomes a topic. Although Petrarca considers him to be guilty, he wonders what could have moved a man “at the end of his life” (“sub extremum vitae tempus”) to commit such a deed.<sup>130</sup> The doge seems to be a “frenzied and insane” (“insanus et amens”) old man. Petrarca also doubts whether the impression of wisdom and experience was really true and notes that Falier may have

124 Georgius Stella, *Annales Genuenses* ed. by Petti Balbi (see note 108), p. 120; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), p. 99; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 12, 346.

125 Matteo Villani, *Chronica. Con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ed. by Giuseppe Porta, vol. 1: *Libri I–VI*, Parma 1995, lib. V. 13, pp. 624–627; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 87–89; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 11, 346. On the chronicle, cf. Matteo Villani, *Chronica*, ed. by Porta (see above), pp. IX–XX. Lazzarini assumes that he had been informed by Florentine merchants who had been in Venice (Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* [see note 21], p. 11). Villani’s account is based on the official version, but he adds numerous details of his own invention.

126 Matteo Villani, *Chronica*, ed. by Porta (see note 125), lib. V. 13, p. 626; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 28.

127 Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus et variae*, ed. by Giuseppe Fracassetti, vol. 2, Firenze 1862, epistola 9, pp. 534–541; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), p. 99; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 11, 28. On the author and his work: Victoria Kirkham (Ed.), *Petrarch. A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Chicago-London 2009. Petrarca wrote his letter in Milan just a few days after the conspiracy. Lazzarini supposes that he might have been informed by the Venetian envoy in Milan (Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* [see note 21], p. 11).

128 Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae*, ed. by Fracassetti (see note 127), epistola 9, p. 540; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 36.

129 Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae*, ed. by Fracassetti (see note 127), epistola 9, p. 539.

130 *Ibid.*, p. 540.

acquired a “false reputation”. It can be observed that the judgements of the outsiders are not aligned with one another and that they refer to diverse motives. Whatever the case may be, it does serve to highlight discrepancies in the official Venetian version: Internal disputes among the nobility, resentment among the people and old age are portrayed. In addition to the image of an old man’s folly, the – ultimately unresolved – question is raised as to why a *senex* without sons would have wanted to make himself an absolute ruler. In the Venetian texts, this incongruity in the story is probably deliberately ignored; instead, greed for power, madness and the working of supernatural forces are highlighted.

As varied and speculative as the sources are the historians’ opinions. Giovanni Pillinini assumes the existence of two opposing factions within the nobility.<sup>131</sup> In the official narrative, however, these internal quarrels were not mentioned. Falier belonged to the faction that wanted to continue the war with Genoa but was then abandoned by his former supporters. Among the *popolani*, resentment had built up against the nobility, which was instrumentalised by the doge to further his personal goals. Nevertheless, the social movement was not widespread and strong enough, which causes Pillinini to describe it as a “popular uprising” (“*rivolta popolare*”) with some hesitation.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, Dennis Romano considers the tensions within the Venetian society to be quite serious and refers to previous revolts, although none of them had previously had the power to bring about a regime change.<sup>133</sup> According to Daniele Dibello, Falier knew how to grasp the discontent of ordinary people and draw political consequences from it.<sup>134</sup> A rebellion of the *popolo* in Venice can be seen as part of a whole series of urban and rural uprisings in the European late Middle Ages.<sup>135</sup> According to Giorgio Ravegnani, Falier did not want to resign himself to his limited power and tried, by means of a conspiracy,

131 Pillinini, I “popolari” (see note 23), pp. 63–71.

132 Ibid., p. 70. Lazzarini also mentions the comparatively few supporters (Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. *La congiura* [see note 21], p. 357). Despite all internal differences, the nobility was still sufficiently united. They were not only able to get rid of a doge whose political views they did not share, but also to suppress the beginnings of an uprising.

133 Romano, Patrizi (see note 4), pp. 14–21. In 1310 the “Querini-Tiepolo Plot” occurred. On this event, cf. for example Dennis Romano, *The Aftermath of the Querini-Tiepolo Conspiracy in Venice*, in: *Stanford Italian Review* 7 (1987), pp. 147–159.

134 Dibello, *La stabilità* (see note 15), p. 8. On revolts in the Late Middle Ages, for example, cf. Peter Blickle, *Unruhen in der ständischen Gesellschaft 1300–1800*, München 1988 (*Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte* 1), pp. 7–21; Samuel K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty. The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe. 1200–1425. Italy, France, and Flanders*, Cambridge, Mass. 2008.

135 Pillinini, I “popolari” (see note 23), p. 70.

to abolish the aristocratic system and make himself lord.<sup>136</sup> Because of his old age, he did not primarily think of himself, but of a member of his family. Samuele Romanin believes that Falier wanted to establish a *signoria* and refers to developments in other Italian cities.<sup>137</sup> Following Petrarch's scepticism, Frederic Lane also asks why Falier had aspired to establish a lordship, especially in his old age.<sup>138</sup> Lane considers the existence of two factions of the nobility to be possible, even if this cannot be proven. Falier belonged to the "monarchist faction", which wanted to attribute more power to the doge. Without going into detail, Alberto Tenenti is of the opinion that Falier went against the prevailing opinion of the governing class and had to give up his life for it.<sup>139</sup> To summarise, serious quarrels within the nobility and the desire to establish a lordship with the support of rebellious members of the Venetian common people are given as the main reasons.

How did the narrative develop in later Venetian chronicles?<sup>140</sup> Two lines can be made out: on the one hand, an uncritical, legendary amplification, and on the other, a growing criticism that was probably made possible by the considerable distance to the mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century events. Marin Sanudo describes Falier's vituperation by young nobles after the Venetians' humiliating defeat and a bad omen on his taking office in detail.<sup>141</sup> This story not only involves a conflict between people of different ages – though there is no evidence of a general generational antagonism here – but also deals with the topics of unequal couples with regard to age as well as sexuality and masculinity in old age.<sup>142</sup> The account of the vituperation is told as follows: The later doge Michele Steno, who

136 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 29, 100. To this end, he relied on citizens who were excluded from power.

137 Romanin, *Storia* (see note 22), p. 181. Around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Venice was surrounded by *signorie* (Romano, Patrizi [see note 4], p. 15; Lane, *Seerepublik* [see note 22], pp. 278–279; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* [see note 21], p. 354).

138 Lane, *Seerepublik* (see note 22), pp. 278–279.

139 Tenenti, *La rappresentazione* (see note 20), p. 73.

140 Of the later chronicles, those of Marin Sanudo and Giovanni Giacomo Caroldo will be analysed here because they can be considered as being representative of this development.

141 Marin Sanuto, *Le vite*, ed. by Muratori (see note 102), cols. 628–632. On the author and his work: Angela Caracciolo Aricò, *Le Vite dei Dogi di Marin Sanudo il giovane*, in: *Umanesimo e rinascimento a Firenze e Venezia. Miscellanea di studi in onore di Vittore Branca*, 2 vols., Firenze 1983 (Biblioteca dell'Archivum Romanicum. Ser. 1 180), vol. 2, pp. 567–592.

142 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), p. 81. On this topic, cf. for example Eva Labouvie (Ed.), *Ungleiche Paare. Zur Kulturgeschichte menschlicher Beziehungen*, München 1997 (Beck'sche Reihe 1197); Shahar, *The Middle Ages* (see note 53), pp. 94–95, 102–103; cf. also the contribution by Hartwin Brandt in this volume.

was a young man at the time, covetously touched one of the court ladies of Dogressa Aluica and perhaps other ladies during festivities at the Doge's Palace, causing him to be sent home. In revenge for this humiliation, Steno secretly placed a piece of paper on the doge's chair with the words "Marin Faliero who has a beautiful wife: Others enjoy her and he keeps her".<sup>143</sup> The *quarantia criminal* imposed a rather mild punishment on Steno, also due to his age and the "hot-bloodedness" ("caldezza") of youth. Falier did not agree with this at all and considered his honour to be diminished. Sanudo imputes loose morals and a strong desire for sexual intercourse to the dogressa, who, although she was already older at that time, was not old. The doge is portrayed as a cuckolded husband who accepts this violation of his honour and obviously cannot satisfy his wife sexually. The dogressa's involvement in the antecedents of the conspiracy was the invention of later chroniclers.<sup>144</sup> In the surviving administrative documents there is no evidence of her infidelity; on the contrary, there is evidence of a profound trust between the spouses. That a trial was conducted against Steno and his young companions by the *quarantia* is proven by documents.<sup>145</sup> Several young noblemen, but especially Steno, were found guilty and sentenced to a mild punishment of one month in the dungeon. This sentence was within the usual range for nobles who had offended the doge. Fixed punishments did not exist; rather, decisions were made on a case-by-case basis. Several weeks of imprisonment, as in this case, and also financial penalties are often found in court records.<sup>146</sup>

Giovanni Giacomo Caroldo's portrayal of Falier's dogeship and the conspiracy differs from previous accounts primarily in regard to two aspects. On the one hand, the political and military events are presented in great detail, whereby the context of the conspiracy becomes clearer than before. On the other hand, Caroldo takes a relatively unemotional point of view, omitting legendary details and reflecting on the reasons for

143 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 76–77, 84–85; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 52–53, 73–74; Cecchetti, *La moglie* [see note 21], p. 364). "Marin Faliero dalla bella moglie: Altri la gode ed egli la mantien" (Marin Sanuto, *Le vite*, ed. by Muratori [see note 102], col. 631).

144 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 79, 84–85; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 69–71. Very few of the trial records have survived. The details of the defamatory lines do not emerge from what has been preserved (Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* [see note 21], doc. 2, pp. 370–371; Ravegnani, *Il traditore* [see note 15], pp. 79, 85).

145 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), pp. 80–81; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), p. 8. Lazzarini dates the events to the beginning of November 1354 (Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* [see note 21], p. 67).

146 Ravegnani, *Il traditore* (see note 15), p. 81; Lazzarini, *Marino Faliero. La congiura* (see note 21), pp. 58, 60–63; Cecchetti, *La moglie* (see note 21), pp. 364–365.

the conspiracy with the aim of discerning a plausible motive, which he ultimately does not succeed in finding. Caroldo explicitly includes the factor “old age” in his analysis. For the first time in a Venetian source, Falier is explicitly described as being “very old” (“*huomo di grand'età*”), but still physically strong as well as courageous, rich, and generous.<sup>147</sup> The deterioration of the political and social situation after the defeat of Porto Longo becomes quite evident.<sup>148</sup> Caroldo’s account of the events gives the official version. What distinguishes this from older accounts is that the author strives to find objective and dispassionate reasons for the actions of those involved. But, he cannot explain things rationally and points to Falier’s advanced age, “*essendo d'età decrepita*”, and then to the fact that he had no children, as the first objection to this narrative.<sup>149</sup> The chronicler considers the story of the vituperation to be a “popular explanation”.<sup>150</sup> He then gives two novel explanations of his own, the first of which is that Falier sought to achieve political reform, after numerous lower noble families and those who had earned merits had become the makers of Venetian politics, to the disadvantage of the established houses. This makes tensions within the nobility a subject for discussion. In fact, although, the old noble families were not involved in the conspiracy and helped to put it down.<sup>151</sup> The second reason proposed by Caroldo is that Falier entered into some unspecified agreements with Hungary, Padua, and others, but there is no evidence to confirm this.

#### 4 Conclusion

The two case studies analysed here deal with the ageing and old age of rulers. They refer to two different types of secular rule and highlight both common and unique aspects. However, the results are not only determined by this systemic difference, but also by the sources of each case study and, finally, by the particularities of each case. Among the common aspects, health and illness, substitution or ‘compensation’ for permanent

147 Giovanni Giacomo Caroldo, *Istorie Veneziene*, ed. by Șerban V. Marin, 5 vols., București 2008–2012, vol. 3, p. 97. On the author and his work: *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 7–36.

148 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 104–108, 112–113. In addition to mourning and dismay, the chronicler mentions rigid coercive measures for the recruitment of crews for new galleys.

149 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

150 *Ibid.*, pp. 118–119.

151 Lazzarini, Marino Faliero. *La congiura* (see note 21), p. 348.

or temporary dysfunctionality<sup>152</sup> (son and royal council vs. the body of the *signoria*), mobility, the transmission of rule (succession vs. election), the preparation for death, memory, and sexuality are particularly prominent. The specific aspects for James I are longevity and length of rule, religion, and warfare; for Marin Falier, these are election and the related criteria as well as the treatment of old age in the event of a struggle for power.

It is likely that both James I and Marin Falier were in good health for most of their lives, indicating that they had ‘aged successfully’.<sup>153</sup> That said, however, it is important to note that functional age was more important than chronological age.<sup>154</sup> The functionality of the person was relevant in both cases, but physical strength is much more prominent in James’s case. Continuity<sup>155</sup> probably mattered greatly to a ruler so focused on his deeds – an aspect that was stressed and exaggerated after his death. The loss of physical strength was therefore more problematic for the king and the stability of his kingdom than it was the case for the Republic of Venice which could rely on institutionalised mechanisms of compensation. As for James, a certain withdrawal, a kind of ‘disengagement’,<sup>156</sup> which happened unwillingly, during his final years in favour of his son Peter can be observed. Although less apparent in the sources, the criteria for election in Falier’s case also show the importance of continuity and the functionality of the person. The Aragonese king intended to remain in the ‘Third Age’ for as long as possible, thus delaying the ‘Fourth Age’; the ducal electors opted for a man in his ‘Third Age’.<sup>157</sup>

152 Paul B. Baltes / Alexandra M. Freund, Life-Management Strategies of Selection, Optimization, and Compensation. Measurement by Self-Report and Construct Validity, in: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82 (2002), pp. 642–662.

153 John W. Rowe / Robert L. Khan, *Successful Aging*, New York 1998.

154 Neumann, *Perspektiven* (see note 10), pp. 397–400; Silke Van Dyk, *Soziologie des Alters*, Bielefeld 2015, pp. 13, 22–23; Gertrud M. Backes / Wolfgang Clemens, *Lebensphase Alter. Eine Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Altersforschung*, Basel 2008 (Grundlagentexte Soziologie), pp. 21–22; see also the contribution by François Höpflinger in this volume.

155 Robert C. Atchley, *Continuity and Adaptation in Aging. Creating Positive Experiences*, Baltimore et al. 1999.

156 Elaine Cumming / William Henry, *Growing Old. The Process of Disengagement*, New York 1961.

157 Neumann, *Perspektiven* (see note 10), pp. 398–399; Chris Gilleard / Paul Higgs, *The Third Age. Class, Cohort or Generation?*, in: *Ageing and Society* 22 (2002), pp. 369–382; Bernice L. Neugarten, *Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old*, in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 415 (1974), pp. 187–198; see also the contribution by Paul Higgs in this volume.

James's relationships with younger women were accepted in principle, but criticised, especially from the point of view of clergymen, as not being age-appropriate in situations in which failures occurred. Moreover, the pope demanded the transcendence of all earthly matters from the king during his old age.<sup>158</sup> In Falier's case, the negative aspects of the two-sided discourse concerning old age came to the forefront at the moment of an extraordinary 'battle'. In contemporary sources, one observes a state of tension between a (probably) intentional avoidance of the topic and a critical reflection on it. Although some criticism arose with an increasing chronological distance, at the same time, the construction of legends, in which masculinity and sexuality as well as the conflictual relations between the young and the old are discussed, also intensified.

To summarise, the examples from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries allow for the study of numerous aspects of ageing and old age. Which aspects can be analysed, is determined by the differences of the political systems, the sources and the specificities of each case. The different evaluations of old age that become evident from the sources are highly influenced by the specific social and temporal contexts, the genres of the texts and the writers' intentions, views and background. Connections to gerontological theories and concepts can be identified and can help to gain a deeper understanding of the empirical findings. Finally, it should be pointed out, that from the series of the Aragonese kings and Venetian doges alone, many more examples of elderly rulers exist, so that numerous new insights can still be expected. The comparative approach pursued here would certainly also be fruitful for future studies.

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158 This is to a certain extent comparable with Lars Tornstam, *Maturing into Gerotranscendence*, in: *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 43 (2011), pp. 166–180.



# Feelings of the Stages of Life

## The Education of Princes in the Modern Era as a Privileged Observation Point

### Abstract

Starting from Philippe Ariès's reflections on the "feeling of childhood" (*sentiment de l'enfance*) and the stages of life as social constructions, which are at the crossroads of various research pathways that reshape the panorama of sources, and considering the extensive debate on the issue, this essay discusses childhood and old age from a privileged observation point, i. e. the education of princes at some European courts. Different types of sources, dating to the time between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, such as *specula* and *institutiones principum*, *fables* and *ad hoc* texts, all of which deal with the education of princes and sovereigns at Italian and French courts, are here analysed. Particular emphasis will be put on the relationships between childhood/youth and old age that can be observed in the pedagogical debates of the specific periods and contexts in question. In the conclusion, some research perspectives that could be conducted with a long-term approach are pointed out: besides the ecologically oriented perspective, these issues concern the interconnections between cultural representations of the princes' life stages, political problems and education in the art of government.

### 1 "Le sentiment de l'enfance". A Problem of Attitude

The feelings regarding the stages of human life are a social construction,<sup>1</sup> which can be circumscribed, with reference to a given era and context, thanks to specific sources,

1 On this matter cf., among others, Heinz Hengst/Helga Zeiher (Eds.), *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, Milano 2004 (Condizionamenti educativi 55). For an overview on childhood studies, cf. Jens Qvortrup/William A. Corsaro/Michael-Sebastian Honig (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, New York 2009. Cf. also: Doris Bonnet, *La construction sociale de l'enfance. Une variété de normes et de contextes*, in: *Informations sociales* 4 (2010), pp. 12–18. For information on old age, refer to: Jean Foucart, *La vieillesse. Une construction sociale*, in: *Pensée plurielle* 2 (2003), pp. 7–18; Éric Deschavanne/Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, *Philosophie des âges de la vie*, Paris

identified on a case-by-case basis: we could say it is a question of ‘attitude’ and generations. Philippe Ariès discussed it at length in his well-known if controversial book,<sup>2</sup> entitled “L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime”, published in Paris in 1960.<sup>3</sup> In fact medievalists reproach Ariès above all for the ‘hasty’ (or in any case not supported by an appropriate use of sources) conclusion about a childhood ‘sentiment’ that would not have existed in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the work inaugurated an international branch of studies which are entirely dedicated to the “history of childhood”, a series of researches that is impossible to retrace here in a comprehensive manner.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is worth remembering that the work of Ariès develops during a cultural period particularly attentive to the *histoire des mentalités*.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Ariès himself wrote the chapter dedicated to the history of mentalities in the book edited by Jacques Le Goff (with Roger Chartier et Jacques Revel) entitled “La nouvelle histoire” (1978–1979), translated and published in Italy by Mondadori in 1980. He also wrote the entry “Generations” published in 1979 in the Einaudi Encyclopaedia. With regard to the

2007–2008 (Pluriel); Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, *Le retour des âges de la vie*, in: *Télémaque* 37,1 (2010), pp. 7–10.

2 For a critical analysis on the positions of Ariès in reference to the medieval world, cf. Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children*, New Haven-London 2001; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Medievalist and the Study of Childhood*, in: *Speculum* 77 (2002), pp. 440–460; Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood. Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*, Cambridge 2001; Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Result of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, Berlin-New York 2005; Pierre Riché, *Être enfant au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2010 (*Pédagogues du monde entier*). Also for a bibliography on the subject; Monica Ferrari, *Costrutti euristici e prospettive di ricerca sull’infanzia nella storia*, in: Anna Bondioli / Donatella Savio (Eds.), *Crescere bambini. Immagini d’infanzia in educazione e formazione degli adulti*, Parma 2017 (*La cultura del bambino*), pp. 21–40.

3 English translation: *Centuries of Childhood*, London 1962; Italian translation: *Padri e figli nell’Europa medievale e moderna*, Bari 1968. Here I will refer to: Philippe Ariès, *Padri e figli nell’Europa medievale e moderna*, Roma-Bari 1981 (*Biblioteca Universale Laterza* 13) (Italian translation).

4 For an initial bibliographic reference, cf. Egle Becchi, *Una storiografia dell’infanzia, una storiografia nell’infanzia* and Simonetta Polenghi, *La ricerca storico-educativa sull’infanzia nel XX secolo*, in: Mario Gecchele / Simonetta Polenghi / Paola Dal Toso (Eds.), *Il Novecento. Il secolo del bambino?*, Parma 2017 (*Storia dell’educazione in Europa* 1), pp. 17–49; Ferrari, *Costrutti euristici e prospettive di ricerca* (see note 2). For a bibliography, mainly in English, cf. Reidar Aasgaard / Cornelia Horn, with Oana Maria Cojocaru (Eds.), *Childhood in History. Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, London-New York 2018.

5 Cf. in particular the now classic Jacques Le Goff / Pierre Nora (Eds.), *Faire de l’histoire*, 3 vols., Paris 1974 (*Bibliothèque des histoires*).

history of mentalities, Ariès retraces its history and stresses that such a perspective of analysis emerged after the First World War, thanks to the work of a generation of historians among whom he mentions Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch from France, and Henri Pirenne from Belgium. Moreover, he certainly does not forget to mention geographers (Albert Demangeon) and sociologists (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Maurice Halbwachs and others). Ariès sheds light on that generation of scholars to whom we owe the creation of the magazine “*Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*” (1929). Finally, he recalls the invaluable contribution of people he defines as pioneers, such as Johan Huizinga or Norbert Elias.<sup>6</sup> These scholars, each very different from the other, have some characteristics in common, according to Ariès. *In primis*, their interest for the imaginary, a research field that today we would call “intersectional” with regards to primary sources, is highlighted. Furthermore, their strong opposition to a history which only pays attention to the political events of the past, to the ‘Greats’ and their contingent affairs becomes clear throughout their writings. Finally, a frame of reference we would now call ecological and contextual, where historic demographics plays an important role, and leaves a deep mark on the “second generation” of historians of mentalities, can be at least partially traced back to their work.

The Sixties mark another turning point, according to Ariès, who published this essay in 1979, more than forty years ago. From this point onward, the history of the stages of life, with childhood being the first, takes centre stage. It is not by chance that he mentions the issue of the “*Journal of the Société de démographie historique*” (1973), which has a specific monographic focus on “*Enfants et Sociétés*”, while in the early Seventies family itself was at the centre of international research. The historian’s research field seems to expand greatly according to Ariès, who remembers the topics addressed in the first instance, linked to economic and demographic history: “*la vie du travail, la famille, les âges de la vie, l’éducation, le sexe, la mort, c’est-à-dire les zones qui se trouvent aux frontières du biologique et du mental, de la nature et de la culture*”.<sup>7</sup>

6 Philippe Ariès, *Histoire des mentalités*, in: Jacques Le Goff (Ed.), *La nouvelle histoire*, Bruxelles 2006 (*Historiques* 47); cf. also Philippe Ariès, *Storia delle mentalità*, in: Jacques Le Goff (Ed.), *La nuova storia* (1979), Milano 1980 (*Gli Oscar studio* 81), pp. 143–166, at pp. 144–145 (Italian translation).

7 Ariès, *Histoire des mentalités* (see note 6), p. 182 (Italian translation, p. 160): “the working life, the family, the ages of life, education, sex, death, i. e. the areas that lie on the border between the biological and the mental, between nature and culture” (own English translation).

While the psycho-historical approach to the history of childhood was spreading thanks to the studies of Lloyd deMause,<sup>8</sup> the *histoire des mentalités* produced studies that were more focused on the intersections between the social imaginary, latent elements in collective social behaviours, constellations of cultural elements responding to both demands of change and permanence, ideas, worldviews, sensitivities shared by certain social groups and different cultures. After the *cultural turn* era,<sup>9</sup> the history of childhood has occupied a privileged place in the development of the international historiography on these issues, which today is ever more connected to ethnographic and / or sociological approaches, to the point of identifying the sociology of childhood<sup>10</sup> as a specific field of research: it focuses on the here and now of the stages of life in the form of permanent social groups that confront themselves with the transience of individual existences.

Childhood has been stimulating specific investigations in Western society which, during the last one hundred years, and especially after the Second World War, has witnessed radically changed lifestyles in terms of societal norms and cultural factors. Some of these changes include the liberalisation of sexual behaviours, the development of new communication technologies and the advent of new mass media: all of them cause rapid changes in the “feeling” of the stages of human existence. We are reminded of this by the studies of Neil Postman, Marie Winn and Marina D’Amato,<sup>11</sup> among others, while, thanks to the “history of childhood”,<sup>12</sup> the awareness of the different, culturally located, descriptions of this particular stage emerges.

In my opinion, however, Ariès’s 1960 pioneering and controversial study had the merit to stress that the “sentiment de l’enfance” – and therefore the meaning of the stages of life – is defined in relation to the social agencies in which the individual is trapped, as

8 Lloyd deMause (Ed.), *Storia dell’infanzia*, Milano 1983 (*L’asino d’oro* 18) (Italian translation). The Italian edition here consulted contains some essays published in the text “The History of Childhood”, New York 1974.

9 Luciano Pazzaglia / Fulvio De Giorgi, *Le dimensioni culturali della ricerca storica nel campo dell’educazione*, in: *Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* 12 (2005), pp. 133–153.

10 Hengst / Zeiher (Eds.), *Per una sociologia dell’infanzia* (see note 1).

11 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, New York 1982; id., *La scomparsa dell’infanzia. Ecologia delle età della vita*, Roma 1984 (*Educazione comparata e pedagogie* 83) (also 2005) (Italian translation); Marie Winn, *Children without Childhood*, New York 1983; ead., *Bambini senza infanzia*, Roma 1992 (*I problemi dell’educazione*) (Italian translation); Marina D’Amato, *Ci siamo persi i bambini. Perché l’infanzia scompare*, Roma-Bari 2014 (*Saggi tascabili* 395).

12 Egle Becchi, *Retorica d’infanzia*, in: *Aut Aut* 191–192 (1982), pp. 3–26; Carlo Pancera, *Semantiche d’infanzia*, in: *Aut Aut* 191–192 (1982), pp. 191–196.

Maria Montessori had said a few years earlier and, more generally, in an “intersectional” sense.<sup>13</sup> According to Montessori, who wrote some of her fundamental works in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shaken by two World Wars but nevertheless defined by Ellen Key as “the Century of the Child”,<sup>14</sup> children find themselves trapped within the family and the school, within a universe of values that deviates from their ‘natural’ development in function of a certain idea of the relationship between generations.<sup>15</sup> This is why one of Montessori’s most well-known sayings overturns this perspective and, with an implicit quotation from William Wordsworth’s famous poem “My Heart Leaps Up” (1802), states: “the child is father of the man”. It is still a relationship between two generations. Using another lexicon, this time of Foucauldian origin, we could now say that the *dispositifs*<sup>16</sup> of subjectivation are omnipervasive and precisely produce the subject within the universes of values that are capable of influencing the way we view ourselves as individuals, and thus the ability to think and to recognise ourselves. These constellations of social meanings also imply a series of mirroring and modelling in the face of others, and in the relationships between the stages of life and generations. These are complex and interrelated mechanisms that, in my opinion, are at the centre of the pedagogical analysis from an epistemological and historical perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Philippe Ariès’s considerations on the *ancien régime*, attentive to the relationships between child and family, in an intersection of feelings capable of affecting the identity of individuals and social groups, still appear extremely interesting, even though they are faced with the difficulty of specifically defining the feeling of childhood as a heuristic

13 Regarding the “intersectional approach”, cf. Aasgaard/Horn/Cojocaru (Eds.), *Childhood in History* (see note 4).

14 Ellen Key published her famous work “The Century of the Child” in Swedish in 1900, and it was later translated into Italian in 1906 (Ellen Key, *Il secolo dei fanciulli*, Torino 1906) and into English in 1909 (Ead., *The Century of the Child*, New York-London 1909).

15 I refer in particular to the preface of the work “Il segreto dell’infanzia” in its 1938 edition, which was later enriched with new pages from a more recent Portuguese edition (Milano 1999).

16 The concept of *dispositif* is at the centre of a vast international debate. Among the now classic studies, cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo?*, Roma 2006 (I sassi), pp. 21–22: “Generalizzando ulteriormente la già amplissima gamma dei dispositivi foucauldiani, chiamerò dispositivo letteralmente qualunque cosa abbia in qualche modo la capacità di catturare, orientare, determinare, intercettare, modellare, controllare e assicurare i gesti, le condotte, le opinioni e i discorsi degli esseri viventi” (“Further generalizing the already very wide range of Foucauldian devices, I will call device literally anything that somehow has the ability to capture, orient, determine, intercept, shape, control and ensure the gestures, behaviours, opinions and speeches of living beings” [own translation]).

17 Monica Ferrari, *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose. Congegni pedagogici tra ieri e oggi*, Milano 2011 (Condizionamenti educativi 66).

construct. In 1983, Ariès stressed the relationship between the images and the “sentiment” of childhood and of old age alongside the history of the Western World.<sup>18</sup> Ariès emphasized the need to reflect on the role of old age in society, on the one hand, and on the theme of social representations of old age, on the other. He underlines the symmetry between the history of childhood and that of old age, in the sense of the history of mental attitudes concerning these extreme ages of life as well as in their connection with the history of human societies and their forms of associated life. He speaks of a society, namely that of the 1980s, which is simultaneously rejuvenated or aged, as captured by a certain image of childhood (the king-child) or by a certain image of old age.

In my opinion, there is still a lot of research to be done on the relationships between studies on childhood, youth, minority (in a juridical sense) and old age, given that previous studies were often conducted in parallel with few opportunities for intersection. The issue is certainly complex, and it cannot be studied with a unilateral perspective, since it actually requires the intersection of a plurality of views, not least the juridical one. Moreover, in our times the “digital revolution” affects the ways human beings communicate with each other: the relationships between generations are still changing. And it is exactly generations and identity that are discussed, *inter alia*, when one speaks of a “lexicon to think history”,<sup>19</sup> and of “generations of feelings”<sup>20</sup> in the interconnections between people and things.<sup>21</sup> As for the Italian pedagogical debate, one should mention here the book entitled “Progetto generazioni. Bambini e anziani. Due stagioni della vita a confronto” (2012), edited by Michele Corsi and Simonetta Ulivieri.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays, the

18 Philippe Ariès, *Une histoire de la vieillesse?*, in: *Communications* 37 (1983), pp. 47–54. Cf. also Georges Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse en Occident de l'antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris 1987 (*Les nouvelles études historiques*); id., *Storia della vecchiaia dall'antichità al rinascimento*, Bari 1988 (*Storia e società*) (Italian translation); Michel Oris/Isidro Dubert/Jérôme-Luther Viret, *Vieillir. Les apports de la démographie historique et de l'histoire de la famille*, in: *Annales de démographie historique* 1 (2015), pp. 201–229.

19 Francesco Benigno, *Parole nel tempo. Un lessico per pensare la storia*, Roma 2013 (*La storia. Temi* 31).

20 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling. A History of Emotions, 600–1700*, Cambridge 2016; ead., *Generazioni di sentimenti. Una storia delle emozioni, 600–1700*, Roma 2016 (*La storia. Temi* 51) (Italian translation).

21 Remo Bodei, *Generazioni. Età della vita, età delle cose*, Roma 2015 (*Economica Laterza* 751).

22 Michele Corsi/Simonetta Ulivieri (Eds.), *Progetto generazioni. Bambini e anziani. Due stagioni della vita a confronto*, Pisa 2012 (*Scienze dell'educazione* 154). Cf. also, as an example of pedagogical research on the field in Italy: Mario Gecchele/Laura Meneghin (Eds.), *Il dialogo intergenerazionale come prassi educativa. Il Centro Infanzia Girotondo delle Età*, Pisa 2016 (*Scienze dell'educazione* 187).

perspective of pedagogical analysis, always more and more sensitive to the connections with “public history”,<sup>23</sup> to the education to speak about oneself, to the evolution of the relationship with gender identity over time,<sup>24</sup> to the *body turn*, i. e. to the research aimed at increasing the awareness that we *are* a changing body,<sup>25</sup> invites us to rethink the time of ageing as being an opportunity to “compose a life”.<sup>26</sup>

## 2 A Privileged Observation Point

To return to the *ancien régime* society, which has been the focus of different historical-pedagogical studies in the last fifty years, after the publication of Ariès’s book, and which offered some starting points for the development of new interpretations of complex phenomena, it seems to me that, in a research that focuses on the elderly and the concept of sovereignty between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, the *pédagogie princière* can be a privileged observation point due to the abundance of available sources and the peculiarity of the training path in view of a political and social project.

With regard to the sources, it is no accident that in Ariès’s 1960 book a central place is held by the childhood of Louis, Dauphin of France, between 1601 and 1610, when his father Henry IV was killed by François Ravallac. In this specific case, we have an exceptional source for those interested in issues that intersect biology and culture, namely the “Journal” of the *premier médecin* Jean Héroard, who lived alongside the Dauphin, recording his day *manu propria* for nearly twenty-seven years. In reference to the children and to the grandchildren of Louis XIII, it is worth mentioning that the *institutions principum* delineate the “having to be” of the relationships among the members of the

23 For a reflection in relation to the history of education, cf. Gianfranco Bandini, Educational Memories and Public History. A Necessary Meeting, in: Cristina Yanes-Cabrera/Juri Meda/Antonio Viñao (Eds.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham 2017, pp. 143–155; Gianfranco Bandini/Stefano Oliviero (Eds.), *Public History of Education. Riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze 2019 (Studi e saggi 204).

24 Vanna Iori, *Pedagogia dell’invecchiamento e identità di genere*, in: Corsi/Ulivieri (Eds.), *Progetto generazioni* (see note 22), pp. 73–86.

25 Maria Luisa Iavarone, *Abitare la corporeità. Dimensioni teoriche e buone pratiche di educazione motoria*, Milano 2010 (I territori dell’educazione 4). For a bibliography on the pedagogy of the body, cf. Matteo Morandi (Ed.), *Corpo, educazione fisica, sport. Questioni pedagogiche*, Milano 2016 (Condizionamenti educativi 67).

26 Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*, New York 2001 (reprint of the first edition 1989); *ead.*, *Comporre una vita*, Milano 1992 (Saggi) (Italian translation).

young princes' *entourages*. This "literary genre" had a remarkable success in the context of a monarchy such as that of the Bourbons of France, which had to face two difficult problems: Louis XIII and Louis XIV became "roi mineurs" after the death of their fathers. The first one became king at the age of nine, the second at five: in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, the "roi mineur" was used to become "majeur" at the age of fourteen.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, tutors (*précepteurs*) such as Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and François Fénelon significantly redesigned the *curriculum* of their royal pupils, publishing specific works *ad usum Delphini*. On the other hand, again with regard to the sources, it is worth remembering that in the case of the Italian courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a rich collection of letters gives insight into the relationship between parents and children as well as the members of the *familia* that took care of the dynasty's young heirs, the *princeps paterfamilias* and his wife. This interplay created a complicated web of relationships that defined the identity and social role of each person within the court.<sup>28</sup>

As to the specifics of the education of the prince, it should be remembered that a literature with a long tradition, revisited by humanistic pedagogy, poses in the mirror for princes<sup>29</sup> an opportunity to express cultural, pedagogic and political proposals capable of redesigning the sense of living within that particular community of associated life (the court) in relation to the government of a state. Moreover, in the specific case of France, the child prince, like his father (the sovereign), found himself living a condition that participates in both the human and the divine, following a juridical invention first studied by Marc Bloch and later by Ernst Kantorowicz.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the body of

27 Roberta Balzarini / Monica Ferrari Alfano / Monica Grandini / Sara Micotti Gazzotti / Marc Hamilton Smith, *Segni d'infanzia. Crescere come re nel Seicento*, Milano 1991 (Storia dell'educazione 1); Monica Ferrari, *La paideia del sovrano. Ideologie, strategie e materialità nell'educazione principesca del Seicento*, Firenze 1996 (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Pavia 80).

28 On the topic: Monica Ferrari, "Per non mancare in tuto del debito mio". L'educazione dei bambini Sforza nel Quattrocento, Milano 2000 (Storia dell'educazione 3); ead., *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose* (see note 17). More recently, also for a bibliography: Monica Ferrari / Isabella Lazarini / Federico Piseri, *Autografie dell'età minore. Lettere di tre dinastie italiane tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, Roma 2016 (I libri di Viella 232).

29 For an analysis and a bibliographic review, cf. Monica Ferrari, *La lunga tradizione degli "specchi dei / per i principi" tra paideia e politeia. Riflessioni in ottica diacronica*, in: Mario Falanga / Nicola Lupoli (Eds.), *Sguardi incrociati sullo human development*, Napoli 2017 (Scienze dell'educazione 2), pp. 131–163.

30 Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges. Étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*, Paris 1961; id., *I re taumaturghi. Studi sul carattere sovranaturale attribuito alla potenza dei re particolarmente in Francia e in Inghilterra*, Torino 1973

the sovereign is in an antinomic condition: he is considered human and divine at the same time, thus embodying two faces, so that after the death of the father, power passes to the son, the “little phoenix” (as Héroard will define him), who carries the torch of his lineage beyond the time of men. However, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the fortune of the *specula principis* started to decline, Fénelon provided new images of the youth and old age of the powerful in his *fables* for the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of the “Roi soleil”. And we must remember that Louis XIV was a sovereign who died at a ripe old age, surviving both his children and grandchildren.

### 3 Childhood and Old Age at the Italian Courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century

The Italian courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century are a privileged observation point of the relationships between childhood and old age in a moment when humanistic pedagogy was redefining the educational path of the princes, following the rediscovery of the “Classics”. In some Italian cities, the 15<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of new educational experiences, patterns, practices, books and institutions between the rediscovery of the Ancients and a new Humanism: the Italian *magistri*, thanks to their translations and studies, reflected upon *paideia* and *politeia*. They thus opened new perspectives, not only about the education of the *élites*, which was still the most important issue for them and for their world.<sup>31</sup> This immediately reminds of the Paduan *contubernium*, of the teacher of many teachers: Gasparino Barzizza, the father of Guiniforte, who was the tutor of Galeazzo Maria Sforza. With regards to Mantua, I think of the “Casa Giocosa” of Vittorino da Feltre, which was not only attended by princes and princesses of the house of Gonzaga but also by pupils destined to play an important role as men of power or intellectuals in the court society. Here I also consider the fundamental role of Guarino Guarini (Veronese) at the court of Leonello d’Este in Ferrara, up to the conception of the little room, the

(Biblioteca di cultura storica 121) (Italian translation); Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton, N. J. 1957; id., *I due corpi del re. L’idea di regalità nella teologia politica medievale* Torino 1989 (Biblioteca di cultura storica 180) (Italian translation).

31 Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning (1300–1600)*, Baltimore-London 1989 (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science 107,1); id., *La scuola nel Rinascimento italiano*, Roma-Bari 1991 (Collezione storica) (Italian translation); Paolo Rosso, *La scuola nel Medioevo. Secoli VI–XV*, Roma 2018 (Quality paperbacks 511).

*studiolo*, which would remain emblematic of the relationship between the *princeps* and the Muses.<sup>32</sup>

It was a large and intricate network of teachers and also teachers of teachers who, both inside and outside of the universities and the court, redefined didactic practices through their teaching and works: many national and international studies have focused on this.<sup>33</sup> Here I would only like to stress that, from the reading of the correspondence of the court networks, a particular image of the children of 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian princes emerges. For example, young princes or princesses show themselves to be worthy of their parents to the extent to which they behave admirably<sup>34</sup> with regards to a phase of life that is often defined, also in the texts that are concerned with regulating their lives, as the *furibonda etate*.<sup>35</sup> This “furious age” was, in fact, seen as a period of life that could be subject to debauchery and excesses, and they were therefore in need of being kept under control by their (not too old) teachers and governors,<sup>36</sup> while the works composed in view of their education consider the whip as a tool to tame “children and boys” like “beasts and madmen” (“Questa fu facta per voi ragazzi / E anchor per quei che son bestiali e pazi”).<sup>37</sup>

The children of princes are required to become adults at an early stage, and to leave their childhood behind as soon as possible: they are portrayed as being older than their

32 For a recent bibliography, cf. Michele Rossi, *Pedagogia e corte nel Rinascimento italiano ed europeo*, Venezia 2016 (Saggi); Lucia Gualdo Rosa, *La paideia degli umanisti. Un'antologia di scritti*, Roma 2017 (Opuscula collecta 17); Monica Ferrari, *L'educazione esclusiva. Pedagogie della distinzione sociale tra XV e XXI secolo*, Brescia 2020 (Saggi 125); Monica Ferrari / Giuseppe Tognon (Eds.), *L'Umanesimo ri / formativo. Leggere, scrivere, vivere nel Quattrocento italiano*, in: *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* 27 (2020).

33 For an analysis and a recent bibliography, cf. Monica Ferrari / Matteo Morandi / Federico Piseri (Eds.), *Maestri e pratiche educative in età umanistica. Contributi per una storia della didattica*, Brescia 2019 (Saggi 113).

34 Here, I am referring to the letters which praise the behaviour of little speakers, boys and girls, in the Sforza family. I also refer to: Maria Nadia Covini, *Donne, emozioni e potere alla corte degli Sforza. Da Bianca Maria a Cecilia Gallerani*, Milano 2012 (Storia lombarda 24) and Ferrari / Lazzarini / Piseri, *Autografie dell'età minore* (see note 28), also for a bibliography on the peculiarity of the correspondence in some Italian courts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

35 On the topic, cf. the various versions of the “order” thought for regulating the life of count Galeazzo now transcribed in Ferrari, “Per non manchare in tuto del debito mio” (see note 28), especially p. 74.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

37 In particular, I refer to the “Liber Jesus”, composed for Massimiliano Ercole Sforza, Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, Code 2163, c. 4v.

age in texts and works tailored for their education. A striking example is provided by the case of Massimiliano Ercole Sforza, son of Beatrice d'Este and Ludovico Maria Sforza, and specifically by the “Liber Jesus” and the “Grammatica del Donato” which were written for him. In the beautiful drawings, now preserved at the Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, he was represented as a young boy, when he was still a child.<sup>38</sup> As a consequence, those who must work with the royal children and take care of their education (*magistri, praeceptores* and governors or *governatori*)<sup>39</sup> should therefore not be too old, so that they are able to keep up with and curb the youthful impetus of their pupils. It appears that the task of teachers and governors was mainly to help princes to overcome their childhood as early as possible.

The image of the *puer senex*, linked to medieval hagiographic literature,<sup>40</sup> is mediated by the rediscovery of the “Classics” and takes on new meanings in the case of the education of the Italian princes of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, whose public speeches on official occasions seem to project them onto an ideal plane, beyond the contingent, for the glory of their family. In her discussion of the Ancient Christian biography, Elena Giannarelli approaches the *topos* of the *puer senex*, connected to that of the *puer maior sua aetate*, as a way of modelling an *exemplum* that transcends the human being. She speaks of the “heirs of the martyr” and adds:

“Fare del *pais* un *paidariogeron*, attribuendogli la vecchiaia, simbolicamente il massimo della saggezza umana, oppure trasformare il bambino in un adulto è un modo per ri-

38 Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, Code 2163 and 2167. Cf. Jonathan J. G. Alexander (Ed.), *Grammatica del Donato e Liber Jesus. Due libri per l'educazione di Massimiliano Sforza*, Modena 2016.

39 Regarding the *entourage* of the young Sforzas, cf. Federico Piseri, *Governatori e “magistri a schola” nelle corti sforzesche. Un primo approccio prosopografico*, in *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* 20 (2013), pp. 41–54.

40 Here one can refer to the following essays and books: Michael Goodich, *Una santa bambina, una santa dei bambini. L'infanzia di Elisabetta di Turingia (1207–1231)*, in: Egle Becchi / Dominique Julia (Eds.), *Storia dell'infanzia*, 2 vols., Roma-Bari 1996 (*Storia e società*), vol. 1, pp. 91–114; Anna Benvenuti Papi, *Bambine sante nell'Italia dei secoli XIII e XIV. Quando la santità non è una scelta*, in: Anna Benvenuti Papi / Elena Giannarelli (Eds.), *Bambini santi. Rappresentazioni dell'infanzia e modelli agiografici*, Torino 1991 (*sacro / santo 5*), pp. 85–98; Dieter Richter, *Das fremde Kind. Zur Entstehung der Kindheitsbilder des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*, Frankfurt a. M. 1987; id., *Il bambino estraneo. L'immagine dell'infanzia nel mondo borghese*, Scandicci 1992 (*Idee 1*) (Italian translation), pp. 3–6. More recently cf. Marco Bartoli, *Santa Innocenza. I bambini nel Medioevo*, Cinisello Balsamo 2021.

scattare l'infanzia dalla naturale debolezza e rendere poi possibile l'ulteriore passaggio: il superamento della dimensione umana, indispensabile per l'approdo alla santità."<sup>41</sup>

Could we therefore say that childhood thus becomes the metaphor *par excellence* of the human condition and, in the juxtaposition of two different stages of life (childhood and old age), of its overcoming?

In Xenophon's "Cyropaedia", Ciro was a prodigious child, as Elena Giannarelli recalls in the above-mentioned study about the long-lasting *topos* of the *puer senex* (or *maior suae aetate*). The Italian *magistri* of the 15<sup>th</sup> century use this *topos* in a new sense, and they also reflect on old age from a political point of view. It is not surprising, then, that Ippolita Maria Sforza transcribed *manu propria* Cicero's "De Senectute", now preserved at the British Museum in London. The *magister* of Ippolita Maria Sforza, brought up with her brother Galeazzo Maria, was Baldo Martorello, a student of Vittorino da Feltre. Cicero's "De Senectute" is a work that best expresses the philosophical and political *topos* of old age across the centuries between the East and the West.<sup>42</sup> Cicero's treatise was also copied for Beatrice, daughter of King Ferdinand I of Aragon (Naples) and later queen of Hungary.<sup>43</sup> It was therefore not unusual that this text formed part of the rhetorical education of a 15<sup>th</sup> century princess, later on required, as a bride, to give a style to court life.

It must be remembered that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, works by authors such as Xenophon, Isocrates and Plutarch were translated from Greek, while Quintilian's "Institutio Oratoria" was rediscovered. Thanks to the work of many intellectuals travelling between the East and the West, the cultural heritage of the dying Byzantine Empire merged with a philological rediscovery of the Ancients, buried in the libraries of the West. From the

41 Elena Giannarelli, *Infanzia e santità. Un problema della biografia cristiana antica*, in: *Benvenuti Papi / ead.* (Eds.), *Bambini santi* (see note 40), pp. 25–58, at p. 37. "Making the *pais a paidariogeron*, attributing old age (symbolically the maximum of human wisdom) to him, or transforming the child into an adult is a way to redeem childhood from natural weakness and then make the next step possible: the overcoming of the human dimension, indispensable to reach holiness" (own translation). Cf. also *ead.*, *Lo specchio e il ritratto. Scansioni dell'età, topoi e modelli femminili fra paganesimo e cristianesimo*, in: *Storia delle donne 2* (2006), pp. 159–187.

42 For a contemporary reflection in this respect, and for a bibliography, cf. Norberto Bobbio, *De senectute*, Torino 1996 (Gli struzzi 481); Francesca Rigotti, *De senectute*, Torino 2018 (Vele 135). On the old age of women in contemporary times, cf. Loredana Lipperini, *Non è un paese per vecchie*, Milano-Firenze 2020 (Tascabili Bompiani 629) (reprint of the first edition 2010).

43 Mark K. Anson et al., *The Education of a Princess. Beatrice of Aragon and her Manuscript of Cicero's De Senectute*, in: *Codices Manuscripti & Impressi 112–113* (2018), pp. 1–12.

Ancients, a new cultural proposal between *paideia* and *politeia* emerged, which found an echo chamber in the courts.<sup>44</sup>

Cicero's "De Senectute" is a work that reflects not only on the passing of time, but also on the relationship between generations and the stages of life:

"Obrepere aiunt eam citius quam putavissent. Primum quis coegit eos falsum putare?  
qui enim citius adulescentiae senectus quam pueritiae adulescentia obrepit?"<sup>45</sup>

The "feeling" about the relationship between the stages of life is at the centre of this work: Cicero reminds us that our subjective perception leads us to (erroneously) believe that old age insinuates itself more rapidly than other stages in our lives. Old age, if prepared well during life, is associated with *gravitas*, wisdom, industriousness, a continuous predisposition to learning, especially in relation to students who themselves are eager to learn, and *auctoritas*. We also read the following: "Cursus est certus aetatis et una via naturae eaque simplex suaque cuique parti aetatis tempestivitas est data, ut et infirmitas puerorum et ferocitas iuvenum et gravitas iam constantia aetatis et senectutis maturitas naturale quiddam habeat, quod suo tempore percipi debeat".<sup>46</sup> Childhood is characterised by *infirmitas*, frailty, and is defined by what it is not. The *ferocitas* that

44 Ronald G. Witt, "In the Footsteps of the Ancients". The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni, Leiden 2000 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 74), id., *Sulle tracce degli Antichi*. Padova, Firenze e le origini dell'umanesimo, Roma 2005 (Saggi. Arti e lettere) (Italian translation).

45 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De senectute* II,4 (id., *La vecchiezza*, transl. by Carlo Saggio, Milano 2002, pp. 130–131). "They say it is advancing almost by stealth, quicker than they thought. First of all who forced them to think something untrue? Perhaps old age takes the place of adolescence earlier than adolescence takes the place of childhood?" (own English translation).

46 Ibid., X,33. "The course of life is fixed, one and only and simple is the way of nature. Each stage of life has its own time. So that the weakness of children, the boldness of young people, the seriousness of the adult age and the maturity of old age bring something natural in all of them to be grasped in due time" (own English translation). For a bibliography on the Ancient World, cf. also Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 18); Umberto Mattioli (Ed.), *Senectus*. La vecchiaia nel mondo classico, 2 vols., Bologna 1995 (Edizioni e saggi universitari di filologia classica); Hartwin Brandt, *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*, München 2002 (Beck's archäologische Bibliothek); id., *Storia della vecchiaia. Il mondo antico*, Soveria Mannelli 2010 (Universale Rubbettino 6) (Italian translation); Gabriella Seveso, *Arrivati alla piena misura. Rappresentazioni dei vecchi e della vecchiaia nella Grecia antica*, Milano 2013 (Collana di pedagogia sociale, storia dell'educazione e letteratura per l'infanzia. Storia dell'educazione e letteratura per l'infanzia 4); Riccardo D'Amanti, *La ricezione di Massimiano della topica ciceroniana De Senectute*, in: *Ciceroniana on line* 2,1 (2018), pp. 75–103.

characterises youth can only be mitigated: maturity seems to be the exclusive property of old age. But we know that Cato, the protagonist of the treatise, was a patrician who occupied an eminent place in the social hierarchy. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century society of princes, where an individual's whole life was determined by a social hierarchy that predefined roles and functions since childhood, old age was the authoritative goal of a life of obedience to one's own "elders", until it is time to take their place.

#### 4 Childhood and Old Age at the Court of the Bourbons of France in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

When reading the pages of the "Journal" of proto-physician Jean Héroard, we are confronted with an exceptional childhood of the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the point of view of someone who was charged by the king of France with the precise responsibility of caring for the Dauphin. The *entourage* of the royal child was managed by a governess until the Dauphin was seven years old, and then taken over by a *gouverneur*.<sup>47</sup> It is mainly the physician's notes in the margins, written in Latin or in French, that allow us to understand what he expected from the future king, and what in his childhood was possible to see as *augurium de se*. This is for example what a note from 3 January 1605 refers to: the child sees the picture of David and Goliath in a book of incisions and exclaims: "E vela le peti dauphin, dict-il, monté su son gran cheval".<sup>48</sup> He seems to be like David and, moreover, he seems to recognise himself in that picture, when he says: "Here is the little Dauphin on his big horse". But in the "Journal" we can also find other notes by Héroard about the topic of the *augurium de se*. For example, on 10 January 1606, in a pretend play experience, the Dauphin defines himself as the puppy dog who chases the wolf and frees the sheep.<sup>49</sup>

The particular attention to the child's use of language demonstrated by the proto-physician shows an unprecedented interest in the childhood of the Dauphin, who was

47 For a bibliography on this subject: Monica Ferrari, Il precettore e/o il *gouverneur* dei principi bambini nella Francia del Sei/Settecento. Questioni di potere e rapporti di forza, in: Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche 20 (2013), pp. 105–121; Jean-Luc Le Cam (Ed.), *Éducation privée et pratiques préceptoriales du XV<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols., Lyon 2015 (*Histoire de l'éducation* 143/144); Monica Ferrari, Il precettorato. Una questione di lungo periodo, in: ead./Matteo Morandi (Eds.), *Maestri e pratiche educative dalla Riforma alla Rivoluzione francese. Contributi per una storia della didattica*, Brescia 2020 (Saggi 127), pp. 59–86.

48 *Journal de Jean Héroard*, ed. by Madeleine Foisil, 2 vols., Paris 1989, vol. I, p. 566.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 1149: "luy est le dogue qui court au loup et delibvre la brebis."

observed in minute detail in his everyday life. Héroard even goes so far as to register the first time the child pronounces a term, as in the case of the word “vraiment” (“truly”) (2 October 1605).<sup>50</sup> And this child, who stutters and speaks his own language, is capable, according to the doctor, to give a precise idea of his destiny as a king in many circumstances throughout his young existence. We therefore know that he is “pour son naturel prudent” (“wise by nature”), as when, on 7 January 1605, he is afraid of hurting himself, or when, on 14 January 1605, he distinguishes himself for his discretion in deciding the different roles for the dinner (“distribue les charges a Mr. D’Espéron pour servir a souper”).<sup>51</sup> His memory is sometimes “amazing”, as in the case of 2 April 1605, when he is able to recognise the pavilion where he had been taken for a particular religious feast.<sup>52</sup> Firmness, charity and compassion are some of the qualities that he shows to possess in August 1605.<sup>53</sup> On 18 September of the same year, he admirably proves to be much into arms,<sup>54</sup> while on 20 September he reveals his predisposition for music.<sup>55</sup> But he is also certainly capable (as on 21 April 1606)<sup>56</sup> of “propos d’ homme ancien”, i. e. of saying sentences typical of an age very different from his own. Between January 1605 and 4 January 1607 there are very few notes qualifying him as “enfant”, indicating that what deserves to be noted is his ability to rise above his age and give an anticipation of his destiny, to which the fate of France is linked.

In order to raise this royal child, it is necessary, according to Héroard, to put together an impeccable *entourage*: for this reason the *précepteur* and the *gouverneur* must be chosen with extreme care, as he himself claims in his “Institution du prince”, published in Paris in 1609.<sup>57</sup> According to Héroard, in this fictitious dialogue – covering a period of seven days – between the doctor and the *gouverneur*, Monsieur de Souvré, it seems that children do not have judgement and are not able to distinguish good from evil, but rather they learn from every occasion and from every person by imitation (p. 24v). The child is “land to be tilled” for his *précepteur* (p. 26r), and “a boat to steer” for his

50 Ibid., p. 775.

51 Ibid., pp. 571, 578.

52 Ibid., p. 633.

53 Ibid., pp. 734–735.

54 Ibid., p. 758.

55 Ibid., p. 761.

56 Ibid., p. 926.

57 Here I will refer to Jean Héroard, *De l’institution du prince*, Paris 1609. Cf. also Jean Héroard, *De l’institution du prince* (1609). Texte établi, présenté et annoté, ed. by Bernard Teyssandier, Paris 2013 (Bibliothèque des littératures classiques).

*gouverneur* (p. 24r). To his age, incapable of judgement, is opposed the “venerable” age of the *gouverneur* (p. 23r), pilot of the Dauphin and of his whole *entourage*. The *gouverneur* is therefore necessarily of an age characterised by *medietas*, wisdom, authority and strength; the *précepteur* too has to be “meur d’âge” (“mature regarding his age”). Maturity guarantees against inexperience, and allows one to verify, in the test of life, the morals of a teacher (p. 23r).

The first pages of Héroard’s “Institution” deal with nothing else but childhood and maturity. Among the Bourbons who would govern France in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were no old kings: Henry IV was assassinated in 1610 at the age of fifty-seven, while Louis XIII died in 1643, at the age of forty-two. This would not be the case for Louis XIV, who was born in 1638 and would remain on the throne until 1715, surviving his children and grandchildren, among whom the Duke of Burgundy (who died at the age of thirty), a pupil of Fénelon who would outlive him, stands out.<sup>58</sup> Fénelon wrote for his pupil, as was usual in this period,<sup>59</sup> *fables* and pamphlets with a decidedly moralising character, along with a series of much better known works, among which was the “Télémaque” (“Les aventures de Télémaque”, 1699), a book dear to Rousseau.

The first of these *fables*, published in the classic Gallimard edition of 1983, is entitled “Histoire d’une vieille reine et d’une jeune paysanne” and is entirely based on the contrast between ages and social conditions: actually, the magical exchange of ages is accompanied by an exchange of social conditions. However inappropriate, this change proves impracticable even in the “Histoire de la reine Gisèle et de la fée Corysante”. Certainly, the question of the intolerable alteration of social conditions is central in the two *fables*. Female old age is here associated with royalty. The body of the aged queen is minutely described in all its wretchedness. She is in the horrible condition of losing her self-image which is inexorably connected only to youth. The repelling old age of women is a long-lasting *topos* that we can here see in its relationship with power.<sup>60</sup>

58 The Duke of Burgundy was born in 1682 and died in 1712; his *précepteur*, Fénelon, was born in 1651 and died in 1715. On old age in France in that period: Jean Pierre Bois, *Le vieillard dans la France moderne, XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Essai de problématique pour une histoire de la vieillesse*, in: *Histoire, Économie et Société* 3 (1984), pp. 67–94.

59 Much has been written on the fortune of fables in France as a literary genre in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the sake of brevity, we refer here to the *notice* regarding Fénelon’s pedagogic fables, published by Gallimard in his “Oeuvres” (1983).

60 Cf. Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse* (see note 18); Giannarelli, *Lo specchio e il ritratto* (see note 41); Bernard Ribémont, *Femme, vieillesse et sexualité dans la littérature médiévale française (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, in: Alain Montandon (Ed.), *Éros, blessures et folie. Détresses du vieillir*, Clermont-Ferrand 2006 (Littératures), pp. 57–77; Chloé Vallée, *Vieillesse et sexualité*. Anthropologie

There is clearly also a certain idea of royalty behind these *fables* for a French prince that was destined to reign. Perhaps precisely for this reason, the presentation of old age in all its horror and in female form was designed for the young grandchild of a king that was actually getting old, despite his garments, concealed the passing of time. It was not until Madame de Lambert devoted her work “*Traité de la vieillesse*”<sup>61</sup> to her daughter, that a positive portrait of women’s old age was provided. This followed the model of Cicero’s “*De Senectute*”, which was written from a male perspective, even if it was not connected to the image of royalty that interested Fénelon with reference to the education of the Duke of Burgundy.

On the representation of old age in the Middle Ages and in Early Modern Europe much has been written (even if further research is needed).<sup>62</sup> On the representation of royalty at the time of the Sun King’s absolutism even more has been written.<sup>63</sup> However, Louis Marin’s study, which deconstructs the portrait of Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743), following a satirical sketch of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>64</sup> is still very important. The portrait, now at the Louvre, dates back to the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1701) when Louis XIV was already over the age of sixty and therefore the king was approximately at the same age as Cicero when he wrote “*De Senectute*”. And, as in the fable, in the sketch of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the king is not only naked under his garments, but he is also old.

sociale et ethnologie, 2014. (dumas-01023873) (URL: <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01023873>; 7. 6. 2022).

61 Anne Thérèse Marquise de Lambert, *Traité de la vieillesse*, in: ead., *Oeuvres*, Amsterdam 1766; ead., *Traité de la vieillesse*, in: ead., *CŒuvres*, ed. by Robert Grandroute, Paris 1990 (*Les Classiques français des temps modernes* 3).

62 For example: Erin Campbell (Ed.), *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe. Cultural Representations*, Aldershot 2006; Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, Berlin 2007 (*Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture* 2); Giovanna Pinna/Hans Georg Pott (Eds.), *Senilità. Immagini della vecchiaia nella cultura occidentale*, Alessandria 2011 (*Studi e ricerche* 95). See also notes 46, 58, 60.

63 Here I only recall two now classic texts published in 1981: Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le roi machine. Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris 1981 (*Arguments*); Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, Paris 1981 (*Le sens commun*). On this subject: Myriam Tsikounas, *De la gloire à l’émotion. Louis XIV en costume de sacre par Hyacinthe Rigaud*, in: *Sociétés et Représentations* 2,26 (2008), pp. 57–70.

64 I refer to the irreverent triple representation of Louis XIV (“*Rex, Ludovicus, Ludovicus Rex*”) which appears in William Thackeray’s “*Paris Sketchbook*”, published in London in 1840, and discussed by Mario Praz (Mario Praz, *Cronache letterarie anglosassoni*, vol. 1, Roma 1950, pp. 88–89) and by Louis Marin (Louis Marin, *Le corps glorieux du roi et son portrait*, in: id., *La parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques*, Paris 1986, pp. 195–225).

## 5 Perspectives of Research

Thanks to different kinds of sources that tell us about childhood and old age in connection with the education of princes between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, there are many tracks to follow with respect to different courts, all concerned with the issue of the relationship between generations. When the monarch is not elected, the father's power must pass to the son, following the unbroken chain of blood. Perhaps that is why in one of the images of the "Camera degli Sposi" ("Bridal Chamber"), painted towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Andrea Mantegna in Saint George Castle (Castello di San Giorgio) (in Mantua), the men of the house are holding hands, showing the urgency of a direct transmission of power.<sup>65</sup> And is this not the aim of the juridical fiction of the "double body" of the king, studied by Marc Bloch and by Ernst Kantorowicz? In the "society of princes"<sup>66</sup> the problem of the age of the person who governs (even if he is a legitimate blood descendant) adds to that of developing a training that should make him worthy of the position he occupies in the social hierarchy in view of the well-being of the state, the political body that he himself embodies through his own existence.

That is why Erasmus of Rotterdam in his "Institutio Principis Christiani" (1516), which marked the beginning of the fortune of the *institutiones* under the *ancien régime*, dictating a new style of political and pedagogical communication, reminds us that the age of the (chosen) king must not be too advanced, so that the typical ravings of old men could be avoided.<sup>67</sup> After the medieval *specula*, in which we see the image of a perfect ruler, capable of respecting his duties, Erasmus's "Institutio" is a turning point for the educational treatises dedicated to princes, placed as it is between the Image of Christ and the pedagogy of Humanism, with specific reference to new authorities from the Ancient World. Additionally, in the case of non-elective monarchies, the age of the person who governs is an issue that, in his view, should be raised and overcome: "In aliis nonnihil conceditur adulescentiae, aliquid donatur senectuti, error illi, huic otium

65 Ferrari, *Lo specchio, la pagina, le cose* (see note 17), p. 131; Pier Luigi Mulas, *L'iconografia ducale nei libri miniati al tempo di Ludovico Sforza*, in: Alexander (Ed.), *Grammatica del Donato e Liber Jesus* (see note 38), pp. 43–92, at p. 68; Ferrari, *L'educazione esclusiva* (see note 32), p. 200.

66 Regarding this term, which I would like to apply to a longer period of time encompassing the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, cf. Lucien Bély, *La société des princes. XV<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris 1999 (*Les nouvelles études historiques*); Christof Dipper / Mario Rosa (Eds.), *La società dei principi nell'Europa moderna (secoli XVI–XVII)*, Bologna 2005 (*Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico. Quaderni 66*).

67 Erasmus of Rotterdam, *L'educazione del principe cristiano*, ed. by Davide Canfora, Bari 2011 (*Biblioteca filosofica Quaestio 9*), pp. 12–13.

et cessatio. At qui principis munus suscepit, quandoquidem omnium agit negotium nec adulescentem esse licet nec senem, propterea quod non nisi magno plurimorum malo errat nec sine gravissima pernicie cessat in officio”.<sup>68</sup> These words are an implicit quotation of the ideology of the “Classics” (such as Cicero or Seneca), at crossroads with that of the Christian world. According to Erasmus, the prince can be neither too young nor too old: he must perhaps be put out of the time of human beings and live in a sort of adult age that means wisdom and strength.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for the young French Bourbon dynasty, anxious for legitimacy, the minority of two kings (King Louis XIII at the age of nine and King Louis XIV at the age of five) ended up risking the crown in various circumstances (from the excessive power of the royal counsellor Concino Concini to the Fronde of the Princes). In the same country, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the old age of the king perhaps also becomes, like the age of the queen of Fénelon’s fables, the sign of a social order that is crumbling, regardless of the tested mechanism of representation of power.

It is my view that it is necessary to further reflect on the two stages of life, childhood and old age, as being only apparently distant, thanks to specific case studies on European courts between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, when the society of princes was at its peak. Additionally, it is worth reflecting on their cultural representations and attitudes, and on how they intersect with each other as well as with politics and education in the art of government.

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68 Ibid., pp. 52–53. “To other men something is forgiven during youth, something is allowed during old age (*senectus*): error for young people, *otium* and retirement for old people. But whoever takes upon himself the burden (*munus*) of being a prince since he carries out an activity (*negotium*) of collective interest, cannot afford to be neither young nor old because his error would be a serious damage for a lot of people and his retirement from his duties (*officium*) would put every one at risk” (own English translation).



### **III Corporeality**



# Social and Cultural Gerontology and the Importance of the Ageing Body

## Abstract

This chapter examines the emergence of cultural gerontology as an important approach to understanding ageing in contemporary society. It will outline its origins within longer established methodologies operating within mainstream gerontology which have been preoccupied with the interconnections between ageing and health. It will also discuss its relationship with the different approaches that emerged out of what has been called the “cultural turn” in the humanities and social sciences. Bringing these two themes together, this chapter will engage with how the ageing and older body becomes a site for examining the position and performativity of older people. Old age is both socially constructed and a recognition of a series of inexorable biological processes. Drawing on the idea that the corporeal dimensions of ageing are often neglected in cultural gerontology, the position is developed that a focus on how the older body is lived in different cultural contexts can deepen our understanding of not only contemporary ageing, but also of societies located in the historical past.

## 1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the development of the field social gerontology and shows how it frames our understanding of contemporary old age. I will argue that social gerontology has developed a number of approaches to understanding what has been presented as ‘the problems of old age’. In locating social gerontology within this context, I wish to demonstrate how a knowledge of social gerontology is important for the historical understanding of old age as well as how these themes mark out ageing today. The chapter will also examine the role of cultural gerontology and the way in that it addresses some of the absences present in social gerontology, most notably around the meanings associated with old age and the ageing body.

Before we begin outlining the different strands of social gerontology, it is critical to demarcate what we are referring to when we talk of ageing and old age respectively. Often these terms are used interchangeably, as well as inconsistently. At its most simple,

ageing is a physiological process whereby the body accumulates physical changes across the lifespan. Old age on the other hand, is a status or social category marked by a particular chronological age or by a set of social markers and / or physiological signs. The problem of old age flows from the fact that ageing is a universal experience. Humans age after reaching maturity. Development is a different biological phase of life and needs to be separated from ageing. The biologist of ageing Bernard Strehler pointed out that ageing is both universal and intrinsic.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, he adds that ageing is also, in general, irreversible and ultimately deleterious. This corporeal dimension is important in studying ageing and old age, because it provides a critical context to the understanding of how the social construction of old age has less role flexibility than other statuses or lines of social division.<sup>2</sup> This tension is present in terms of how old age is demarcated in every society on the planet as well as the factors that are seen to be important. This includes how gender and reproduction contribute to the social locations of age, with the menopause being a cultural factor in attributing an 'aged' status in many societies. It is also important to note that over the life-course age is associated with a growing risk of illness and disability. Historically, life expectancy was also constrained by high infant mortality that resulted in old age (however defined) being restricted to a minority of the population.

## 2 The Modern Problem of Old Age

Moving on from a focus on ageing towards a consideration of the category of old age, the significant social and historical variation regarding at what point old age begins, and who is included in this category, has led to a concern with the status of older people. This has generally taken the form of questions related to how older people are incorporated into social and cultural divisions such as class, gender and disability.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there has been an interest in whether the shift to industrialisation and urban living has diminished the status accorded to old age, or whether there has been a more contradictory picture across time and geography. This has often taken the form of studies of age-stratified

1 Bernard L. Strehler, *Time, Cells and Aging*, New York 1962.

2 Chris Gilleard / Paul Higgs, *Social Divisions and Later Life. Difference, Diversity and Inequality*, Bristol-Chicago 2020.

3 Sara Arber / Jay Ginn, *Gender and Inequalities in Health in Later Life*, in: *Social Science & Medicine* 36,1 (1993), pp. 33–46; Mark Priestley, *Disability. A Life Course Approach*, Cambridge 2003; John Vincent, *Inequality and Old Age*, London 2003.

societies and the importance of age as a source of wisdom as well as a dimension of social power. Equally, the significance of kinship relationships in mobilising resources for the care of older people has been identified as a property of specific social relations based in agrarian and often non-European cultures.<sup>4</sup> This has, however, been highly contested and is seen as a projection of an idealised past which is mainly used for comparison with a less than ideal present.<sup>5</sup>

For social gerontology, such considerations situate the ‘modern’ problem of old age. This problem arises out of the decreasing productivity of the older workers under industrialisation and their consequent inability to maintain themselves in a wage economy. Drawing on the historical evolution of retirement within Western Europe and the English speaking settler colonies outside Europe such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, social gerontology has explicitly linked old age with the concept of retirement from the labour force.<sup>6</sup> This social construction of old age as retirement has become so powerful in modern society that the age of eligibility for a state retirement pension has become synonymous with old age itself. As with many codifications of social processes into social policy, the introduction of pensions brought with it (and further deepened) already existing discriminations and normative expectations: state pensions were, in the main, provided for men, and were granted on the expectation that the recipient would completely exit the labour market. Retirement therefore became an issue of income maintenance rather than one of social care. The emergence of retirement as a potential ‘stage of life’ also promoted the importance of chronological age as the key determinant of the status of old age. The choice of a particular age for pension eligibility has shown much variability with different countries choosing different ages for a variety of reasons; rarely have they connected to any medical or scientific justification.<sup>7</sup> The accurate recording of births and the consequent capacity to ascertain correct age thus became a fundamental task in the construction of the modern state. It also became essential to what has come to be described as the ‘institutionalization of the life course’ whereby individuals find themselves moving through a sequence of state

4 David G. Troyansky, *Aging in World History*, London 2015 (Themes in World History).

5 Andrea Luh, Das „Goldene Zeitalter der Alten“? Alter in historischer Perspektive, in: *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 36,4 (2003), pp. 303–316.

6 Chris Phillipson, *Capitalism and the Construction of Old Age*, London 1982 (Critical Texts in Social Work and the Welfare State).

7 Montserrat Pallares-Miralles/Carolina Romero/Edward Whitehouse, *International Patterns of Pension Provision II. A Worldwide Overview of Facts and Figures*, Washington 2013 (Social Protection and Labor Discussion Paper 1211).

sanctioned social processes such as schooling, work and retirement; all of which organise their lives.<sup>8</sup>

If the institutionalisation of retirement has become old age, then it is not surprising that how retirement is structured – and the assumptions that flow into it – becomes the reality of the lived experience of older people. Assumptions about social redundancy, social dependency as well as chronic illness and disability ensures that old age becomes a category of social and health policy.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it suggests that social gerontology is an applied social science akin to social administration dealing with the problems of old age. If the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the institutionalisation of retirement as a stage of the life course, then it can also be argued, that the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries represented the point that retirement became a near universal experience for most citizens in the high-income countries of Europe, North America and Australasia. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, policy makers assumed that the majority of the labouring population would not reach old age and therefore not live long enough to draw a retirement pension, or if they did, it would represent a relatively short period of their lives. Much of the social policy surrounding the establishment of the post-war welfare states therefore saw old age as a residual area of activity primarily concerned with poverty alleviation or care for the chronically sick. Those interested in studying old age, particularly in the UK, not only identified the pre-eminent role of the state in shaping the lives of the retired population, but also concluded that it was governmental lack of interest in this unproductive section of the population that led to retirement being in the words of Peter Townsend ‘a tragedy’.<sup>10</sup> Concentrating on the very low level of the UK’s universal state retirement pension, researchers such as Townsend coined the term ‘structured dependency’ to describe the poor position that older people occupied in society.<sup>11</sup> Being ‘structured’ into dependency, not only exacerbated the disabilities produced by ageing, but provided a template for excluding older people from society. This occurred through the devaluing of older people’s contribution to society and the portrayal of them as ‘a burden’ that the rest of society had to bear. In 1969, across the

8 Martin Kohli, *The Institutionalization of the Life Course. Looking Back to Look Ahead*, in: *Research in Human Development* 4,3–4 (2007), pp. 253–271.

9 Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age. The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge*, Charlottesville 1996.

10 Peter Townsend, *The Family Life of Old People. An Inquiry in East London*, Harmondsworth 1963.

11 Id., *The Structured Dependency of the Elderly. A Creation of Social Policy in the Twentieth Century*, in: *Ageing & Society* 1,1 (1981), pp. 5–28.

other side of the Atlantic, Robert Butler described this as constituting what he termed 'age-ism'; a form of exclusion which deliberately echoed the struggles of race and gender that arose in the ferment of the 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

Structured dependency and ageism brought to the emergent field of social gerontology a number of questions that had not readily concerned earlier policy orientated researchers: What was the role of old age in a society in which retirement was universal and where the numbers of those aged over retirement age continued to grow? In Europe, a sociology of old age had not emerged, with ageing being generally absent from the concerns of theorists and mainstream researchers.<sup>13</sup> In America, on the other hand, the success of the relatively newly implemented social security system was the motivation for programmes of research as well as thinking about the transformation of old age brought about by mass retirement.<sup>14</sup> Many research projects, examined the relatively new problem of old age: How was it possible for older people to adjust to the 'roleless role' of retirement in a society in which role-integration was one of the markers of American society, at least as far as functionalist theory was concerned.<sup>15</sup> Following the theorisation of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century sociologist Talcott Parsons there was certainly pessimism that anything in retirement could replace the manifold roles provided by formal employment. Accepting that retiring represented a withdrawal from society and a loss of influence and status was the starting point to what has become known as the "Kansas City Study" which introduced the idea of disengagement theory which suggested that older people actively 'disengaged' from society as a way of completing psycho-social development.<sup>16</sup> This disengagement took the form of a re-orientation of 'ego energy' on private projects and family relationships rather than an engagement with society as a whole. The disengagement of older people was understood as being for the mutual benefit of both the older person, as well as for the whole of society. Society benefitted because to function efficiently there needed to be room for younger cohorts to take up the positions occupied

12 Robert N. Butler, Age-ism. Another Form of Bigotry, in: *The Gerontologist* 9,4 (1969), pp. 243–246.

13 Paul Higgs/Ian Jones, *Medical Sociology and Old Age. Towards A Sociology of Health in Later Life*, London 2009 (Critical Studies in Health and Society).

14 W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontier. Gerontology Emerges as a Science*, Cambridge 1995.

15 Woodrow Morris, The Roleless Role of the Aging, in: *PsycCRITIQUES* 7,3 (1962), pp. 112–114.

16 Victor Marshall, Sociology, Psychology, and the Theoretical Legacy of the Kansas City Studies, in: *The Gerontologist* 34,6 (1994), pp. 768–774.

by older cohorts. A failure to do this threatened social stability as well as inhibited innovation and development. Significantly, Disengagement Theory reproduced the gendered roles of the 1960s, with men disengaging on retirement whereas for women it occurred on being widowed.<sup>17</sup> Criticisms of the approach emerged almost as soon as it was put forward, often centring on whether disengagement was a chosen or imposed condition. This reflected tensions that existed around the degree to which old age was structured, or was an outcome of individual agency. This split continues in research and policy in North America where approaches that stress individual adjustment to retirement and old age such as Activity Theory<sup>18</sup> have played a key role in shaping social gerontology. Other researchers, however, have continued to claim that ageing continues to be marked by inequality and that this is reflected in ageism and the life-long effects of such inequalities. Social class related gradients in life expectancy, illness and disability have long been noted by medical sociologists,<sup>19</sup> and while much of this work has generally ignored inequalities after retirement, a number of researchers have long been interested in the way that the life course reflects these inequalities. Theories of cumulative disadvantage / advantage have been particularly influential in explaining how disadvantages at particular points in the life course have been amplified over the decades to produce poorer health and income in old age.<sup>20</sup> One highly influential study illustrating these ideas is Glen Elder's "Children of the Great Depression", which was a longitudinal study of the effects of the 1930s economic crisis in America.<sup>21</sup> Elder integrated social and biological sciences to examine the multigenerational impact of poverty and his work has provided a framework for many social gerontologists wishing to foreground structural issues in explaining the diversity of the older population in the United States. To this approach needs to be added the view of what has come to be termed 'Critical Gerontology'. Carroll Estes' "The Aging Enterprise", which reflected many of the ideas regarding the structured dependency of older people, added specifically American concerns about managed care and the fiscal

17 John Hendricks, Revisiting the Kansas City Study of Adult Life. Roots of the Disengagement Model in Social Gerontology, in: *The Gerontologist* 34,6 (1994), pp. 753–755.

18 Robert Havighurst, Successful Ageing, in: *The Gerontologist* 1 (1961), pp. 8–13.

19 Mel Bartley, Health Inequality. An Introduction to Concepts, Theories and Methods, London-New York 2016.

20 Stephen Crystal/Dennis Shea, Cumulative Advantage, Cumulative Disadvantage, and Inequality among Elderly People, in: *The Gerontologist* 30,4 (1990) pp. 437–443.

21 Glen Elder, Children of the Great Depression, London 2018.

crisis of the state.<sup>22</sup> Estes' contribution – meshed with the work of Alan Walker<sup>23</sup> and Chris Phillipson<sup>24</sup> – took Townsend's ideas and integrated them with an approach developed from political economy that saw the disadvantages of old age as a product of the workings of the economy and the different class interests enshrined there.

On both sides of the Atlantic, social gerontology has generally coalesced around the problematisation of old age in society, even if many key thinkers rail against such negativity.<sup>25</sup> Most recently, this approach has seen the adoption of the concept of precarity as a way to understand the disadvantages that older people experience in different parts of their lives.<sup>26</sup> These disadvantages range from the inadequacies of social care, through the differential impact of globalisation on funding social policies for older people, to the instability of individualised pension arrangements in securing a consistent income in later life. In summary, mainstream gerontology has continued to locate old age through the prism of social administration with policy makers being the principal actors shaping later life. One consequence of this is that in some senses the negative experiences of old age are conditioned by powers outside of old age itself, and that older people themselves are not considered reflexive or are capable of agency.

### 3 The Third Age and the Cultures of Ageing

If mainstream social gerontology takes a pessimistic approach to ageing in the modern world, then this has been countered by arguments centring on the idea of old age representing a third age rather than simply being a terminal destination of the institutionalised life course. Drawing on an awareness that retirement in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century differs considerably from the old age experienced by previous cohorts of retirees,

22 Carroll Estes, *The Aging Enterprise. A Critical Examination of Social Policies and Services for the Aged*, San Francisco 1979 (Jossey-Bass Social and Behavioral Science Series).

23 Alan Walker, *Towards a Political Economy of Old Age*, in: *Ageing & Society* 1,1 (1981), pp. 73–94.

24 Chris Phillipson, *The Social Construction of Old Age. Perspectives from Political Economy*, in: *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology* 1,4 (1991), pp. 403–410.

25 Toni Calasanti/Neal King, *Beyond Successful Aging 2. 0. Inequalities, Ageism, and the Case for Normalizing Old Ages*, in: *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B* (2020) (DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbaa037).

26 Amanda Grenier/Christopher Phillipson, *Precarious Aging. Insecurity and Risk in Late Life*, in: *Hastings Center Report* 48 (2018), pp. 15–18.

the appeal that post-working life might represent a positive experience has been evident to many older people contemplating their own lives after exiting work. There have been widely acknowledged positive epidemiological changes in the health of the older population which alongside the 'compression of morbidity'<sup>27</sup> has supported the claim that people are not living longer and sicker as a consequence of increased life expectancy, but rather that they are living relatively longer and fitter. At a policy level, this has challenged many of the age-associated boundaries that were taken as obvious in the mid-part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as setting retirement ages at 60 or 65. These socially constructed institutionalised status transitions presumed that older workers would be unable or unwilling to continue working such was the close connection between chronological age and disability. Not only has there been an increase in disability free life expectancy after retirement,<sup>28</sup> but often people can live in retirement for decades after they have left the formal labour market. The opportunities for a post-working life which is not primarily overshadowed by illness, disability, and death, may explain the widespread interest in early retirement that has been a mark of successive cohorts of late 20<sup>th</sup> century workers. While this aspect of the transition to retirement is not without other 'push' factors such as the re-organisation of work practices and the restructuring of the economy, the fear of the tragedy of retirement does not seem to be a limiting factor, the way it was in earlier decades.<sup>29</sup>

The growth of income and assets in later life may also be another factor in transforming the experience of old age.<sup>30</sup> In part, one could argue that this is a consequence of the success of the post-war welfare states challenging the life cycle theory of poverty; a result whereby older people experienced poverty in old age as the incomes that they achieved in middle-age could not be matched after retirement. Significantly, most high-income countries have seen not only the minimisation of poverty in later life, but in addition, the income of the retired population has grown relative to that of other pop-

27 James Fries, *The Compression of Morbidity*, in: *The Milbank Quarterly* 83,4 (2005), pp. 801–823.

28 Eileen Crimmins/Mark D. Hayward/Aaron Hagedorn/Yasuhiko Saito/Nicolas Brouard, *Change in Disability-Free Life Expectancy for Americans 70 Years Old and Older*, in: *Demography* 46,3 (2009), pp. 627–646.

29 Paul Higgs/Gill Mein/Jane Ferrie/Martin Hyde/James Nazroo, *Pathways to Early Retirement. Structure and Agency in Decision-Making among British Civil Servants*, in: *Ageing & Society* 23 (2003), pp. 761–778.

30 Chris Gilleard/Paul Higgs, *Contexts of Ageing. Class, Cohort and Community*, Cambridge 2005.

ulation groups.<sup>31</sup> The work of the historian Peter Laslett has been highly influential in challenging thinking about old age and in particular for suggesting that the third age was a putative ‘crown of life.’<sup>32</sup> Laslett saw the period of post-work as one of potential self-development and self-enrichment. Drawing on both demography and epidemiology, he believed that both individuals and societies had reached a historical point where the third age was both possible and desirable. Laslett’s premise was that in the third age, older people are free from many of the obligations of work and family that had previously prevented them from realising their full potential. Probably, best known for his role in stimulating the development of the University of the Third Age in the UK as well as in many other countries, Laslett’s idea of the third age, while exhortatory in tone is one that has resonated among those who could be described as constituting the ‘youngest old’. He was also aware that in thinking about the third age, it was important to recognise that later life too has its limits and postulated the presence of a fourth age of terminal decline, dependency and ultimately death. Critically, he described the fourth age as a short-lived phenomenon, ‘a terminal phase’ reflecting the compression of morbidity outlined above. Certainly, this understanding of the losses of the fourth age finds its echo in the adoption of the concept of ‘frailty’ by geriatric medicine as a way of distinguishing the health needs of the older population. Rather than concentrate on chronological age as the critical factor in an assessment, what is now measured is how an individual scores on one or other indices of frailty. Frailty is a ‘catch-all’ term used to describe those people whose bodily systems are on the verge of a total breakdown, and for whom death is a likely outcome.<sup>33</sup> Those deemed frail may be a relatively small proportion of the older population, but they come to represent the other side of the positive attributes of Laslett’s third age.

Laslett’s radical re-working of the nature of later life has been a wellspring for ideas such as ‘successful ageing’<sup>34</sup> and ‘productive ageing’<sup>35</sup> that have made a case for a more positive view of the possibilities of later life in contemporary societies. In separating the

31 Chris Gilleard, *The Changing Fortunes of UK Retired Households. 1977–2017*, in: *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 40 (2020) (DOI: 10.1108/IJSSP-05-2020-0162).

32 Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map Of Life. The Emergence of the Third Age*, Cambridge MA 1991.

33 Paul Higgs/Chris Gilleard, *Personhood, Identity and Care in Advanced Old Age*, Cambridge 2016.

34 John Rowe/Robert L. Kahn, *Successful Aging*, in: *The Gerontologist* 37,4 (1997), pp. 433–440.

35 Patrick O’Reilly/Francis G. Caro, *Productive Aging. An Overview of the Literature*, in: *Journal of Aging & Social Policy* 6,3 (1995), pp. 39–71.

third age from the fourth age, Laslett has been joined, maybe somewhat inadvertently, by other important writers thinking about later life, who also wanted to see old age as being constituted by two different constructs; suggesting that the new realities of later life were now recognised by researchers and policy makers. Paul Baltes accepted that whilst much was possible in post-working life there were constraints.<sup>36</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the plasticity of the brain as well as the capacity of the body will reach a point where such adaptability would start to diminish, and that ageing would reach its limits and become qualitatively different from the agency typifying the third age. Baltes, as befits a psychologist, is particularly concerned about the plasticity of the brain and he brings a new dimension into the divisions between the third and fourth age, namely the problems connected with cognitive impairment and dementia.<sup>37</sup> It is paradoxical, therefore, that as much of the ageing experience has become more open to individual agency the limits of old age have increasingly become bound up with degenerative brain disease that seems to represent all that is (and has been) dreaded about living too long.

#### 4 Cultural Gerontology

In the context of the differing explanations of old age in contemporary societies provided by the different schools of thought within social gerontology, there has also emerged a distinct approach influenced by the 'cultural turn' that occurred in the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s. This turn represents a shift in thinking; one that was directed at making culture and meaning the key concerns of a range of academic disciplines. Cultural gerontology brought to the study of ageing an interest in how old age could be understood in terms of its cultural significance, as well as showing how there were many different possible dimensions to ageing in disparate situations and media. As pointed out earlier, social gerontology has been a field of study dominated by structural accounts of the social processes and institutions that create old age. Cultural gerontology having engaged with the ideas of feminism and post-modernism has played a role in

36 Paul B. Baltes / Jacqui Smith, *New Frontiers in the Future of Aging*. From *Successful Aging of the Young Old to the Dilemmas of the Fourth Age*, in: *Gerontology* 49,2 (2003), pp. 123–135.

37 Sébastien Libert / Georgina Charlesworth / Paul Higgs, *Cognitive Decline and Distinction. A New Line of Fracture in Later Life?*, in: *Ageing and Society* 40 (2020), pp. 2574–2592.

counterbalancing the dominant paradigms of social gerontology and their prioritising of structural processes over ones of meaning and affect.<sup>38</sup>

Cultural gerontology has pointed out that culture constitutes a major part of the nature of social relations. While anthropologists had studied ageing and old age across many different societies, until recently there has been relatively little work done on cultural ageing in Europe and North America. Cultural gerontologists, on the other hand, have wanted to make the point that older people also need to be viewed as engaging in the creation of identities, as well as in the negotiation of social relations. Implicitly criticising mainstream social gerontology for its lack of attributing agency to older people, cultural gerontology has shown how the discursive construction of society enabled researchers to show how discourses not only created the experiences of later life, but how they also lead to resistance to the taken for granted inequalities faced by older people.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, one of the key roles that cultural gerontology plays in contemporary thinking about ageing is to challenge the way that ageing is organised around policy-focused concepts of old age. Policy-orientated gerontology does not recognise that, as in all cultures, there are other ways of being old, as well as other aspects of ageing such as race, gender and sexuality that have their own meanings and social relations. While the range of approaches covered by the umbrella term cultural gerontology cannot do justice to all of their differences and disparate views, it is acknowledged that its overall impact on social gerontology has been to facilitate a shift away from the determinacy of structure and towards a more 'individualized' understanding of later life. Not only is more emphasis given to ideas of personal agency, the capacity for identity construction in later life is also highlighted.<sup>40</sup>

The interest in deconstructing the discourses of ageing is not limited to the subject of the cultural meanings of old age in society, but now extends to criticising the very assumptions contained in commonplace terms such as ageing. The more humanities-engaged field of Ageing Studies can be referred to as Age Studies. Humanities scholars such as Margaret Morganroth Gullette have argued that the term Age Studies, in preference to Ageing Studies, does not contribute to perpetuating the 'decline narrative' that

38 Julia Twigg/Wendy Martin, *The Challenge of Cultural Gerontology*, in: *The Gerontologist* 55,3 (2015), pp. 353–359.

39 Rachel Pain/Graham Mowl/Carol Talbot, *Difference and the Negotiation of 'Old Age'*, in: *Environment and Planning D. Society and Space* 18,3 (2000), pp. 377–393.

40 Laura Hurd Clark, *Older Women's Bodies and the Self. The Construction of Identity in Later Life*, in: *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie* 38,4 (2001), pp. 441–464.

is implicit in the term ageing.<sup>41</sup> This narrative is not only negative to older people, but also acts as a form of trauma underpinning the experience of ageism itself. This position pivots around the idea that the physiological concepts of ageing are in fact ideological. This may be a reflection of the epistemological relativism connected to the ‘cultural turn’, however it does also represent a new angle of studying the connections between embodiment and ageing.

Age studies has consequently shifted the focus of cultural gerontology onto topics that have conventionally lain outside the purview of conventional social gerontology. One major area where this has happened is around the ageing body. This concern has not just centred around the experiences of the ageing body but has examined how subjectivity is formed in the mediation between older people and discourses of health and disability. In addition, consumption and consumption practices increasingly give rise to new ways of ageing that go beyond conventional discourses of later life. Drawing on Foucault’s idea of ‘the technologies of the self’<sup>42</sup> has meant that the role of ‘body-work’ too has become an important theme in contextualising the ‘new ageing’. Examining the commodification of fitness and health in later life, as well as the way in which personal appearance is graded through the articulation of ageist concepts has become an important part of work in this area.<sup>43</sup> Following from this, one key dimension that this approach has led to is an examination of the part played by anti-ageing technologies in encouraging older people to position themselves as youthful, as against being defined as ‘old’.<sup>44</sup> This work meshes with concerns regarding the absence of sexuality in conventional accounts of old age.<sup>45</sup> Age studies as an extension of cultural gerontology has as a consequence revived an interest in ideas of ageing as a form of oppression as well as opening up perspectives allowing ageing to be understood as a combination of differing intersectional processes operating at many levels that negatively impact on older people. Drawing attention to the various

41 Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Against ‘Aging’ – How to Talk About Growing Older*, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 35,7–8 (2018), pp. 251–270.

42 Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Boston 1988.

43 Kristi A. Allain/Barbara Marshall, *Foucault Retires to the Gym. Understanding Embodied Aging in the Third Age*, in: *Canadian Journal on Aging / La Revue canadienne du vieillissement* 36,3 (2017), pp. 402–414.

44 Beatriz Cardona, ‘Healthy Ageing’ Policies and Anti-Ageing Ideologies and Practices. On the Exercise of Responsibility, in: *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 11,4 (2008), pp. 475–483.

45 Sue Westwood, *Ageing, Gender and Sexuality. Equality in Later Life*, London 2016 (Routledge Research in Gender and Society 49).

ways that old age is framed by negative discourses, brings us once again back to the discussion of ageism.

## 5 Ageism

Ageism has been an important linking concept in social gerontology ever since it was coined by Robert Butler<sup>46</sup> in the late 1960s. According to Butler, “ageism reflects a revulsion on the part of the young and middle-aged for growing old, disease, disability; and fear of powerlessness, ‘uselessness,’ and death”.<sup>47</sup> He went on to argue that ageism might parallel racism as the great social issue of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The combination of personal and structural concerns evident in his essay have continued to the present day, and that the term provides a link between conventional social gerontology, cultural gerontology and age studies. While there is agreement that ageism is a concept that accounts for the negative experiences that affect older people *as* older people in such areas as employment, health care and social policy; how such a concept is supposed to operate is less clear, however, and often difficult to demarcate from other aspects of social life.<sup>48</sup> Are positive representations of older life as ageist as those that portray negative imagery? Certainly, images of older happy heterosexual couples ‘selling’ the third age as a lifestyle have been interpreted as forms of insidious ageism with corresponding negative effects on the position of older people.<sup>49</sup> As a result there is no agreed definition of ageism and as many different approaches to detecting its presence. Often, what is at stake is how human ageing as a corporeal process connects with old age as a social construction.

The social category of old age is not completely arbitrary, and there are losses and limitations connected with becoming old. These losses may have been modified in contemporary circumstances given that the chronological ages linked to increases in morbidity and disability. As the debate around the division between the third and fourth age has shown, there are still limitations to human life at the oldest ages. This can in part account for the discrimination that older people encounter, equally important however is the truism ‘that all would like to live long, but few want to grow old’. Ageism may

46 Robert N. Butler, Age-ism. Another Form of Bigotry, in: *The Gerontologist* 9,4 (1969), pp. 243–246.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

48 Gilleard/Higgs, *Social Divisions* (see note 2).

49 Barbara Marshall, Happily Ever After? ‘Successful Ageing’ and the Heterosexual Imaginary, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21,3 (2018), pp. 363–381.

be a relatively modern concept but its existence before the 1960s and in cultures other than in Europe and North America can be gleaned from the disciplines of both History and Anthropology. Discussions about the nature of ageing in historical scholarship have started to recognise the importance of examining both aspects of the context of ageing: looking at the demographic and archaeological aspects of ageing in historical societies as well as the representations of old age in records and artefacts.<sup>50</sup> These studies can illuminate whether old age was a more valued status in the past, or whether it was not. It can also provide insights into the inequalities of old age that may be present in historical societies where social position might be the key determinant of a good old age. Equally, many historical sources describe ambivalent and even hostile attitudes towards older people, particularly those suffering from cognitive or physical impairments. Such attitudes varied greatly with 'death hastening' behaviours often enacted alongside reverence for old age.<sup>51</sup> Gerontology can therefore benefit from an engagement with historians of old age, in part to facilitate a move away from its concerns with the present circumstances of old age, but also to develop more fully an awareness of the difference between ageing and old age.

## 6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to outline the nature of social gerontology to give historians a broad outline of the concerns of this field of study. I believe that I have presented the major approaches to the topic to illustrate the tension between structural and policy-orientated positions and those focussed on issues of agency. I have also stressed the developing role of cultural gerontology in adapting to some of the changes that have occurred in contemporary society particularly around the importance of the body. There is a paradox in that many social gerontologists of all hues often ignore the corporeal experience of the ageing body, concentrating instead on the social status of old age as if these aspects are only lightly connected. This is where evidence of the historical nature of ageing can act as a corrective to notions of 'disembodied' ageing. Presenting the contradictions present in social gerontology will, I hope, be of use to those researchers examining the nature of ageing and old age in historical contexts. Certainly, the way that historical accounts of old age have been incorporated into social gerontology demon-

50 Joanna E. P. Appleby, *Why We Need an Archaeology of Old Age, and a Suggested Approach*, in: *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 43,2 (2010), pp. 145–168.

51 Michael Brogden, *Geronticide. Killing the Elderly*, London 2001.

strates how ideas from outside particular 'disciplinary silos' can have influence, or lead to some degree of revision. This 'triangulation' is vital to the intellectual health of any field of study. Social gerontologists, as do all those studying ageing, need to ensure that they are not using concepts in an anachronistic fashion and back projecting them onto an imagined past. We all need to be aware of the assumptions we are making about the position of old age in society, whether the society is contemporary or historical. Being open to multiplicity of structures and opportunities in these different societies and different times can only enhance the project of understanding the experience of growing old wherever and whenever it occurs. I hope that this chapter can facilitate a productive 'fusion of horizons' so that social gerontologists and historians can better understand each other in the production of knowledge in this important area.

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Lidia Vitale

# The Life Cycle

## Age from the Perspective of Human Osteoarchaeology

### Abstract

During the life course, the human body experiences a series of significant changes that are part of the individual maturation cycle. The processes of growing and ageing, as well as diet, diseases, climate, and activities have distinct impacts on the skeleton – the marks of which are still visible after death. The discipline of osteoarchaeology aims to analyse the developmental signs ‘imprinted’ in the human bones of past populations in order to reconstruct the biological profile and lifestyle of individuals and groups. A fundamental component of this reconstruction is the age-at-death assessment: it is a focal point for the study of identities and paleo-demography, and contributes to the understanding of funeral rites, life conditions and perception of age. The primary purpose of this paper is to explore the main techniques for the estimation of the age-at-death, based on the evaluation of the physiological changes that normally occur in certain areas of the human skeleton, and to outline how the results of such analyses could be linked to findings of the humanities to contribute to a fuller investigation of the life cycle.

### 1 Introduction

Life is a long individual process of growing, developing, and maturing, not just mentally and spiritually, but physically as well. From early infancy to adolescence, teeth appear and bones form, shape, and fuse. During adulthood and old age, parts of the human body carry on fusing, metamorphosing, and degenerating. The body changes over the whole lifetime, undergoing a sequential chronological transformation. The specific features of old age appear during the last step of this cycle, namely the period of senescence. The life-span is limited, and the maximum age achieved by humans so

far was about 120 years.<sup>1</sup> From a biological perspective, ageing is a degenerative process influenced by genetic disposition.<sup>2</sup> All these alterations are investigated through the approach of human osteoarchaeology: the study of human skeletal remains from archaeological contexts.

The objective of this paper is to explore the life cycle from this perspective, discussing the principal methodological approaches for determining the age-at-death of historical populations based on the evaluation of the physiological changes that are commonly evident in certain areas of the skeleton. It will be pointed out how these modifications are ‘read’ for their chronological value. Despite the difficulties of determining the age-at-death in elderly subjects, osteoarchaeologists have developed a specific range of techniques that allow for a more accurate view of how old people lived, and what their social and historic role was in past communities.

After an overview of the field of research and an explanation of the subject and purpose of human remains analysis, this paper will focus on the main assessment procedures of the age-at-death for the different stages of human life. In order to estimate age, many factors such as health and lifestyle, nutrition, activity, and occupation have to be considered, in addition to the subjective observer bias. In the last part, it will be explained to what extent human osteoarchaeology and related sciences have been combined in an interdisciplinary fashion with historical research to date, and how research may develop in the near future.

## 2 Human Osteoarchaeology. A Brief Definition

Human osteoarchaeology is defined as the study of human remains from archaeological sites.<sup>3</sup> More commonly in the UK, the term can be used interchangeably with that of “bioarchaeology”, which was coined by the archaeologist Grahame Clarke in 1972.<sup>4</sup>

1 Jean-Marie Robine / Michel Allard / François R. Herrmann / Bernard Jeune, The Real Facts Supporting Jeanne Calment as the Oldest Ever Human, in: *Journal of Gerontology. Medical Sciences* 74 (2019), pp. 13–20.

2 Douglas E. Crews, *Human Senescence. Evolutionary and Biocultural Perspectives*, Cambridge 2003 (Cambridge Studies in Biological and Evolutionary Anthropology 36).

3 For a complete overview and an essential bibliography of the discipline cf. Kristina Killgrove, *Bioarchaeology*, in: *Oxford Bibliographies Online – Anthropology*, Oxford 2013.

4 Clark J. D. Grahame, *Star Carr. A Case Study in Bioarchaeology*, Reading, Mass. 1972 (Addison-Wesley Module in Anthropology 10).

Bioarchaeology was initially applied to zooarchaeological research before, in the United States, it was adopted and used to refer almost exclusively to the study of human skeletons. Later, in the 1970s, the anthropologist Jane Buikstra defined the term independently as the study of human remains from archaeological contexts, as a line of research that focusses on paleodemography, diet, disease, mortuary analysis, social organisation, and social activities.<sup>5</sup>

Human bones and teeth reflect the combined action of genes and environment, 'recording' in themselves body growth and development, and preserving in their shape, morphology and chemical composition evidence of disease, stress, diet, nutrition, climate, activity, and injury that occur during the lifetime. The main purpose of osteoarchaeology is the reconstruction of the individual life and lifestyle, allowing the outline of the biological profile through the estimation of sex, age-at-death, stature, and pathologies. In addition, it explores the collective population histories, analysing groups of individuals to determine mortality profiles, evidence for immigration and spread of disease. A biocultural approach analyses human biology in the context of the interaction between the natural and cultural environments. It is based on a multidisciplinary perspective combining archaeology, biology and cultural anthropology with theories and methods from sociology, demography, statistics, chemistry, forensics, and medicine.<sup>6</sup>

### 3 The Work-Routine

The methodology of standard osteoarchaeology applies several different elements from field work and laboratory procedures to the interdisciplinary study of skeletons and burials. The process starts with the uncovering of the remains, which can be recovered in scheduled archaeological excavations. Additionally, finds can also be made by resuming fieldwork or through accidental discoveries. Differences between burial contexts as well as variations in preservation and the state of decomposition require different approaches. However, the general steps described in the following can be applied in most instances.

5 Jane E. Buikstra, *Biocultural Dimension of Archaeology Study. A Regional Perspective*, in: Robert L. Blakely (Ed.), *Biocultural Adaption in Prehistoric America*, Athens 1977 (Southern Anthropological Society Proceedings 11), pp. 67–84.

6 Clark S. Larsen, *Bioarchaeology. Interpreting Behaviour from the Human Skeleton*, Cambridge 1999 (Cambridge Studies in Biological Anthropology 21).

After being uncovered, exposed, and recognised, skeletons are recorded by drawing, photography, stratigraphic and taphonomy documentation, and subsequently excavated and retrieved.<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, samples are collected and transported to a laboratory where the analysis continues. In the laboratory, the human remains are washed and dried, after which the fragmentary bones are restored by checking the joints and stabilised with a consolidating agent. The bones are subsequently identified and labelled. Other steps include photographic documentation, compilation of a bones and dental inventory, and the recording of skeletal completeness for each individual. Finally, standard analysis such as sex, age-at-death and stature determination are carried out, and a report of pathologies, anomalies and trauma is drafted.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4 Age-at-Death Assessment. Methods and Techniques

Age-at-death estimation is an essential parameter of skeletal analysis. It refers to a close approximation of the biological age, which is proposed to coincide with the individual chronological age. The main methods rely on age-range systems based on the measurement of growth, physical remodelling, changes, and degeneration that normally occur in specific parts of the human body during the life course. A certain phenomenon is thus given a chronological value. However, the timescale of skeletal modifications varies slightly between individuals, as it is dependent on genetic factors that influence growth and senescence, and systematic influences from the environment, nutrition, and disease can also affect the assessment.

As there are no standardised terminology and age ranges to categorise individuals, it is necessary to specify which system is applied or how age classifications were determined. In 1994, Jane E. Buikstra and Douglas H. Ubelaker proposed the following age categories, dividing the human life span into seven stages (see table 1):<sup>9</sup>

7 Henry Duda, *The Archaeology of the Dead. Lectures in Archaeoethanatology*, London 2009 (Studies in Funerary Archaeology 3).

8 Tim D. White/Michael T. Black/Pieter A. Folkens, *Human Osteology*, New York 2011.

9 Jane E. Buikstra/Douglas H. Ubelaker, *Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains*, Fayetteville 1994 (Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series 44).

Tab.: Age Categories according to Buikstra and Ubelaker

Age Category	Range of Years
Foetus	Before birth
Infant	0–3 years
Child	3–12 years
Adolescent	12–20 years
Young Adult	20–35 years
Middle-Aged Adult	35–50 years
Old Adult	50+ years

Although these categories are most commonly employed, in modern practice diverse and alternative categories are adopted that adapt the age ranges used to the research questions or to the state of preservation of the samples. Methods for determining age-at-death can be conducted on several different parts of the human body. Age estimation is, indeed, a multifactorial process and osteoarchaeologists tend to use as many techniques as possible to gain the most accurate results and limit the possibility of associated errors. The choice of the method(s) is also determined by the state of completeness and preservation of the skeletons. The common techniques mostly employ macroscopic visual observations of biological changes, even though chemical analyses such as DNA or radiographic analysis are sometimes used. Beyond these content-related considerations, the choice of techniques is also conditioned by practical issues such as the available budget, as some methods are particularly costly.<sup>10</sup>

To explore the techniques in more detail, I will proceed by dividing them into three age-classes – pre-birth to adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood and old age – as similar processes are observable within each group.

#### 4.1 Techniques for Estimating Age below Adulthood

Age assessment for subadult individuals is based on developmental changes of the teeth and bones. As the patterns of growth are biologically determined, the development of

<sup>10</sup> The paper will focus on the most common macroscopic methods utilised, as they are frequently applied in research.

especially the first year of life can be determined quite precisely and accurately. Since teeth are usually well-preserved in archaeological finds, and their formation and eruption occur regularly, preference is usually given to the examination and observation of the stage of dental maturity. By means of visual observation or radiographic images, the precise development stage for each tooth can be accurately recorded.<sup>11</sup> The assessment includes the registration of the completeness of all crowns and roots (known as formation) and the place of each tooth relative to the alveolar margin (known as eruption).

There are four distinct periods of human dentition.<sup>12</sup> During the first period, from birth to two years of age, most of the deciduous teeth appear. Between six and eight years, the two permanent incisors and the first permanent molars erupt. Between 10 and 12 years, most permanent teeth such as canines, premolars and second molars emerge, while between 14 and 18 years, the third molars appear.<sup>13</sup> Individual variables include an earlier eruption or a different order dependent on sex and population differences.

The second most common method is to record the state of ossification and epiphyseal plates or, in older people, the epiphyseal lines across the skeleton. The fusion of bones is, indeed, progressive and scored as “unfused”, “partially fused” or “fully fused”. Ossification and epiphyseal union occur from the first month after birth through to the early thirties, providing a relative indicator of age within a comparatively short time range.<sup>14</sup> For the assessment, it is important to consider that maturation processes vary according to ethnic affiliation and gender, and are also susceptible to the effects of genetic, nutritional, and social factors.

Other techniques include the comparison of the length of long bones and of bone elements which should always be done with reference to the same, or a closely related, skeletal collection. The assessment is based on seriation. However, it is important to consider that most data on the relationship of the length of long bones and age is derived from modern individuals and that past individuals are more likely to have suffered from debilitating illnesses that could have hindered development, thereby leading to reduced bone length.<sup>15</sup>

11 B. Holly Smith, *Standards of Human Tooth Formation and Dental Age Assessment*, in: Mark A. Kelley/Clarke S. Larsen (Eds.), *Advances in Dental Anthropology*, New York 1991, pp. 143–168.

12 Teeth formation begins in the embryo about 14–16 weeks after conception.

13 Douglas H. Ubelaker, *Human Skeletal Remains. Excavation, Analysis, Interpretation*, Washington, D. C. 1999 (*Manuals on Archaeology* 2), p. 172.

14 Louise Scheuer/Sue Black, *Developmental Juvenile Osteology*, London 2000.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 252–395.

## 4.2 Techniques for Estimating Young Adulthood

Age estimates for young adults are mostly based on the recording of the epiphyseal fusion of three different bones: (1) The medial aspect of the clavicle – a fusing flake that appears between 16 and 21 years. A total coverage is achieved by 24–29 years and a complete fusion by 30 years. (2) The sacrum – if there is a space between the first and second sacral segment, the individual is less than 27 years old.<sup>16</sup> (3) The jugular growth plate in the cranium, of which there is no fusion prior to 22 years and a fusion occurs unilaterally between 22 and 34 years in both sexes.<sup>17</sup>

## 4.3 Techniques for Estimating Adulthood and Old Age

When the processes of bone and teeth growth end during adulthood, the body progressively starts deteriorating. In adult and older individuals, physiological age change is seen against the backdrop of, and is affected by, several internal and external variables such as sex, genetics, nutrition, health, occupation, and lifestyle activities. A combination of different methods is usually better and more accurate. The estimation of age is based on macroscopic observations of progressive degenerative processes and different skeletal parts are commonly studied for this. One of the most used techniques is the observation of the metamorphosis of the symphyseal surface of the pubic bone of the *os coxae*. Brooks and Suchey illustrate six phases of its erosion and general deterioration. Variabilities are observed in male and female individuals; for women one factor of the decay of the bone is usually childbirth.<sup>18</sup>

A second technique is the analysis of the auricular surface of the *ilium*. This surface changes during ageing and visual observation are usually performed to evaluate the changes in order to categorise an individual. Age-related changes in the auricular surface include granulation, micro and macro porosity, transverse organisation, billowing and

16 Ibid., p. 213.

17 George J. R. Maat/Rob W. Matwijk, Fusion Status of the Jugular Growth Plat. An Aid for Age at Death Determination, in: *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 5 (1995), pp. 163–167.

18 Sheilagh T. Brooks/Judy M. Suchey, Skeletal Age Determination Based on the Os Pubis. A Comparison of the Acsádi-Nemeskéri and Suchey-Brooks Methods, in: *Human Evolution* 5 (1990), pp. 227–238.

striations.<sup>19</sup> Another widely applied method consists in observing the three components of age-related changes at the sternal end of the fourth rib: pit depth, pit shape, rim, and wall configuration. Six numbered stages are distinguished for each of these components. The accuracy of this technique both depends on preservation – ribs are fragile – and a positive identification of the fourth rib.<sup>20</sup>

Other methods are sometimes also used, even if they are less accurate than the techniques described above. One method is the observation of the progressive cranial suture closure. The suturing process starts at the age of 20 and continues until its complete obliteration. A numerical score is given to each suture segment: score 0 is given when there is no evidence of any closure; score 1 when there is a minimal closure; score 2 when a significant closure can be seen and score 3 is given when the process has finished. Obliteration is considered to be a very general indicator of either young or advanced adulthood, as some diseases might cause a premature suture closure and obliteration. However, the cranium is often the best-preserved part of the skeleton in archaeological contexts, which is why this method is still used.<sup>21</sup>

A final comment has to be made here regarding the measurement of dentition. The age-assessment of teeth in adult individuals is based on the rate and patterns of wear visible on a tooth once the permanent eruption is completed. Seriation based on dental attrition often relies on studies done on modern populations. Estimations based on teeth therefore tend to be rather imprecise, as the observed attrition might be influenced by nutrition, dental pathology<sup>22</sup> and, in specific populations, the use of the teeth as a ‘third hand’ supporting work.<sup>23</sup>

19 C. Owen Lovejoy/Richard S. Meindl/Thomas R. Pryzbeck/Robert P. Mensforth, Chronological Metamorphosis of the Auricular Surface of the Ilium. A New Method for the Determination of Adult Skeletal Age at Death, in: *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 68 (1985), pp. 15–28.

20 İřcan M. Yařar/Susan R. Loth/Ronald K. Wright, Metamorphosis at the Sternal Rib End. A New Method to Estimate Age at Death in White Males, in: *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 65 (1984), pp. 147–156.

21 Richard S. Meindl/C. Owen Lovejoy, Ectocranial Suture Closure. A Revised Method for the Determination of Skeletal Age at Death Based on the Lateral-Anterior Sutures, in: *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 68 (1995), pp. 57–66.

22 Don R. Brothwell, *Digging up Bones. The Excavation, Treatment and Study of Human Skeletal Remains*, Oxford 1981.

23 Graham Turner/Trevor Anderson, Marked Occupational Dental Abrasion from Medieval Kent, in: *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 13 (2003), pp. 168–172.

## 5 Main Implications of Human Osteoarchaeology for the Humanities

In recent decades, multifaceted investigations integrating human osteoarchaeology (and related disciplines such as paleodemography)<sup>24</sup> and the humanities demonstrated that the lives of past populations and their biological profiles could be reconstructed more precisely. The assessment of aspects like sex, age, stature, and pathology provided more meaningful and comprehensive interpretations. Socially conditioned inequalities between diet, lifestyle, access to medical treatment and working conditions can be assessed, combined, and compared with historical and archaeological information in order to elucidate the social roles of individuals at various stages of their lives.<sup>25</sup> Beyond social differences, categorisations of the stages of life and age limits also depend on social contexts, even within one social group or class. Questions of gender may also be investigated with reference to foot binding, food preparation, labour or other activities that leave their mark on the skeleton. Rather than allocating people into strict pre-defined categories, patterns of gender construction should receive more attention.<sup>26</sup>

When analysing funerary contexts from different perspectives, one of the most common concerns is the divergence between social, historical, and archaeological age categories – all of them constructions that define the stages of life differently – and the results of osteoarchaeological analysis. These discrepancies can be attributed to the outcome of the age-at-death estimations that often tend to be rather broad, and to many different kinds of categorisations of age. In addition, the fundamental differences between pre-historic or historic societies and today's society should be taken into consideration. It is very unlikely that individuals from non-literate societies knew their precise chronological age; it may not have been too relevant to them as they gave more importance to generational or birth order and marital and reproductive status.<sup>27</sup> However, age identity can be

24 Brenda J. Baker/Osbjorn M. Pearson, Statistical Methods for Bioarchaeology. Applications of Age Adjustment and Logistic Regression to Comparisons of Skeletal Populations with Differing Age-Structures, in: *Journal of Archaeological Science* 33 (2006), pp. 218–226.

25 Giovanna Belcastro/Elisa Rastelli/Valentina Mariotti/Chiara Consiglio/Fiorenzo Facchini/Benedetta Bonfiglioli, Continuity or Discontinuity of the Lifestyle in Central Italy During the Roman Imperial Age-Early Middle Ages Transition. Diet, Health and Behaviour, in: *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 132 (2007), pp. 381–394.

26 Elizabeth Berger/Liping Yang/Wa Ye, Foot Binding in a Ming Dynasty Cemetery Near Xi'a, China, in: *International Journal of Paleopathology* 24 (2019), pp. 79–88.

27 Nancy Scheper-Hughes/Margaret M. Lock, The Mindful Body. A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology, in: *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1 (1987), pp. 6–41.

explored through a multifactorial approach that studies burial remains to elucidate the social roles of individuals at various stages of their lives.

Being part of the analysis of human remains, the determination of the age-at-death is a fundamental component in the investigation of mortuary practices, health, and well-being, and for the creation of demographic models of mortality. As with the other stages of life, this can also be done for the period of old age. The degenerative processes that normally affect the human body are often linked to a loss of physical strength and the inability to reproduce any longer, which most probably results in a change of social roles. Mature individuals may have been denied access to resources and treatment, or they may have had an increased exposure to diseases due to their old age. Signs of trauma, such as a depressed cranial fracture, often identifiable on the skeletons of the elderly, hint at domestic violence.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, marks of surgical treatments left on the bones or the laying out of the (old) body (prosthesis) can help us to better understand reactions to physical impairment and the affection towards elderly people, as a long life in disablement surely required special care from members of the family or other forms of social support.<sup>29</sup>

## 6 Final Considerations

While techniques to estimate age in juvenile subjects are based on the growth and development of different parts of the skeleton, those for the age assessment of adults take degenerative modifications of the bones into account. Age-related changes do not occur at the same pace throughout life but do so rather rapidly in the first third of life and then become increasingly slower throughout the greater part of an individual's lifetime. As immature or adolescent individuals undergo relatively profound alterations in a short period of time, the determination of their age is mostly fairly accurate, as small fluctuations and variations in the developmental sequence only insignificantly affect the results. Contrary to this, degenerative processes in adult human skeletons happen slowly and progress in a nonlinear manner, which means that variability is quite high, and only broad ranges of age estimations are possible.

28 Joanna E. P. Appleby, *Why We Need an Archaeology of Old Age and a Suggested Approach*, in: *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 43 (2010), pp. 145–168, at p. 157.

29 Diana E. Hawkey, *Disability, Compassion and the Skeletal Record. Using Musculoskeletal Stress Markers (MSM) to Construct an Osteobiography From Early New Mexico*, in: *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 8 (1998), pp. 326–340.

Many factors could influence the reliability of the different age assessment methods, including sex, genetics, nutrition and health status, occupation, and lifestyle activities.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore suitable to combine several methods to increase the percentage of accuracy in determining age. There are also other macroscopic aspects that can help to assign skeletal remains to a category, such as bone size or chemical composition or specific pathologies normally linked to adults or old people. Without also concentrating on diseases, age assessment is not reliable.

Despite the error-prone nature and variabilities connected with the discussed techniques, age-at-death assessment represents a valuable resource for the investigation of past individuals and communities. It contributes to addressing and enriching a variety of archaeological and historical questions related to different aspects of the human life course, such as health condition, social status, and identity. The continuous development of the discipline is interwoven with the emergence of new methods that are constantly introduced and tested. In general, it can be stated that age assessment is becoming ever more precise, especially regarding old subjects. The focus has been put on identifying morphological variations that are more strongly correlated with chronological age-at-death rather than other elements that can mark human bones. At the same time, a revision of the standard markers for old age is ongoing, which may result in a higher precision for determining age and thereby change the chronological limits of old age.<sup>31</sup> A further integration of osteoarchaeological and archaeological/historical data and finds in the future would increase the chance to understand the complexity of the life cycle in a more accurate and reliable way.

30 Simon A. Mays, Age-Related Cortical Bone Loss in Women from a 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD Population from England, in: *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 131 (2006), pp. 352-362.

31 Kelly J. Knudson/Christopher M. Stojanowski, New Directions in Bioarchaeology. Recent Contributions to the Study of Human Social Identities, in: *Journal of Archaeology Research* 16 (2008), pp. 397-432.



## Proto-Geriatrics

### A Subdiscipline of Late Medieval Medicine under the Banner of Humanism?

#### Abstract

Relating to content, quality and quantity, the nearly 400 years which the European High and Late Middle Ages lasted offer impressive developments in the field of medicine. The broad unfolding of intellectual cultures in the 12<sup>th</sup> century also led to a modest flourishing of proto-gerontology with the publication of monograph treatises and special investigations during the High and Late Middle Ages. In terms of content, proto-geriatric traditions can be traced back at least to Greco-Roman antiquity; but until modern times, they did not constitute nuclei for an independent specialist discipline. This chapter will start with methodological considerations concerning the search of relevant text types. Then I will present the High and Late Medieval development of this special medical knowledge. I will try to identify the most essential sources, authors, and contents of natural-philosophical and medical research on old age during those times. Subsequently, some examples of the reception of this proto-geriatric knowledge in other, non-medical texts will be discussed. Above all, letters written by the humanist Petrarch disclose the links between late medieval (scholastic) medicine and the humanities. Finally, two great proto-gerontological-geriatric works by Marsilio Ficino and Gabriele Zerbi – both published in 1489 and both written by humanistic authors – are examined to learn whether this was the starting point of a fundamental new development in proto-geriatrics.

#### 1 Introduction

Gerontology and geriatrics are terminologically and technically (sub-)disciplines that originated in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> It was the Austro-American Ignaz Leo Nascher

1 Daniel Schäfer/Ferdinand Peter Moog, Gerokomie – Gerontologie – Geriatrie. Geschichte der Altersheilkunde im Spiegel ihrer Benennungen, in: Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift 130 (Nr. 47) (2005), pp. 2719–2722.

who, in 1909, coined the term “geriatrics”;<sup>2</sup> the first geriatric societies and scientific journals emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. In terms of content, proto-geriatric traditions can be traced back – as not yet clearly defined branches of knowledge – at least to Greco-Roman antiquity; but until modern times, they did not constitute nuclei for an independent specialist discipline. This disciplinary and professional marginality<sup>3</sup> does not only apply to premodern scholarly proto-geriatrics: especially in the Middle Ages, in many social areas (e. g. culture, art, literature and law) the elderly were only of marginal importance; an exception here may be the Church with its hierarchical and gerontocratic organization, which will be of some significance for our topic.

Relating to content, quality and quantity, however, the nearly 1 000 years which the European Middle Ages lasted offer impressive developments: the broad unfolding of intellectual cultures in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup> also led to a modest flourishing in the field of studying old age with the publication of monograph treatises and special investigations in the High and Late Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> However, there can be no question of a systematic collection and study of this proto-geriatric knowledge as it was true for the arising gerocomies since the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter starts with a discussion of the development of this knowledge along with eminent texts and protagonists, followed by some examples of the reception in other, non-medical texts. Finally, two great gerontological-geriatric works both published in 1489, and both written by humanistic authors, are examined to determine whether they prompted the beginning of a fundamental new development in proto-geriatrics under the banner of Humanism.

2 Ignaz Leo Nascher, *Geriatrics*, in: *New York Medical Journal* 90 (1909), p. 358.

3 Correspondingly, Josef Ehmer postulates a general marginalization of the topic of old age in premodern literature; Josef Ehmer, *Das Alter in Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: Ursula M. Staudinger/Heinz Häfner (Eds.), *Was ist Alter(n)? Neue Antworten auf eine scheinbar einfache Frage*, Berlin 2008 (SCHRIFTMATH 18), pp. 149–172, at p. 160.

4 Chiefly, under the influence of the Aristotle-reception (see below), and maybe due to a temporary increase in the number of elderly people in the population resulting from plague epidemics; cf. George Minois, *History of Old Age. From Antiquity to Renaissance*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 210–220.

5 Ehmer, *Alter in Geschichte* (see note 3), pp. 149–172, presents a survey across epochs and topics. Metzler provides the best access to the older and newer research literature in the notes of her cultural and social historic overview; Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability. Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment*, New York 2015 (Routledge Studies in Cultural History 20), pp. 92–153.

6 Daniel Schäfer, *Gerokomien – eine vergessene Fachliteratur der frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Würzburger medizinhistorische Mitteilungen* 21 (2001), pp. 7–17.

## 2 Development of Proto-Geriatric Knowledge

Despite the fact that there was no systematic gathering and study of proto-geriatric knowledge, it is possible to identify the most essential sources, authors and contents of natural-philosophical and medical research on old age during those times. To solve these complicated questions, former medical historians drew upon the medical training of the authors or used information given by them relative to the channels of reception: thus the focus was placed on texts of learned ‘physicians’ or ‘medical schools’ such as Salerno or Montpellier, and on the use of original ‘medical’ sources of Greco-Roman antiquity and the Islamic Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> This pragmatic, but also anachronistic approach, because modern ideas of the medical profession and medicine were anticipated, is inadequate in many respects. The concept of the “learned physician” only took root in the late Middle Ages (after modest beginnings between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century); he primarily was a graduate in the *artes liberales* with a scholastic education in the study of books and had little contact with medical practice. Hence, for a long time many scholars who concerned themselves with geriatric medicine in the broadest sense were often not graduates in medicine nor experienced in medical practice.

Assuming that such a learned doctor or scholar wanted to write about proto-geriatric topics and searched, in the typical way of the respective epoch, for appropriate templates produced by authorities, he would not find any central monograph stemming from the Greco-Roman antiquity or the Islamic Middle Ages to refer to. Above all, until the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, he would have had no access to the relevant authentic writings of Galen (“De marasmo”; book 5 of “De sanitate tuenda”), because these works were not yet available in Latin translations.<sup>8</sup> Rather, he would have had to fall back on general compendia of medicine and compilations dating from late antiquity or the 11<sup>th</sup> century, for example the “Articella”, in other words he would have had to rely on texts translated

7 Still worth reading is Luke Demaitre, *The Care and Extension of Old Age in Medieval Medicine*, in: Michael M. Sheehan (Ed.), *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, Toronto 1990 (Papers in Mediaeval Studies 11), pp. 3–22. Demaitre closely builds on the older medical-historical literature, among others Mirko D. Grmek, *On Ageing and Old Age. Basic Problems and Historic Aspects of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, Den Haag 1958 (Monographiae biologicae V,2); Gerald J. Gruman, *A History of Ideas about the Prolongation of Life. The Evolution of Prolongevity Hypothesis to 1800*, Philadelphia 1966 (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, N. S. 56,9); Joseph T. Freeman, *Aging. Its History and Literature*, New York 1979.

8 Demaitre, *Care and Extension* (see note 7), p. 5 (note 11); Luke Demaitre, *The Medical Notion of ‘Withering’ from Galen to the Fourteenth Century. The Treatise on Marasmus by Bernard of Gordon*, in: *Traditio* 47 (1992), pp. 259–307, at p. 261.

from Arabic or Greek containing only few specifics on old age. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward, there existed translations of equally unspecific synopses of Islamic authorities (especially the “Canon” of Ibn Sina / Avicenna<sup>9</sup>). But let us suppose that our doctor wanted to advise a rich and powerful patient on his dietetics, his choice would have been the ancient Greek or Islamic texts dealing with health (the so-called “*regimina sanitatis*”). Certainly, these texts occasionally offered some remarks on dietetics in old age,<sup>10</sup> but the discussion with regard to the different stages of life was often unspecific. The first *regimina sanitatis* that specifically focused on the elderly appeared in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, for instance Guido da Vigevano’s “*Liber conservacionis sanitatis senis*”, that appeared around 1335.<sup>11</sup>

What does ageing mean? And what kind of physiological processes are going on? Treating these issues relative to the theoretical-natural philosophy, a graduate of the medieval university was inclined to fall back on relevant passages of the rediscovered Aristotelian “*Parva Naturalia*” and the “*Meteorologica*”. Since the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, these texts were widely commented on, yet mainly by scholars, who – like Albertus Magnus, Adam of Buckfield or Petrus de Hibernia (Peter of Ireland) – had no direct

9 In particular Avicenna, *Canon*, ed. Venice 1507/reprint Hildesheim 1964, p. 3v (lib. 1, fen. 1, doct. 3, ch. 3: illustration of the complexions in the different stages of life); *ibid.*, pp. 53r–64v (lib. 1, fen. 3, doct. 1–3: dietetics of different stages of life. In her study, Paola Carusi compares the six chapters of this dietetics of old age with the writings of Galen (mainly “*De sanitate tuenda*”, lib. V) and comes to the conclusion that Avicenna, more explicitly than Galen, “*individua la medicina geriatrica come una parte ben distinta della medicina*” (“distinguishes geriatric medicine as a part of medicine in its own right” [own translation]) (Paola Carusi, *Età avanzata e qualità della vita nel canone di Avicenna*, in: Chiara Crisciani / Luciana Repici / Pietro B. Rossi [Eds.], *Vita longa. Vecchiaia e durata della vita nella tradizione medica e aristotelica antica e medievale*, Firenze 2009 [Micrologus’ Library 33], pp. 41–60, at p. 47).

10 On the model of the “*Canon*” by Ibn Sina, of the “*Liber Regalis*” by Haly Abbas (al-Mağūsi) (“*Liber totius medicine necessaria continens*” [“*Kitab al-Malaki*”]), Lyon 1523, fol. 153v (II. 1.24 “*De regimine senum*”) or of the “*Liber medicinalis*” by Rhazes (al-Razi), *Contenta in hoc volumine. Liber Rasis ad Almansorem ... Venedig 1497*, fol. 21v (lib. IV, chap. XXXI “*Summa de regimine aliarum etatum*”). – Cf. Averroes, “*Colliget*”, in: *Aristotelis ... opera ... cum Averrois in ea opera ... comentarii*, vol. 10, Venetiis 1562 (reprint Frankfurt a. M. 1962), pp. 138–139 (VI. 9 “*De regimine senilis aetatis*”).

11 Guido da Vigevano, *Liber conservacionis sanitatis senis* (around 1335; Ms. Paris, Bibl. Nat., Lat. 11015, fols. 32–41), written for the 45 year old French King Philip V. – Overview to the *regimina sanitatis*, in: Wolfram Schmitt, *Theorie der Gesundheit und „Regimen Sanitatis“ im Mittelalter*. Habilitation thesis, Heidelberg 1973; Pedro Gil Sotres, *The Regimens of Health*, in: Mirko D. Grmek (Ed.), *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass.-London 1998, pp. 291–318, at pp. 316–318.

relation to medicine. Nevertheless, the reception of Aristotle (and that of Ptolemy<sup>12</sup>) was an integral part of late medieval scholastic-Arabic medicine: a learned physician like Petrus Hispanus (Portugalsensis) (Peter of Spain) was not only familiar with Hippocrates, Galen or Rhazes, but also with the “Parva naturalia”. In general, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, “lay-medical men dealt with a medically underpinned natural philosophy”<sup>13</sup>, while physicians trained in natural philosophy explored the biological arguments of Aristotelian writings (like Galen in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. D.). It is due to this reciprocal influencing that staunch medical critics such as the (natural) philosopher Roger Bacon focused their attention on subjects regarding proto-geriatrics – Bacon not only produced texts on the prolongation of life (see below), but he is also seen as the author of a classic dietetics for the elderly, with reference to Ibn Sina and Rhazes.<sup>14</sup>

Along with authors and sources, the content-related spectrum expanded over the centuries. Propaedeutic basic knowledge about the differences of the life stages already circulated in the early Middle Ages. Basically, the four-part scheme chosen by Beda Venerabilis (“De temporum ratione”, ch. 35) was a better fit to the humoral and quality theory of ancient medicine than the rather theologically motivated division into six to eight life ages, which we also find in Beda, but above all in Isidore of Seville (“Etymologiae”, XI. 2) who followed Augustine in this matter.<sup>15</sup>

Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, dietetic knowledge reached the West, first through the reception of dietetic-therapeutic texts to be found for example in the “Canon”<sup>16</sup>, and later in the context of the above-mentioned general health *regimina*. In these tracts, topics

12 Ptolemy, Tetrabiblos, Cambridge, Mass. 1940 (Loeb Classical Library 435), IV. 10, p. 447 (division of the human ages of life in seven stages, the last one was assigned to Saturn). Regarding the reception, cf. Harry Peters, Jupiter and Saturn. Medieval Ideals of “Elde”, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.), Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic, Berlin 2007 (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 2), pp. 375–392.

13 Esteban Law, *Etas – Die theoretischen Grundlagen des Alters in der mittelalterlichen Heilkunde*, in: Christoph Oliver Mayer / Alexandra-Kathrin Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen. Alter(n) in Romanischem Mittelalter und Renaissance*, München 2012 (Mittelalter und Renaissance in der Romania 5), pp. 59–75, at p. 70.

14 Roger Bacon, *Fratr̄is Rogeri Bacon De retardatione accidentium senectutis cum aliis opusculis de rebus medicinalibus*, ed. by Andrew G. Little / Edward T. Withington, Oxford 1928, pp. 90–95 (“De universali regimine senum et seniorum”). About Avicenna and Rhazes see note 10.

15 John A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man. A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought*, Oxford 1988, pp. 12–13, 82–84.

16 Avicenna, *Canon* (see note 9), pp. 63v–64v (lib. 1, fen. 3, doct. 3, ch. 1–6). – A short *regimen senum* treating mainly the excretion of superfluous humours is to be found within the didactic poem “al-Urguza fit-tib” (Latin version printed *ibid.*, p. 570v).

specifically connected with old age were on the increase,<sup>17</sup> mainly in cases when the rules were in accordance with the pathophysiological theory, meaning that they were substantiated and classified in harmony with the theory of temperaments and complexions. Assuming that the vital heat and moisture were dwindling from birth onwards, the temperament of older people was defined as being “cold” and “dry”. Accordingly, dietic countermeasures (warm climate, baths, appropriate foodstuffs and exercises) were deemed to ensure a cautious compensation. It is one of the tenets of Salernitan medicine that the temperament of an individual changes over time; it was also held that children and the elderly were ‘defective’ by nature and lingered between the condition of health and disease (the same argumentation can also be found in the “Kitab al-Malaki” by Haly Abbas, i. e. in his Latin version “Liber pantegni” by Constantinus Africanus).<sup>18</sup>

In the realm of old age pathology, Galen’s analogy in which he drew a parallel between hectic fever and dried out old age was already known from Islamic Literature in the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, 150 years before the Latin translation of “De marasmo”.<sup>19</sup> The list of elderly diseases, included in the Hippocratic *aphorisms*, was also made known very early.<sup>20</sup> However, no systemized clinical pathology of old age developed from this foundation and this deficiency was only overcome in early modern times.

In general, the reception of the “Canon Avicennae” differentiated and varied the pathophysiological picture of ageing. The “Canon” bridges the apparent contradiction in correlating the qualities with the ages: on the one hand, the last phase of life was regarded as dry because of the continuous desiccation of man, on the other hand it was deemed moist because of the seasonal analogy (winter); only summer and autumn are dry.

17 The tables included in the “Taqwim as-sihha” by Ibn-Butlan, latinised in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, even contained a column displaying the ages of life in which the favorable effects of a certain lifestyle are listed, above all those related to various foods (Tacuinum sanitatis in medicina. Codex Vindobonensis ser. nova 2644 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. Faksimile-Ausgabe, Graz 1967, figs. 1–2 [without pagination]).

18 Schmitt, Theorie (see note 11), p. 92.

19 Peter H. Niebyl, Old Age, Fever, and the Lamp Metaphor, in: Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences 26 (1971), pp. 351–368; Michael R. McVaugh, The “humidum radicale” in Thirteenth-Century Medicine, in: Traditio 30 (1974), pp. 259–283.

20 Daniel Schäfer, Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine, London 2011 (The Body, Gender and Culture 4), pp. 32–34; Gabriele Zerbi refers in the prologue of his “Gerontocomia” to the relevant aphorism III. 31 without discussing specific diseases (Gabriele Zerbi, Gabrielis Zerbi Veronensis ad Innocentium VIII. Pon. Max. Gerontocomia [!] feliciter incipit, Roma 1489, prologus, no pagination).

According to Avicenna, the elderly are intrinsically dry, but extrinsically moist.<sup>21</sup> In this context, he offers a rather complex, speculative understanding of the relationship between the pathophysiological lack of intrinsic heat and innate moisture: the desiccation is not only the result of external feverish heat or of innate warmth which, as a vital flame, is dependent on oily fuel.<sup>22</sup> The body also dries out as a result of an insufficient regeneration of this inner moisture, because its restoration is partly dependent on the heat-related digestion of food.

In the case of a gradual decline in heat, the result was an irreversible vicious circle: the moisture consumed becomes ever more difficult to replace, since the heat necessary for its production and its intrinsic intake is lacking.<sup>23</sup> Instead, the insufficient digestion engenders an accumulation of moisture on the external solid parts of the body. This *humor extraneus* constitutes a superfluous waste and, as such, is another reason for ageing.

Eventually, the great medieval reception of the Aristotelian “Parva naturalia” not only extended the number of recipients (as already mentioned) but it also enriched the ancient picture of the lamp or flame metaphor propagated by Islamic authors<sup>24</sup> with hypotheses on longevity.<sup>25</sup> But, Aristotelian reception also meant the dissemination of the encyclopaedic treatise “Secretum Secretorum” that was ascribed to Aristotle for a long

21 Schäfer, *Old Age* (see note 20), p. 28. – This concept already appears in Galen (In Hipp. Nat. Hom. Comment. 3,7 [XV, 185–190 Kühn]; De temper. 2,2 [I, 580–582 Kühn]), but its dissemination in the medieval Western world goes back to Islamic medicine.

22 Avicenna does not explicitly equate the *humidum radicale* derived from semen with the *humidum nutrimentale* which develops in the last process of digestion, yet this was the interpretation made in the High and Late Middle Ages (e. g., in Arnau de Vilanova); cf. Law, *Etas* (see note 13), pp. 69–72.

23 Avicenna, Canon (see note 9), p. 53r (lib. 1, fen. 3, doct. 1), 4r (lib. 1, fen. 1, doct. 3, ch. 3); cf. Michael Stolberg, *Die Lehre vom „calor innatus“ im lateinischen Canon medicinae des Avicenna*, in: *Sudhoffs Archiv* 77 (1993), pp. 33–53, at p. 37; Niebyl, *Old Age* (see note 19), p. 359. – Avicenna’s metaphorical conception differs notably from Galen’s. According to him, the superabundant external moisture can indirectly lead to the extinction of the *calor innatus*, just as lamp oil can no longer be burnt after it has been diluted with water.

24 Aristotle, *Juv.* 470 a1; *Resp.* 474 b13–24; *GA* 784 b7 f.; *Pr.* 875 a4–15. Cf. Niebyl, *Old Age* (see note 19), pp. 351–368; Daniel Schäfer, *More than a Fading Light. Old Age Physiology between Speculative Analogy and Experimental Method*, in: Manfred Horstmanshoff/Helen King/Claus Zittel (Eds.), *Blood, Sweat and Tears. The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe*, Leiden 2012 (*Intersections* 25), pp. 241–266.

25 One hypothesis, for instance, says that creatures of the same species live longer in hot than in cold countries or that female animals have a shorter lifespan than do male animals (Aristotle, *Long.* 466 b15–19). – It is interesting to note that in medieval comments such details were occasionally adjusted to the changing circumstances: for example, in book 3 of the “*Epitome*” of Averroes – summing up “*De Longitudine*” – the Latin version by Michael Scotus brings up the longevity of women;

time. Its complete Latin translation was available in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and contains a *regimen sanitatis* and alchemical instructions about gold making, astrological set pieces, and wonder herbals, gems, and animals as drugs. The text met with a strong response, and one of the introductions was written by Roger Bacon.<sup>26</sup>

In general, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, both the genuine and the (from a modern perspective) pseudo-Aristotelian writings centred on the gerontological topics dealing with longevity or age retardation as well as rejuvenation. In a transitional phase before this spectrum of new themes dominated, the anonymous treatise “(Epistola) De retardatione accidentium senectutis” was published, and for a long time was attributed to Roger Bacon.<sup>27</sup> This first medieval monograph treatise on proto-gerontology and -geriatrics, probably written around 1235, combines and explicitly distinguishes between ample ‘ancient’ mainly dietetic-humoural knowledge and early alchemical-therapeutical advice: while the conventional regimen pursues the goal of preserving health and preventing a morbid premature ageing, the new regimen is supposed to retard natural signs of old age (whiteness of the hair, wrinkles, paleness, shortness of breath, insomnia, general weakness, and sensory impairment).<sup>28</sup> First, the author touches upon the conventional causes of the most significant signs of old age (white hair, wrinkles, paleness, shortness of breathing, insomnia, limited sense perception, and general weakness). A warming, moistening diet counteracting these causes (cold, dryness, anaemia) as well as the expelling of the superfluous, extrinsic mucus would be helpful against the *accidentia* of old age, whereas drying or cooling food would intensify them. These classical dietetics were then sup-

cf. Patrick O. Lewry, Study of Aging in the Arts Faculty of the Universities of Paris and Oxford, in: McMahan Sheehan (Ed.), *Aging and the Aged* (see note 7), pp. 23–38, at p. 26.

26 Gundolf Keil, “Secretum Secretorum”, in: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters – Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 8, Berlin et al. 1992, cols. 993–1013; Steven J. Williams, Roger Bacon and the “Secrets of Secrets”, in: Jeremiah Hackett (Ed.), *Roger Bacon and the Sciences. Commemorative Essays*, Leiden 1997 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 57), pp. 365–393.

27 The oldest manuscript, Paris BN, ms. lat. 6978, dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Related to the dating, cf. the respective works by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, for instance Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Der Leib des Papstes. Eine Theologie der Hinfälligkeit*, München 1997, pp. 192–203; cf. Annette Kehnel, *Altersforschung im Mittelalter. Strategien zur Altersvermeidung vom Jungbrunnen in Indien bis zur Kurie in Rom*, in: Mayer/Stanislaw-Kemenah (Eds.), *Die Pein der Weisen* (see note 13), pp. 27–57, at pp. 47–54. – In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the text was also translated into Middle English; cf. Carol A. Everest/M. Teresa Tavormina (Eds.), *On Tarrying the Accidents of Age*, in: M. Teresa Tavormina (Ed.), *Sex, Aging and Death in a Medieval Compendium. Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52. Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, vol. 1, Tempe, Arizona 2006 (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 292), pp. 133–149.

28 Bacon, *De retardatione*, ed. by Little/Withington (see note 14), p. 80.

plemented by cosmetic recommendations, including morning massages with ointments, attendance at joyful activities and the seven *occulta*<sup>29</sup>: gold, pearls or amber, snake flesh, rosemary, venison heart bone and aloe wood, maybe also human blood, breath or heat. Paravicini Bagliani assumes the origin and reception of this text at the papal or imperial court in Italy;<sup>30</sup> where at that time topics related to the preservation and prolongation of life, or for instance to the legends of a fountain or spring of youth were increasingly popular since the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In about 1265, the (above mentioned) Roger Bacon seized on this “Epistola” and numerous other sources (for example the “Secretum Secretorum”) in his writings for Pope Clement IV.<sup>31</sup> According to him, the additional *occulta* are supposed to act upon the heart as the cardinal organ (*cordalia*). Bacon justified their use by highlighting the impossibility of permanently following the dietetics deemed crucial for a long life.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, he expanded his argumentation concerning a biblical-theological perspective, which was absent in the “Epistola”: He interprets the decline in prediluvian longevity (achievable before the Flood and recorded in the Bible) as a consequence above all of dietary mistakes which increased over the generations (“hominis stultitia et propria voluntas”);<sup>33</sup> thus he resorted to a rational concept. In his analysis, Bacon repeatedly harshly criticizes the medical profession: the teaching on dietetics was incorrect, and the knowledge of medicines, a helpful agent in preventing the shortening of life, was insufficient. Correspondingly, he sees opportunities to compensate these mistakes by devising better dietetics and by using the *occulta*, but principally by having recourse to the achievements of the *scientiae experimentales*. In this way, not only could the generally

29 They are called “occulta [medicamina]”, because they were unknown to the ancient authorities, or are to be hidden from the eyes of the inexperienced.

30 According to Paravicini Bagliani, it was addressed to Pope Innocent IV as well as to Emperor Frederick II; cf. Paravicini Bagliani, *Der Leib* (see note 27), pp. 301–302.

31 E. g. Roger Bacon, *The Opus Maius*, vol. 2, ed. by John Henry Bridges, Cambridge 1897, pars VI, exempla 2–3, pp. 204–213; id., *Opus Minus*, in: id., *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, vol. 1, ed. by John S. Brewer, London 1859, pp. 311–389, at pp. 373–374; id., *Part of the Opus Tertium. Including a Fragment now Printed for the First Time*, ed. by Andrew G. Little, Aberdeen 1912 (*British Society of Franciscan Studies* 4), pp. 45–54; cf. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Ruggero Bacone e l'alchimia di lunga vita*, in: Chiara Crisciani/Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Eds.), *Alchimia e medicina nel Medioevo*, Firenze 2003 (*Micrologus Library* 9), pp. 33–54, at p. 35.

32 Bacon, *Opus Maius* (see note 31), pp. 204–205.

33 Bacon does not exclude a weakening of the soul brought about by the Fall as the cause for its failure to care adequately for the body; Roger Bacon, *Liber sex scientiarum*, quoted according to Paravicini Bagliani, *Ruggero Bacone* (see note 31), p. 46.

presumed limit of life (to be attained by means of an optimal diet) be reached, but also a limit that would by far exceed this. The new *scientiae* are capable of bringing people nearer to that goal by optimizing foodstuffs and medicaments (plants, gemstones, etc.) by means of alchemy, astrology and optics. With regard to the *in-stellatio*, it was intended to use lenses to gather the beams of stars. The beams so collimated would be focused on those medicaments.<sup>34</sup>

Obviously, Bacon's treatises attracted great interest, not only (as the "Epistola" a generation earlier), among the highly cultivated recipients at the papal court in Viterbo at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but also, for instance, among merchants, nobles, lawyers and the clergy in London. Around 1450, people placed great hopes in the potential of alchemy for both the multiplication of metals and the promotion of longevity.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the writings of Bacon, there are many others written around 1300 by authors such as Arnau de Vilanova with his treatise "De conservanda juventute et retardanda senectute"; its title immediately evokes the anonymous "Epistola". In a similar fashion to Bacon's work, it mainly offers various recipes related to dietetics and medicines to be applied to specific ailments of the elderly and to measures to be taken for rejuvenation along with commentaries on the pathology of old age.<sup>36</sup> Together with other late medieval writings by Johannes de Rupescissa (Jean de Roquetaillade), (Ps.-)Ramon Llull and many other authors, these texts established a rich alchemical-gerontological tradition. In this tradition, for instance, stands Paracelsus in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who shows astonishing parallels with Bacon: in his gerontological treatises "De renovatione et restauratione" and "De vita longa" he too amalgamates harsh criticism of the medical profession with a

34 Bacon, Liber, quoted according to Paravicini Bagliani, Ruggero Bacone (see note 31), p. 47. A parallel to this optic perception can be found in Bacon's comparison between different forms of retraction in the eye and the divine ray that shines on mankind; cf. Klaus Bergdolt, Der Sehvorgang als theologisches Analogon. Augen-anatomie und -physiologie bei Roger Bacon, in: Sudhoffs Archiv 75 (1991), pp. 1–20.

35 M. Teresa Tavormina (Ed.), Roger Bacon. Two Extracts on the Prolongation of Life, in: ead. (Ed.), Sex (see note 27), vol. 1, pp. 327–343, at pp. 336–338.

36 Arnaldus Villanovanus, De conservanda juventute et retardanda senectute, in: id., Opera, Lyon 1504, fol. 85r–90r; cf. id., Il libro di Arnaldo da Villanova sul modo di conservare la gioventù e ritardare la vecchiaia, transl. by Clodomiro Mancini / Gino Fravega, Genova 1963 (Scientia veterum 38). – The "Regimen senum et seniorum" (e.g. the early print of Félix Baligault, about 1500) also ascribed to Arnald corresponds at least in part to a précis of the anonymous "Epistola de retardatione accidentium senectutis".

laudation of the experience, acquired, in particular, in natural philosophy, alchemy and astrology as well as astonishing theological (lay) commentaries.<sup>37</sup>

### 3 Reflections on Proto-Geriatric Knowledge in Non-Medical Texts

How was this proto-geriatric knowledge, accumulated over centuries, adopted outside medicine? In the light of this poorly coherent proto-gerontological-geriatric corpus of knowledge evolving over centuries and its diverse tiers of reception, only a cursory outline of its manifold aspects is feasible. As a consequence, it is difficult to verify a direct correlation between ‘medical’ and ‘non-medical’ texts. Additionally, it is necessary to distinguish between various types of texts in which potential medical knowledge was adopted. The question also arises whether the confirmed body of knowledge might not stem from different sources. In the following, the intention is to examine the reception of specific medical knowledge in some selected exegetical-ascetic sources, scholastic disputations as well as in encyclopaedias and poems.

Bible commentaries adopt medical-related knowledge – if at all – directly from scholarly Fathers and Doctors of the Church like Isidore of Seville and Jerome; the latter for example mentions typical disorders and conditions of the elderly in his interpretation of the old age metaphors by Kohelet (ch. 12, 1–5).<sup>38</sup> In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas of Lyra added further medical interpretations in his comment on the respective paragraph in the “Glossa ordinaria” of this exegetical canon.<sup>39</sup> But, it was only in the late

37 Urs Leo Gantenbein, *Paracelsus und die Quellen seiner medizinischen Alchemie*, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Religion und Gesundheit. Der heilkundliche Diskurs im 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2011 (Theophrastus-Paracelsus-Studien 3), pp. 113–164, at pp. 124–128; Daniel Schäfer, *Lebensverlängerung – Verjüngung – Unsterblichkeit? Über eine Hauptattraktion der Paracelsus zugeschriebenen Heilkunde*, in: Christoph Strosetzki (Ed.), *Gesundheit und Krankheit vor und nach Paracelsus*, Berlin 2023, pp. 25–44 (in print).

38 Jerome’s exegesis contains details requiring a certain medical knowledge: for instance, when it comes to the insufficiency of the “mandibulae” (lower jaw bone) rendering chewing and speaking difficult, or to the cooling of the blood which along with a dry constitution of the humours causes insomnia and early awakening; cf. Daniel Schäfer, „Hebraeorum Hippokrates rei medicae peritissimus fuit“. Über die Rezeption der pseudosalomonischen Metaphern zum Greisenalter (Koh. 12, 1–6) in der frühneuzeitlichen Medizin, in: *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 35 (2000), pp. 219–250, at pp. 223–224.

39 Nicholas, for example, refers the pseudo-solomonic metaphor “Et conteratur hydria super fontem” (Eccl. 12,5) (“and the pitcher be broken at the fountain”), to the entirety of the limbs which in old age or in dying have lost the capacity to resort to the “spiritus vitalis” situated in the heart (“fons”) (Text-

16<sup>th</sup> century that a cross-fertilization of theological and medical comments on Kohelet 12 began.

Furthermore, Lotario dei Conti di Segni, the later pope Innocent III, as one of the first proponents of ascetic literature, quoted a leitmotif of old age pathology included in the “Ars poetica” of Horace in the highly influential “De contemptu mundi” (around 1195): “Many complaints surround the elderly”.<sup>40</sup> Admittedly, this quotation also appears in Late Medieval medical texts, but it does not convey any specific medical knowledge. The age-related complaints listed by Lotario in rhythmic assonances recall the enumerations provided by (Ps.-)Augustine, Gregory and Bede;<sup>41</sup> they only describe physical restraints in general. Around 1235, the professor of rhetoric, Boncompagno da Signa, wrote his late work “Libellus de malo senectutis et senii”. In it he explicitly opposes Cicero’s old age-apologetic writing: the “martirium” of old age could only be useful insofar as it was considered to be a penance for vices in which one had wallowed at a younger age.<sup>42</sup> Boncompagno lists – with a vague reference to Hippocrates and Johannitus (Hunain ibn Ishaq) – the life ages, but his only explanation for the last phase is a reduction

tus Bibliae cum Glossa ordinaria ... Nicolai de Lyra postilla, Moralitatibus eiusdem, Pauli Burgensis additionibus, Mathiae Thoringi replicis, Lugduni 1528, tertia pars, fol. 154r).

40 Innocentius III, *De contemptu mundi sive De vilitate conditionis humanae*, Köln about 1473, ch. I.11 (“De incommodis senectutis”; no pagination): “Audi [Horatium] poetam: Multa senem circumveniunt incommoda.”

41 (Ps.-)Augustinus, *De duodecim abusionibus gradibus*, in: *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 40, Paris 1865, cols. 1079–1088, at cols. 1079–1080; Gregorius Magnus, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, lib. I, hom. 1 (about Lk 21, 25–33), in: id., *Homiliae in Evangelia / Evangelienhomilien*, lateinisch-deutsch, transl. and introduced by Michael Fiedrowicz, Freiburg 1997 (*Fontes Christiani* 28.1), pp. 59–60; Beda Venerabilis, *Collectanea et Flores*, in: *Venerabilis Bedae Anglosaxonis Presbyteri Operum*, vol. 3, Köln 1612, col. 482.

42 Formally, Boncompagno asks a certain “Ardingus” (Ardingo Foraboschi), bishop of Florence, in the prologue to review his writing scheduled for publication; the addressing of a supporter of the poor suggests that the author implicitly is begging for personal help in old age – according to the chronicler Salimbene de Adam, Boncompagno died completely impoverished in a Florentine hospital (“ad tantam devenit inopiam”) (“he was reduced to such a hardship”); quoted from Boncompagno da Signa, “Amicitia” and “De malo senectutis et senii”. Edition, Translation and Introduction by Michael W. Dunne, Paris 2012 (*Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations* 15), p. 5. Correspondingly, Boncompagno defines age related ailments and hardship: “Pena est afflictio corporis cum onere paupertatis. Miseria est afflictio spiritus et anime dolorosa cum infirmitatis et inopie grauamine” (“Penance is the affliction of the body in combination with the burden of poverty. Misery is the painful affliction of the spirit and the soul with the weight of illness and want” [own translation]) (ibid., pp. 138, 144).

of the natural heat. A small list of physical complaints in old age<sup>43</sup> is confronted with an extensive list of mental and social ailments. Like Lotario, Boncompagno also adopts the pertinent characteristics of old age propagated by Aristotelian “Rhetoric” (but not the “Parva naturalia”!).

It is mainly in the natural encyclopaedias of the High Middle Ages where one finds a notable reception of medical knowledge. The books VI and VII of “De proprietatibus rerum” by Bartholomaeus Anglicus contain a discussion of the ages of life, but above all of dietetics and pathology, mostly without direct relation to older people.<sup>44</sup> In the highly comprehensive “Speculum maius” by Vincent of Beauvais, completed in 1250, in the 31<sup>st</sup> book of the “Speculum naturale” there appears a specific section on elderly dietetics; it briefly refers to the relevant texts of Haly Abbas, Avicenna and Rhazes. Other chapters deal with the ages of life, the various complexions and with the causes of white hair and

43 Da Signa, “Amicitia” (see note 42), p. 146.

44 Only occasionally reference is made to a specific diet for the elderly, for example, in connection with a relevant Hippocratic quotation: “Item alio modo cibandus est iuuenis et adolescens et alio modo ipse senex. Nam abstinentia cibi que senibus est facilis, pueris et iunioribus est difficilis. Iuxta illud yprocras: Senes facillime ferunt ieiunium, secundo consistentes facilius, pueri vero minus. Nam in senibus debilis est calor naturalis, in aliis autem est fortis” (“So a young man and an adult shall eat in a different way, and an old man in turn in a different way. For abstinence is easy for old people, but difficult for children and young people. Hippocrates says about this: ‘Old people fast easily, people in their middle age more easily, but children less so. For in old people natural heat is weak, but in others it is strong.’” [own translation]) (Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Liber de proprietatibus rerum, Argentoratum [Strasbourg] 1485, lib. VI. 20 [“De cibo”] [without pagination], quoting Corpus Hippocraticum, Aphorismi I. 13 [IV, 466 Littré]). At the beginning of Book VI, one finds an explanation referring to the physiology and pathology of old age that the Englishman might have come upon in a medical source: “In senio autem calor naturalis extinguitur, deficit virtus regitua, et humor dissolvitur, deficit virtus, et carnositas consumitur, contrahuntur nerui, cutis corrugatur et incuruatur, corpore perit species, et decor corporis adnullatur ... tussibus, sputis et aliis fatigatur” (“But in old age natural warmth extinguishes, the regnant power of soul is lacking, and the humour dissolves, strength is missing, fleshiness is consumed, the nerves contract, the skin becomes wrinkled, the species fades by the body, and the beauty of the body fades ... it is weakened by coughing, sputum and other things.” [own translation]) (Anglicus, Liber [see above], lib. VI. 1 [without pagination]). The following book VII (“De infirmitatibus”), is also centered on medical knowledge, and contains scattered information on diseases in old age: “De cecitate: Aliquando fit propter humorum et spirituum consumptionem, ut est videre in senibus, quorum oculi primum caligant et defectum visus patiuntur. Tandem deficiente virtute videndi potentie penitus destruuntur” (“About blindness: at some point, due to the consumption of the humours and vigours, what happens in old people is that their eyes first become dark and vision problems become manifest. Eventually they are completely destroyed by the loss of sight.” [own translation]) (Anglicus, Liber [see above], lib. VII. 19 [without pagination]).

baldness. In this 31<sup>st</sup> book, which includes a comprehensive portrayal of man, Vincent cites the medical authorities, but also Vergil, Horace, Maximianus, Seneca, the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. Here again, medicine is only one component among various areas of knowledge, and proto-geriatrics is only touched upon very briefly.<sup>45</sup>

Different poets of the High and Late Middle Ages considered the body and the characteristics of older people in a detailed, but stereotypical manner. The old French novel “Roman de la Rose” written by Guillaume de Lorris around 1235 and continued by Jean de Meung some 40 years later considers vices and conditions banned from the “Garden of Delights”. This series includes also a portrait of the personified *Viellece*; the focus here is placed on the external signs of decay (decrease in body size, wrinkles, loss of teeth, and impairment of mobility), and of ugliness (for example hairy ears), which are not typical of medicine.<sup>46</sup> Also mentioned are childish behaviour and a ‘second childhood’ in old age, a topos treated by Isidore, Juvenal and Plato and that was almost ignored by medieval medicine.<sup>47</sup>

A similar example refers to the highly stylized complaint against old age in “Ich sich und hör“ (“I see and hear”) by the Tyrolean poet Oswald of Wolkenstein (written before 1425): in addition to the usual display of decrepitude, sensory deficiencies, brittle voice, blue lips and trembling, coughing and the loss of easiness (in German: “freier Sinn”) are noteworthy.<sup>48</sup> Such lists of sensually perceived ailments of the elderly were certainly even more frequent during this time (cf. François Villon);<sup>49</sup> a popular topos of the *Maeren* poetry is the impotence of old men.<sup>50</sup> But, apart from personal experience and poetic

45 Vincentius Bellovacensis, *Speculum naturale*, Graz 1964 (reprint of the edition Duaci 1624), cols. 2348–2349, 2360–2365; Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*. “Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain”, London-New York 1993, pp. 16–17, 56.

46 Metzler, *Social History* (see note 5), p. 115.

47 Aristotle’s (*Rhetoric* II. 14) and Thomas Aquinas’s (on this point sharing the philosopher’s view) theory was that the soul aged more slowly than did the body (Metzler, *Social History* [see note 5], p. 256, note 83); cf. Shahar, *Growing Old* (see note 45), p. 39. Nonetheless, mental decay is a topic in poetry, see below.

48 Modern High German translation and comment in Sieglinde Hartmann, *Altersdichtung und Selbstdarstellung bei Oswald von Wolkenstein*, Göttingen 1980 (*Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik* 288), pp. 153–175.

49 In the ballad “Les regrets de la belle Heaulmiere”; cf. Hartmann, *Altersdichtung* (see note 48), pp. 165–167.

50 Albrecht Classen, *Der alte Mensch in den spätmittelalterlichen Mæren*. Die Komplexität der Alterserfahrung im Spätmittelalter aus mentalitätsgeschichtlicher Sicht, in: Elisabeth Vavra (Ed.), *Alterskulturen des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*. Internationaler Kongress Krems an der

models which have survived from antiquity, there is no convincing evidence of medical knowledge in them. Even Christine de Pizan's observation in "Le Livre de la Cité des dames" that "there is no worse disease than old age" has to be ascribed to Cicero or to the younger Seneca, but not to Galen or Hippocrates.<sup>51</sup> In general, literary portrayals of the ageing body frequently focus on a few topoi with a clear pejorative bias for dramatic reasons, notably on physical ugliness, decline of the senses, impotence, helplessness, and finally mental deficiency; because in poetry, the intention was not to present a medical, natural-philosophical characterization.

As a result of this very cursory study of non-medical works, it can be concluded that many medieval texts contain lists enumerating the afflictions of old age (mostly found in the Patristics and ancient poetry). However, until the Late Middle Ages, true proto-geriatric knowledge on a larger scale only appears in natural encyclopaedias, especially in Vincent of Beauvais. This is understandable, because Vincent gathers and processes medical knowledge of all kinds.

#### 4 Influence of Humanism

My reflections will conclude with the question of how the humanists influenced the proto-geriatric discourse. I start with a brief discussion of Francesco Petrarch who was a representative of early Humanism and part of a small group of humanists who examined the subject of old age. Petrarch had a bitter literary feud with an anonymous scholastic physician who probably worked at the papal court in Avignon;<sup>52</sup> but, despite his critical attitude to medicine,<sup>53</sup> in various moral-philosophical treatises, and in his letters as well,

Donau, 16.–18. Oktober 2006, Wien 2008 (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse 780), pp. 219–241.

51 Daniel Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness ...". Concepts of Age and Ageing in Perspective, in: *Medical History* 46 (2002), pp. 525–548; Daniel Schäfer, 'Cato Maior'-Rezeption in der frühneuzeitlichen Medizin?, in: Anne Eusterschulte / Günter Frank (Eds.), *Cicero in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart 2018 (Melanchthon-Schriften der Stadt Bretten 13), pp. 133–147, at p. 144, note 61.

52 For more details cf. Klaus Bergdolt, *Arzt, Krankheit und Therapie bei Petrarca. Die Kritik an Medizin und Naturwissenschaft im italienischen Frühhumanismus*, Weinheim 1992, pp. 33–66.

53 Besides Petrarch, there are further critical comments on medicine and natural sciences expressed by early humanists such as Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni. However, it can be noted that the antinomy between natural sciences and Humanism signally ebbed away in the subsequent generations; cf. Klaus Bergdolt, *Naturwissenschaften und humanistisches Selbstverständnis*, in: id., *Aufsätze zur Medizin- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Heidelberg 2020, pp. 259–278, at p. 265.

he shares his view on medical topics and old age. Thus, in the dialogue “De remediis utriusque fortunae” (completed in 1366 at the age of 62) there is a lengthy chapter entitled “De Senectute”; in which some unspecific complaints of old age are brought forward: general weakness, wrinkles in the face and white hair with the result that one has problems to recognize oneself, the loss of bodily pleasures, a crooked back and, finally, becoming childish.<sup>54</sup> According to Seneca and Cicero, a rational acknowledgement of the necessities claimed by nature, the advantages of old age and the expected otherworldly redemption serve as a remedy against these monotonous grievances. In one of his “Epistolae seniles”, written in 1362 to his younger friend Boccaccio, Petrarch again emphasizes the advantages of old age, here following Cicero.<sup>55</sup> In two other letters from 1370 dealing with the same topic and addressed to his physician-friend Giovanni Dondi,<sup>56</sup> who was appreciated by him as a scholarly humanist, he goes into issues related to elderly dietetics. Concerning himself, however, he refuses to accept the medical recommendations made by Dondi: in general, Petrarch agrees on the reduction of food for the elderly (because of insufficient digestion), but he is not willing to spread his daily ration over several little meals. Indeed, old people are able to fast<sup>57</sup> and to eat raw fruits and vegetables as well as drink water instead of wine<sup>58</sup> (despite the fact that in the contemporary medical dietetics all these provisions were rejected). In contrast, the poet opposes the inflexible dietetic regulations of scholastic medicine, “because everybody ages in his own way, and lifestyles differ”.<sup>59</sup>

Petrarch’s reception of medical knowledge probably resides in his general humanistic interest in the investigation of the various kinds of human nature (*humanitas*) as well as in his reflections on the self. Cicero’s “Cato Maior”, in which he considers the optimal lifestyle, serves him as a literary model here. He shows a certain, but often critical, interest in elderly medicine. However almost nothing of this early critique can be found in two later ample proto-geriatric treatises showing humanist influence. Both of them appeared

54 Francesco Petrarca, *De remediis utriusque fortunae libri II*, Berna 1605, ch. II. 83, pp. 571–581.

55 Francesco Petrarca, *Lettere senili di Francesco Petrarca. Volgarizzate e dichiarate con note*, vol. 1, ed. by Giuseppe Fracassetti, Firenze 1892, Sen. I. 5, pp. 32–49; cf. Bergdolt, *Arzt* (see note 53), pp. 131–132.

56 Petrarca, *Lettere senili*, ed. by Fracassetti (see note 55), vol. 2, sen. XII. 1–2, pp. 207–268.

57 Dondi obviously refers to Galen “De sanitate tuenda”, ch. V. 4 (VI, 332 Kühn), whereby he ignores the Hippocratic aphorism I. 13 (see note 44).

58 Bergdolt, *Arzt* (see note 53), pp. 117, 120–125; cf. also the interpretation by Scynthia Skenazy, *Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance. Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne*, Leiden 2013 (*Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts* 11), pp. 23–25.

59 Bergdolt, *Arzt* (see note 53), p. 125.

in 1489, and thus in the transitional period to early modern times. Medieval specialist knowledge nevertheless still prevailed, but the rhetoric and style of the two authors allude to the humanist Renaissance. Despite the similarities, each author approaches the subject in a very different way. This is a result of their biographies and their academic environment.

The first of them, Gabriele Zerbi, taught philosophy and medicine, wrote works on Aristotelian metaphysics, anatomy, deontology and pathology; despite his interest in new medical topics, he remained closely connected to the university and its scholasticism throughout his life – unlike Petrarch or his contemporary Marsilio Ficino. The title of Zerbi's "Gerontocomia"<sup>60</sup> readily resorts to a notion introduced in medicine by Galen in his 5<sup>th</sup> book of "De sanitate tuenda": the "Gerokomikon". Following Galen, this medical field concerns the care of the elderly. The Greek title already announces the humanist program: going back to the roots of proto-geriatric knowledge. Consequently, Zerbi regularly quotes Galen and Pliny, and occasionally the Islamic authorities, alongside Aristotle and the Roman poets (here exhaustively Juvenal and Maximianus, but also Horace). A novelty is the envisioning of a caregiver or geriatrician (*gerontokomos* in Greek) for the elderly, who is responsible for supervising the treatment of elderly people. This should not be interpreted as a sign of geriatric professionalisation, it is simply a humanist title referring to a personal physician for which the author applied at the papal court. Regarding content, the work takes up the program of the anonymous "Epistola de retardatione accidentum senectutis". Approximately 80 % of its contents concern dietetics, yet similarly to the "Epistola", a distinction is made between a classical conservative and a restoring ("resumptive") therapeutical regime: in the former, treatment concentrates on the cold-dry constitution, while in the latter it is directed against it. A positive impact on the emotions, concurrent with the "Epistola", can be generated by stimulation of the senses through pleasant impressions and conversation – which is also typical for Humanism. Some of the traditional *occulta* such as potable gold, pearls, amber and human blood are mentioned in the concluding medicinal advice. Before going into this comprehensive dietetic-therapeutical part, Zerbi – analogous to the "Epistola" – describes pathophysiology, outlining the causes of ageing and briefly discusses the characteristics of longevity.

60 Zerbi, Gerontocomia (see note 20). – About Zerbi cf. the introduction of Lind in his translation; Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerontocomia. On the Care of the Aged and Maximianus. Elegies on Old age and Love*, transl. by Levi R. Lind, Philadelphia 1988 (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 182), pp. 3–16; Levi R. Lind, *Studies in Pre-Vesalian Anatomy. Biography, Translations, Documents*, Philadelphia 1975 (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 104), pp. 1–18; Ladislao Münster, *Il primo trattato pratico compiuto sui problemi della vecchiaia. La 'Gerontocomia' di Gabriele Zerbi*, in: *Rivista di Gerontologia e Geriatria* 1 (1951), pp. 38–54.

Astrological aspects appear rather casually, yet the names of the planets and the signs of the Zodiac serve as metaphors. And just as the “Epistola” had originated in the Roman setting 250 years previously, so the “Gerontokomia” was also published in Rome and dedicated to the morbid 57 year old Pope Innocent VIII – the gerontocratic *curia* had not lost its interest in elderly care and longevity. Almost no one beyond this circle of clerics took notice of Zerbi’s exhaustive work that lacked innovative content in spite of its thoroughness, and there was no reprint of it. Only a few copies have survived.

In this respect, it clearly differs from the considerably shorter writing “De vita longa” of his older contemporary Marsilio Ficino, that saw 30 editions until the 17<sup>th</sup> century within the complete work of “De vita libri”. Ficino was the son of a physician; he was trained in the *artes liberales* and medicine but is said to have only occasionally practiced medicine. He was the author of a vernacular plague-guide. In the 1480s, however, his Florentine milieu mainly celebrated him for his translations of, and commentaries on, Plato and Plotinus. According to his own statements, he combined the writing of “De vita longa” with the reading of the treatise “De retardanda senectute” (maybe there is talk here of the anonymous “Epistola” which, already in the days of Ficino, was disseminated under the names of Arnau de Vilanova or Roger Bacon).<sup>61</sup> At any rate, “De vita longa” is clearly reminiscent of the medieval tradition, but independently adds neoplatonic elements to the proto-geriatric theme. After having discussed the physiology of the elderly and dietetics in a rather conventional way, he turns his attention to the speculative means and methods directed to the prolongation of life; unlike Zerbi he is not convinced of the inescapability of ageing. He allows, not only for rhetorical reasons, the advice for a long life to be conveyed by the personified planets: Saturn is both the symbol of macrocosmic power and of microcosmic melancholic constitution and lifestyle, which is typical of scholars. The slowest of all planets induces the inward regression of the vital spirit (“spiritus”); this results in a gradual ageing of the external parts of the body and a suffocation of the vital flame. Venus, in contrast, drives the spirit outward, provoking a rapid inner ageing: by having sexual intercourse the vital flame is virtually blown out.

61 Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life. A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes*, ed. by Carol V. Kaske / John R. Clark, Tempe, AR 20198 (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 57), pp. 164–235. According to the “editorial introduction” (ibid., p. 7), “De vita longa” was the last of three books, and not the second as it appears in its first edition. Ficino read the treatise “De retardanda senectute” in August 1489, assuming its author was Arnau de Vilanova.

## 5 Conclusions

With the following questions I come to the end of my remarks: is the simultaneous publication of two such comprehensive proto-geriatric works at the end of the Middle Ages the harbinger of a new development in proto-geriatrics? What is the role of Humanism in this context?

A differentiated answer to these questions could be that the reviewed texts convey both. On the one hand, the sophisticated medieval knowledge is shown by the inclusion of Islamic and Aristotelian texts (and henceforth also authentic Galenic writings), where previously this knowledge seldom encroached upon non-medical texts. On the other hand (as shown in Petrarch) the humanist interest in the life of the scholar (in other words, reflecting on one's own life) is linked to the thought that it is also important in old age to individually conserve and extend this life. The simultaneous publication of two such differing works may have been triggered by the reception of Cicero's "Cato Maior" and Seneca's "Letters to Lucilius", that drew humanist interest in old age. Both texts also disclose that proto-geriatrics reached a crossroads around 1500: even though Gabriele Zerbi had ample recourse to ancient, also non-medical sources, he rather followed the traditional program of medical care of the aged which learned medicine, by means of individual gerocomies, adhered to until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, proto-geriatrics elucidates the process of ageing and principally advocates a dietetic treatment aimed at a small group of affluent clients who strove to retard this process and who wanted to alleviate individual complaints; beyond this no further promises were made.<sup>62</sup>

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward, one can observe a further development. Around 1350, the proto-geriatric discourse was modified by the reception of the "Parva naturalia" and alchemical works in the direction of a prolongation of life and rejuvenation. Ficino further developed it by resorting to neoplatonic and astrological sources. Around 40 years later, Paracelsus broke with learned proto-geriatrics once and for all. His gerontological works were influenced by Ficino and the quantity of dietetic matter further decreased, while that of alchemical increased.<sup>63</sup> From then on, the learned medicine of ageing and the art of extending life 'each went its own way' – an evolution that can be followed up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Humanism only played a minor and temporary role in terms of a further development of proto-geriatrics, and did not promote the unfolding

62 Researched in detail in Schäfer, *Old Age* (see note 20), pp. 41–99.

63 Thomas Willard, *Living the Long Life. Physical and Spiritual Health in Two Early Paracelsian Tracts*, in: Classen (Ed.), *Religion* (see note 37), pp. 347–380.

of a subdiscipline. However, as a mind-set that overcame the narrow medical canon,<sup>64</sup> Humanism could have been crucial for the genesis of the paramedical gerontology.

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64 On the hardly definable relationship between medicine and the Renaissance, cf. Richard Toellner, *Zum Begriff der Autorität in der Medizin der Renaissance*, in: Rudolf Schmitz / Gundolf Keil (Eds.), *Humanismus und Medizin*, Weinheim 1984 (Mitteilungen der Kommission für Humanismusforschung XI), pp. 159–179, at pp. 159–161.

# The Treatment of Old Age at Court

## The Kings of Sicily from Roger II to Martin II (11<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> Century)

### Abstract

According to Galenic theory, old age is not regarded as an unavoidable degenerative process, but as a stage of life in which it is possible to maintain health and prolong life. The aspiration to delay the ailments of old age inspired the thought and work of the philosophers and doctors who became figures of reference for the Sicilian kings, by recalling and re-proposing the myth of the *prolongatio vitae*. This contribution aims to focus on the strategies followed by the kings of Sicily who lived comparatively long, from Roger II (1095–1154), the founder of the Sicilian monarchy, to Martin II called “the Elder” (1356–1410), king of Aragon and Sicily, by analysing the cultural context of the various royal dynasties that ruled the island (Normans, Swabians, Angevins and Aragonese). The concept of old age is relative and must be seen in its historical development. The cases analysed here concern kings who were about sixty years old which is an age that today is not considered to be advanced. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, general health manuals, the *regimina sanitatis*, were written for rulers to preserve youth and delay the onset of old age through the use of specific dietetic rules and therapeutic means, starting from the studies on the influence of the environment on man. Special attention will be paid to the reflections of the Catalan physician and philosopher Arnau de Vilanova, who was active at the court of Frederick III of Aragon in Sicily.

### 1 Introduction

We have a precious testimony regarding the perception of old age in the Middle Ages: describing the events of the Sicilian Vespers, Saba Malaspina captures the state of mind of Charles I of Anjou, king of Naples, who felt uneasy about by the invitation of King Peter III of Aragon, to resolve the conflicts in the Kingdom of Sicily through a duel.

The reference is here to the “Bordeaux duel” (1283).<sup>1</sup> Charles of Anjou, who was then 57 years old, did not feel able to face the duel due to his lack of agility. In the description of Charles’ feelings which is given by the Roman chronicler Saba Malaspina, old age is not a time of rest but rather one of deprivation that torments him and, mingling with memories of his past youth, fills him with anxiety. The Angevin sovereign explains that he would not have avoided the challenge if he had been younger, because “the blood in our body goes cold by torpid old age, and the already exhausted forces are, so to speak, being frozen in the parts of the body”.<sup>2</sup> We have to emphasize that the challenger, Peter III, was 13 years younger than Charles I, thus at the time of the duel he was 44 years old, and was still considered to be young.

Not neutral and not static, the concept of old age has, as is known, many different meanings – psychological, chronological, biological, sociological – depending on culture and time. How old age is seen, is also conditioned by environment and circumstances.<sup>3</sup> For example, Christianity inculcated the concept with an expression of human frailty. Only gradually would there be an aspiration to improve earthly life, and the problem of the extension of the life span and the preservation of the body be increasingly placed at the centre of attention, in the obsessive search for what can keep it beautiful and make it immortal.<sup>4</sup> A more difficult question, then, arises concerning old age in the Middle Ages. How old was “old” in the Middle Ages, and who actually reached old age? Though statistics on life expectancy and longevity were not collected in the medieval period, studies point to a correlation between socio-economic status and longevity, obviously taking into account factors such as plague and other disasters.<sup>5</sup>

1 Fulvio Delle Donne, *Le armi, l'onore e la propaganda. Il mancato duello tra Carlo d'Angiò e Pietro d'Aragona*, in: *Studi storici* 44,1 (2003), pp. 95–109.

2 “Tardante senecta gelidus in nostro corpore sanguis hebet, unde vires jam effactae quodammodo frigent in artubus congelatae” (Saba Malaspina, *Rerum Sicularum Historia* [1250–1285], in: *Cronisti e scrittori sincroni napoletani*, ed. by Giuseppe Del Re, vol. 2, Napoli 1868, pp. 201–408, lib. IX, ch. XXIV, p. 371).

3 W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers. Gerontology Emerges as a Science*, Cambridge-New York 1995; Malcolm L. Johnson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing*, Cambridge-New York 2005; Chris Gilleard, *Aging and Old Age in Medieval Society and the Transition of Modernity*, in: *Journal of Aging and Identity* 7,1 (2002), pp. 25–41.

4 Salvatore Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia. Uomo e natura dall'XI al XIII secolo*, Torino 1999 (Biblioteca di cultura storica 221), pp. 287, 311.

5 Sarah M. Anderson, *Old Age*, in: Albrecht Classen (Ed.), *Handbook of Medieval Culture. Fundamental Aspects and Conditions of the European Middle Ages*, 3 vols., Berlin-Boston 2015, vol. 2, pp. 1281–1323, at pp. 1284–1285. Contrary to the accepted view that people in the Middle

Furthermore, as Philippe Ariès noted, two currents or lines of historical research on old age can be distinguished: the history of the “real roles”, i. e. the position of the elderly in society, on the one hand, and the history of “representations”, i. e. socially generated images, on the other hand.<sup>6</sup> For a long time, the subject has remained at the margins of historians’ interests: medievalist research has only begun to devote itself to questions of old age since the 1980s, mainly thanks to contributions from scholars from English speaking countries. Another starting point is French historiography, most notably and still Georges Minois’ 1987 work. Recent essays have helped to bring the issue again to the centre of historical interest.<sup>7</sup> In Italy, medieval studies regarding old age are rather rare to find. As for Sicily in particular, which is the area analysed in this article, studies on the subject are completely absent, apart from some aspects derived from the many writings of Salvatore Tramontana.<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to tackle this historiographical gap, we will proceed by illustrating the relationship of some sovereigns of Sicily during the period between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century with the care of the body, a theme closely related to old age.

The purpose here is thus to focus on the strategies followed by the Sicilian kings to maintain their health and to increase their longevity, by examining the social and cultural contexts of the island during the various royal dynasties that succeeded one another over the course of only a few centuries: Arabs, Normans, Swabians, Angevins, and Aragonese. The concept of old age we have today must also be relativized, as the cases

Ages and the Renaissance were considered old from their forties onward, in fact they were only classified as old between the ages of 60 and 70; what mattered in most people’s lives was their functional capacity, rather than strict chronological age: Shulamith Shahar, *Who Were the Old in the Middle Age?*, in: *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 6,3 (1993), pp. 313–341; ead., *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, New York-London 1997. Cf. Michael E. Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age. The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought, 1250–1350*, Lanham-New York-London 1989.

6 Philippe Ariès, *Une histoire de la vieillesse?*, in: *Communications* 37 (1983), pp. 47–54, at p. 47.

7 Georges Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse en Occident. De l’Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris 1987 (*Nouvelles études historiques*) (id., *Storia della vecchiaia dall’Antichità al Rinascimento*, Roma-Bari 1988 [*Storia e società*] [Italian translation]); Christian Alexander Neumann, *Perspektiven einer Gerontomediävistik*, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 98 (2018), pp. 387–405.

8 In addition to the essay already cited (see note 4), we refer to the following contributions: Salvatore Tramontana, *La monarchia normanna e sveva*, Torino 1986 (*Storia d’Italia* 3); id., *L’effimero nella Sicilia normanna*, Palermo 1988 (*Biblioteca siciliana di storia e letteratura. Quaderni* 4); id., *Gli anni del Vespro. L’immaginario, la cronaca, la storia*, Bari 1989 (*Storia e civiltà* 25); *Vestirsi e travestirsi in Sicilia. Abbigliamento, feste e spettacoli nel Medioevo*, Palermo 1993 (*Prisma* 153).

analysed here concern kings who were about 60 years old. Therefore, it is evident that the environment in which they grew old was the court. In some studies, it is regarded as a generic political and social entity, and as a legal and administrative institution. If we consider the court from a certain point of view, it is a place where a particular culture is elaborated. The court was a meeting place, where cultural and political elites are integrated and reciprocally conditioned, and a centre of creation and fruition of artistic and literary works.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, the Norman and Swabian courts stand out, with Roger II and Frederick II who distinguish themselves by the quality of the historical evidence that has been transmitted about them.<sup>10</sup>

The court comprised also the privileged circle of people who assisted the king in official functions, ensuring the safety and ease of his life.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the Sicily, we focus our attention on the thought and work of those (philosophers and physicians) who became prominent figures for the sovereigns, and who were often motivated by the aspiration to delay the ailments of old age, by recalling and re-proposing the myth of *prolongatio vitae*. We will see how, progressively, the problem of longevity and preservation of the body will be increasingly placed at the centre of attention, culminating in the obsessive search for what could maintain its beauty and make it immortal. With regard to the sources and methods related to the case studies presented, particular emphasis will be given to medical treatises, iconography, and chronicles by following a descriptive and comparative method of analysis, in the wake of a cultural history.

## 2 The Kings of Sicily (11<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> Century)

It has been calculated that, if one examines the life span of the kings of France, death beyond the age of 50 or 55 years was a rare exception.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the popes, the kings were young: there was no ‘dogma’ that made them accede to the throne as young men. Rather, the dynastic principle was decisive: their predecessors died relatively young, and they inherited the throne while they were still young. Of all European kings from the 11<sup>th</sup>

9 Francesco Tateo, *La cultura nelle corti*, in: Giosuè Musca (Ed.), *Centri di produzione della cultura nel Mezzogiorno normanno-svevo*, Bari 1997 (Centro di Studi Normanno-Svevi, Bari. Atti 12), pp. 41–54, at p. 42; Aurelio Roncaglia, *Le corti medievali*, in: *Letteratura italiana*, 2 vols., Torino 1982, vol. 1: *Il letterato e le istituzioni*, pp. 33–147, at p. 33.

10 Tateo, *La cultura della corti* (see note 9), p. 44.

11 Roncaglia, *Le corti medievali* (see note 9), p. 35.

12 Jacques Le Goff, *Il corpo nel Medioevo*, Roma-Bari 2017, p. 88.

to the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, only Alfonso VI, king of Castile and León (1030–1109), reached the age of 79. And only three of the kings of Aragon reached their sixties: James II (1264–1327) was 63 when he died while James I (1208–1276) and Peter IV (1319–1387) both died at the age of 68. All the others, in all countries, died younger.<sup>13</sup>

In Sicily, among the oldest kings were Roger II (58 years old) and Martin the Elder (53 years old), who died in a desperate attempt, it seems, to have an heir. Did Frederick III of Aragon perhaps reach the age of 60 thanks to the advice of Arnau de Vilanova? With the exception of William II, who died at the age of 36 in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the cases of death of kings before the age of 40 are related to the difficult years following the Black Death, which arrived in Messina in 1347 and spread throughout Europe from there on.<sup>14</sup>

The following table shows, for the kings of Sicily from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, whether or not they reached an age that can be considered elderly (see table 1). It shows the names of the kings of the various ruling dynasties (Normans, Swabians, Angevins, and Aragonese) starting from the founder of the *Regnum Siciliae*, Roger II, and including their date of birth and death as well as their age at the time of death.

Tab.: The Kings of Sicily (11<sup>th</sup>–first half of 15<sup>th</sup> Century)

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Age at Death
Roger II	22 December 1095	26 February 1154	58 years
William I	May 1120	7 May 1166	46 years
William II	December 1153	18 November 1189	36 years
Frederick II of Swabia	26 December 1194	13 December 1250	56 years
Conrad IV of Swabia	25 (or 26) April 1228	21 May 1254	26 years
Conradin (Corradino) of Swabia	25 March 1252	29 October 1268	16 years: violent death
Manfred of Sicily	1232	26 February 1266	34 years: violent death (Battle of Benevento)
Charles I of Anjou	March 1226	7 January 1285	58 years
Peter III of Aragon, I of Sicily	July 1239/1240	11 November 1285	45/46 years

13 Shulamith Shahar, *Old Age in the High and Late Middle Ages. Image, expectation and status*, in: Paul Johnson/Pat Thane (Eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, London-New York 1998, pp. 43–63, at p. 56.

14 Cf. the vivid description of the disease in Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, ed. by Antonino Giuffrida, Palermo 1980 (Fonti per la storia di Sicilia 3), ch. 29, pp. 84–87.

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Age at Death
James II of Aragon	10 (?) August 1264	5 November 1327	63 years
Frederick III of Aragon, king of Trinacria	13 December 1273/1274	25 June 1337	63/64 years
Peter II, king of Trinacria	1305	August 1342	37 years
Ludovico of Aragon, king of Trinacria	4 February 1338	16 October 1355	17 years:plague
Frederick IV of Aragon, king of Trinacria	4 December 1342	27 July 1377	34 years
Martin I, called "the Younger", king of Sicily	25 July 1374	25 July 1409	35 years:malaria
Martin I, king of Aragon, II, king of Sicily, called "the Elder"	29 July 1356	31 May 1410	53 years
Ferdinand I of Aragon	27 November 1380	2 April 1416	35 years
Alfonso V called "the Magnanimous", king of Aragon	24 February 1396	27 June 1458	62 years

### 3 Roger II (1095–1154) and the First Norman Kings

At the age of 35, at Christmas 1130, Roger II was crowned king of Sicily in the Cathedral of Palermo, unifying southern Italy and Sicily under his rule. A brilliant organizer, Roger (it seems he was burly and had a 'lion' face), protected the arts, sciences and letters and gave input for the creation of extraordinary monuments, such as the Palatine Chapel in Palermo and the Cathedral of Cefalù.<sup>15</sup> The meeting between Greco-Byzantine and Arab-Muslim traditions at the court of Sicily generated an unprecedented flourishing of activities in various respects, in the name of cultural pluralism. These traditions converged in a fruitful manner, especially in the scientific-philosophical sector. In 1153, Roger II ordered an Islamic intellectual hosted at court, al-Idrisi (1100–1165), to write a description of the world – in truth above all of Sicily, the South and the rest of Italy. The king himself participated in the writing thanks to his naturalistic, astrological and mathematical-geometric interests, that were attested to since his youth. It is the so-called "Book of Roger" (written in Arabic), whose main purpose was the acquisition of updated

15 Cf. Giuseppe Bellafiore, *Architettura in Sicilia nelle età islamica e normanna (827–1194)*, Palermo 1990 (*La civiltà siciliana* 1).

information of military and economic importance of the lands of which the Hauteville was lord or with which he interacted. To confirm his scientific-technological interests, the king had a water clock made in 1142, on the model of similar clocks existing in the Islamic world. His library was well equipped with Greek codices dedicated to natural sciences which showed his broad cultural interest.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the influence of Arab culture can also be seen in those privileged spaces (*loca amoena*) which, conveyed by Arab traditions, characterized the Norman Kingdom of Sicily, dotted with places of bodily and spiritual pleasure, parks and gardens for the rest and recreation of the king and his court.<sup>17</sup> Those spaces were closed to most people, as “la création de ces lieux de loisir est un acte de pouvoir royal”.<sup>18</sup> Among the tempera paintings that adorn the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel, all dating prior to 1150,<sup>19</sup> some illustrate the prince’s and court’s pleasures: the symposium with courtiers, hunting, a game of chess, musicians with psaltery, lute and tambourine, singers, dancers, jugglers, acrobats, wrestlers, and zoomancies, a king (Roger II?) with a wine cup. An iconographic documentation that, although stylised, succeeds in directly bearing witness to the climate at Roger’s court.<sup>20</sup> It is an atmosphere in which wine, songs, water, wonderful homes, beauty, and fragrant gardens serve to reinvigorate body and spirit. The refined comforts of life at court in the times of Roger II were also celebrated by the Arab-Sicilian poets, one of whom was responsible for some verses about wine: “Fa circolare il vino vecchio, dorato, e bevi da mane a sera: bevi al suono del liuto e dei canti degni di Ma’bad!”<sup>21</sup> Wine that, as sung by an anonymous poet who lived in the preceding age of the Emirate

16 Francesco Paolo Tocco, Ruggero II, re di Sicilia, in: Dizionario biografico degli Italiani (= DBI), vol. 89, Roma 2017, pp. 212–218.

17 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 381.

18 Joël Blanchard, *Le corps du roi. Mélancolie et “recreation”. Implications médicales et culturelles du loisir des princes à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in: id., *Représentation, pouvoir et royauté à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Paris 1995, pp. 199–214, at p. 200. Cf. Daniela Santoro, *Salute del re, salute del popolo. Mangiare e curarsi nella Sicilia medievale*, in: *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 43,1 (2013), pp. 259–289, at pp. 278–279. “The creation of these places of recreation is an act of royal power” (own translation).

19 Cf. Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Roma 1950.

20 Roncaglia, *Le corti medievali* (see note 9), p. 100.

21 Francesco Gabrieli/Umberto Scerrato, *Gli Arabi in Italia: cultura, contatti e tradizioni*, Milano 1985 (*Antica madre*), p. 738. “Pass around the old, golden wine and drink from morn to night: drink to the sound of the lute and the songs worthy of Ma’bad” (own translation).

of Sicily, in Palermo: “scorre nel corpo con effetto di farmaco, scorre come l’acqua alle radici delle piante”.<sup>22</sup>

The same exotic and refined atmosphere characterised the court of the successive kings, William I (1120–1166) and William II (1153–1189), in which Romualdo Guarna, physician and archbishop of Salerno, stands out in the dual role of doctor and counselor.<sup>23</sup> In Lent of 1166, William I was stricken with dysentery and fevers (“fluxu ventris et molestia cepit affligi”) and Romualdo, “who was very experienced in the art of medicine” (“qui in arte erat medicine valde peritus”) was summoned to attempt a cure and “and he gave him [the king] much useful advice” (“cui multa salutaria medicine consilia tribuit”). The king – as Romuald says in his “Chronicon” – trusted in his intelligence and the physician “only administered him remedies that seemed beneficial to him” (“sibi nonnisi que ei oportuna videbantur medicamina adhibebat”).<sup>24</sup> Despite all those efforts William made his last will and died on 7 May 1166 in Palermo, at the age of 46.

William II, according to the description given by Ibn Giubair (1145–1217), was surrounded by doctors and astrologers to on whom he lavished every attention. He was also able to read and write Arabic.<sup>25</sup> The prestige maintained by Arab medicine is demonstrated, among other things, by the image handed down by Peter of Eboli which shows William II on his deathbed, surrounded by an Arab astrologer consulting the stars and an Arab doctor, Achim, inspecting the urine in the matula.<sup>26</sup> William II died in 1189, having not yet reached the age of 36.

22 Umberto Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura nella Sicilia saracena*, Palermo 1975 (Biblioteca di letteratura e storia. Saggi e testi 5), p. 180. The therapeutic value of wine was recognised by the *regimen sanitatis* of the Salernitan School, that used it for pharmaceutical preparations (Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* [see note 4], p. 220). “It flows through the body acting like a remedy, it flows like water through the roots of plants” (own translation).

23 Massimo Oldoni, Guarna, Romualdo, in: *DBI*, vol. 60, Roma 2003, pp. 400–403.

24 Romualdus Salernitanus, *Romualdi Salernitani Chronicon*, ed. by Carlo Alberto Garufi, Bologna 1914–1935 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*. Nuova edizione 7,1), p. 253; Francesco Panarelli, Guglielmo I d’Altavilla. Re di Sicilia, in: *DBI*, vol. 60, Roma 2003, pp. 778–784; id., Guglielmo II d’Altavilla. Re di Sicilia, in: *ibid.*, pp. 784–792. On Romuald’s “Chronicon”, cf. Marino Zabbia, Romualdo Guarna arcivescovo di Salerno e la sua Cronaca, in: Paolo Delogu / Paolo Peduto (Eds.), *Salerno nel XII secolo. Istituzioni, società, cultura. Atti del convegno internazionale, Raito di Vietri sul Mare, Auditorium di Villa Guariglia, 16–20 giugno 1999*, Salerno 2004, pp. 380–398.

25 Gabrieli / Scerrato, *Gli Arabi in Italia* (see note 21), p. 741.

26 Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis*. Codex 120 II der Burgerbibliothek Bern. Eine Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit, ed. by Theo Kölzer / Marlis Stähli, Sigmaringen 1994, p. 43 (fol. 97r).

#### 4 Frederick II (1194–1250) and the Obsession with Immortality

Even the Swabian Sicily of the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was, at least at court, an original amalgamation of flavours of different origins. The emperor's cultural profile is well known: he devoted himself to art, literature and science with an intensity and an open-mindedness that generated both wonder and fascination.<sup>27</sup> Some ecclesiastical authors were scandalized by his behaviour and pointed out that he bathed every day, even on holidays.<sup>28</sup> At the Norman and Swabian courts, baths were considered an essential component of physical well-being. The practice in Sicily followed Muslim customs as it was viewed as a significant form of attention to the body, promoting both physical well-being and mental balance.<sup>29</sup> In the baths, the therapeutic virtue of water was suitable for treating various illnesses: cataract, rheumatism, arthritis, gout, spasms, fevers, ulcers, and sciatica. Frederick II – inspirer of the poem “De balneis Puteolanis” of Peter of Eboli, on the healing properties of the thermal waters in the area between Pozzuoli and Baia – had the opportunity to personally experience the benefits of the Pozzuoli baths.

The court of Frederick II was characterized by the presence of intellectuals of different backgrounds and training. Michael Scot, a Scottish philosopher, was hosted for several years as court astrologer. His life was accompanied by legends that attest to his skills as a magician, and he used these skills to improve the emperor's life. Scot wrote to Frederick II: “O good emperor, I firmly believe that if in this world there was a man capable to escape time and therefore death because of his knowledge, this man would be you”.<sup>30</sup> The key to immortality is seen in knowledge and wisdom. The vigour and beauty of the body is an asset to be preserved even in old age: through recourse to dreams, imagination and science.<sup>31</sup> The quality of life influences biological destiny. “Many” – wrote a disgraced courtier to Frederick II – “grow old through age, but I grow old not through the passing of time, but through pain”.<sup>32</sup> According to Saba Malaspina, “when he [Frederick II] devoted himself deeply to the study of nature, he very much adored astrologers,

27 Cf. Pierre Toubert / Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Eds.), *Federico II e le scienze*, Palermo 1994 (Micrologus 2).

28 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 374.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 230–232.

30 Antonino DeStefano, *La cultura alla corte di Federico II imperatore*, Palermo 1938, p. 15. On Scotus's advice to the emperor, cf. Raoul Manselli, *La corte di Federico II e Michele Scotto*, in: *L'Averroismo in Italia*, Roma 1979 (Atti dei convegni lincei 40), pp. 63–80, at pp. 70–71.

31 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), pp. 296–297.

32 Umberto Rizzitano / Francesco Giunta, *Terra senza crociati*, Palermo 1967, p. 161.

necromancers and people who practised divination”: following their interpretations, the emperor wanted to be immortal *contra naturam corporis*.<sup>33</sup>

Frederick II is the dedicatee of several treaties dealing with the preservation of health. The “*Epistola magistri Petri Hispani missa ad imperatorem Fridericum super regimen sanitatis*” states that care for the body and the soul must go hand in hand, including healthy sexual relations.<sup>34</sup> For Peter of Spain (Petrus Hispanus) – who held the chair of medicine in Siena between 1245 and 1250 and was later elected pope under the name of John XXI – the only way to delay the progressive deterioration of the body’s functionality and to prolong life was to live in a sober way.<sup>35</sup> It is again worth noting that particular attention was paid to the body, its functioning and its sensitivity at Frederick’s multifaceted court:<sup>36</sup> it was a place where the heritage of ideas and methods derived from the encounter between Byzantine, Arabic and Latin experiences circulated. In 1234, Frederick II had the book that Aldebrandin of Siena (Aldobrandino da Siena) dedicated to the “*régime du corps*” translated from Greek into Latin and from Latin into the *langue d’oïl*: attention was given to hygiene based on a reworking of Greek, Arabic and Hebrew texts and to dietetics with the aim to better know the human body, to preserve health, and to remove diseases, as it is said in the prologue.<sup>37</sup> The treatise by Adam of Cremona (Adamo da Cremona) – “*Tractatus de regimine iter agentium vel peregrinantium*” – was also dedicated to Frederick II, highlighting the link between environmental factors, sanitary structures (bathhouses above all), levels and quality of food and contagion.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of the reception of the dietary precepts of Greek and Arab medicine, Frederick II entrusted his health to a physician, Master Theodore, who had learned medicine in Baghdad prior to arriving at the court of the Swabian emperor, where he would

33 “Dum subtili indagazione naturalia vestigabat, astrologous et nigromanticos adeo venerabatur et aruspices” (Malaspina, *Rerum sicularum Historia* [see note 2], lib. I, ch. II, p. 208; Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* [see note 4], p. 297).

34 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 298; MaryFrances Wack, *The Measure of Pleasure. Peter of Spain on Men, Women and Lovesickness*, in: *Viator* 18 (1986), pp. 173–196.

35 On Peter of Spain’s relations with the Swabian court, cf. *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. by Brian Lawn, London 1979 (*Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi* 5), pp. 76–78.

36 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 370.

37 Aldobrandino da Siena, *Le régime du corps. Texte français du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Louis Landouzy/Roger Pepin, Paris 1911, pp. 3–7. Aldobrandino recommends frequent bathing to keep the body agile (*ibid.*, p. 25). Cf. Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 372.

38 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 313.

remain for many years in a variety of roles.<sup>39</sup> At the special request of the emperor, Theodore of Antioch compiled a treaty on hygiene as a letter, the “*Epistola Theodori philosophi ad imperatorem Fridericum*”, where he insists on the advice to eat little.<sup>40</sup> Dietetics and gastronomy proceeded symbiotically, and the authors of medical texts established a connection between cuisine and medicine,<sup>41</sup> “like Siamese twins”, “des sortes de soeurs siamoises”.<sup>42</sup> Food causes can cause illness, so Frederick II paid particular attention to its use:<sup>43</sup> a chronicler reports that the king took only one meal a day, in order to keep his body flexible, elastic and elegant. Among Theodore’s other advice in the mentioned *regimen sanitatis*, was the recommendation to walk “through pleasant and delightful places” (“per amena et delectabilia loca”) after lunch and to indulge in good wine: “quod non erit acetosum, turbidum, novum, acerbum, nigrum, grossum, sed bene digestum, desecatum, aureum, odoriferum et vetustum”.<sup>44</sup> In addition to symbolic meanings, wine is recognised as having important hygienic and medicinal virtues: it aids digestion, is suitable for all ages, and is the first remedy for the weakness of the sick organism.<sup>45</sup>

Wine is also an important aspect in the work of the English philosopher and Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–post 1292) that shows the aspiration to delay the ailments of old age, recalling and re-proposing the myth of the *prolongatio vitae* – a vi-

39 Charles Burnett, Master Theodore. Frederick II’s philosopher, in: Federico II e le nuove culture, Spoleto 1995 (Centro Italiano di Studi sul Basso Medioevo, Todi. Nuova Serie 8), pp. 225–285; Laura Minervini, Teodoro di Antiochia, in: DBI, vol. 95, Roma 2019, pp. 366–368.

40 Henri Bresc, Il cibo nella Sicilia medievale, Palermo 2019 (Frammenti 17), p. 100.

41 Marilyn Nicoud, Savoirs et pratiques diététiques au Moyen Âge, in: Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes 13 (2006), pp. 239–247, at p. 240.

42 Danielle Jacquart, La nourriture et le corps au Moyen Âge, in: Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes 13 (2006), pp. 259–266, at p. 260.

43 Anna Martellotti, I ricettari di Federico II. Dal “Meridionale” al “Liber de coquina”, Firenze 2005 (Biblioteca dell’Archivum Romanicum. Ser. 1. Storia, letteratura, paleografia 326), pp. 99, 117, 134.

44 Santoro, Salute del re (see note 18), p. 261. “Which is not sour, turbid, new, bitter, black, heavy, but well arranged, drained, golden, fragrant and aged” (own translation).

45 Mireille Ausécache, Des aliments et des médicaments, in: Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes 13 (2006), pp. 249–258, at p. 257; Tramontana, Il Regno di Sicilia (see note 4), pp. 209–210.

sion of life that is not specific to medieval mentality.<sup>46</sup> Through the court of Frederick II, Bacon had known Aristotle and the Arab philosophers.<sup>47</sup> According to Bacon, gaiety, song, the vision of human beauty, spices, wine, hot water, baths, and so on, are medicines useful to diminish, delay, and eliminate the problems of the ageing already in youth, the infirmities of old age, and the weakness and diseases of decrepitude in extreme old age.<sup>48</sup> While the West discovered alchemy from the Arab world, above all thanks to the intensification of cultural exchanges between Christians and Muslims after the Norman conquest of Sicily,<sup>49</sup> Bacon was surrounded by an aura of mystery, as a necromancer, magician, alchemist and prophet. Gold as an elixir was at the centre of his theories on a possible way to extend human life. The alchemist must prepare gold so that it can be used in food and drink: thus, taken by a human being, gold can transform and protect the body from all illness and prolong life.<sup>50</sup>

Frederick II died before his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday, assisted by his physicians, including Giovanni da Procida (c. 1210–c. 1298),<sup>51</sup> an extraordinary and long-lived personality. He died in his eighties and was the physician and confidant of Frederick, of his son Manfred<sup>52</sup> and also of King Peter III of Aragon who, after the Vespers (31 January 1284), appointed him chancellor of the Kingdom of Sicily for the rest of his life in recognition of his

46 Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Ruggero Bacone. Bonifacio VIII e la teoria della *prolongatio vitae*, in: *Medicina e scienze della natura alla corte dei Papi del Duecento*, Spoleto 1991 (Medioevo latino. Biblioteca 4), pp. 329–361.

47 De Stefano, *La cultura* (see note 30), pp. 36–37; Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 356.

48 Roger Bacon, *The Cure of Old age and Preservation of Youth*, transl. by Richard Browne, London 1683, p. 148.

49 Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 341; Eric John Holmyard, *Storia dell'alchimia*, Firenze 1972 (Biblioteca Sansoni).

50 Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Età della vita*, in: Jacques Le Goff/Jean-Claude Schmitt (Eds.), *Dizionario dell'Occidente medievale*, 2 vols., Torino 2003, vol. 1, pp. 385–397. Cf. Michele Pereira, *Un tesoro inestimabile. Elixir e prolongatio vitae nell'alchimia del '300*, in: *Micrologus* 1 (1993), pp. 161–187.

51 Salvatore Fodale, *Procida, Giovanni da*, in: *DBI*, vol. 85, Roma 2016, pp. 475–478. As a physician, he was credited with a work entitled “*Utilissima practica medica*”, an electuary for rheumatism, prescriptions against thirst and kidney and bladder stones, and translations from Greek and Arabic.

52 Daniela Santoro, *Medici del re nella Sicilia aragonese*, in: Elisa Andretta/Marilyn Nicoud (Eds.), *Être médecin à la cour (Italie, France, Espagne, XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Firenze 2013 (Micrologus Library 52), pp. 87–104, at p. 88.

fame and merits.<sup>53</sup> During the course of his long and adventurous life, Giovanni spent much time travelling between Sicily, Rome and the Iberian Peninsula, for the successors of the Swabian sovereigns up to James II of Aragon, Queen Constance and Frederick III of Aragon, king of “Trinacria” (as the island of Sicily was later named after the Vespers and the Peace of Caltabellotta in 1302). To Pope Nicholas IV, then in his sixties, who received him as ambassador in 1290 to try to resolve the conflicts between the Church and the House of Aragon, Giovanni confided the fatigue of that mission: “Clementissime Pater, si senectutis meae conditionem advertis, cum jam limina vitae curva transierim, et cum aetas mea jam torpeat, nec sunt a primitivis fontibus habiles sensus mei, recto certe iudicio iudicabis, quod a tam longe remotis insulae Siciliae finibus ad Sanctitatis tuae pedes pro strepitu mundi senex iste, cum in coelum jam tendat, non fuerat evocandus”.<sup>54</sup> Giovanni at that moment was a stunning octogenarian.

## 5 The Oldest King of Sicily. Frederick III

The only king of Sicily who lived beyond the age of 60 was Frederick III (1273 or 1274–1337). We wonder if this is due to following Arnau de Vilanova’s advice (c. 1235 or 1240–1312). The 13<sup>th</sup> century was fundamental for the progress of medical knowledge: thanks also to Arnau’s contribution, who was the personal physician of four popes (Innocent V, Boniface VIII, Benedict XI and Clement V), of two kings of Aragon (Peter III the Great [1276–1285] and James II the Just [1285–1327]), of a king of Naples (Robert of Anjou [1309–1343]), and finally of a king of Sicily (Frederick III of Aragon [1296–1337]).<sup>55</sup> Whether or not they can be attributed to the Catalan physician, as in the case of the

53 *Codice diplomatico dei re aragonesi di Sicilia*, vol. 1: 1282–1290, ed. by Giuseppe La Mantia, Palermo 1917 (*Documenti per servire alla storia di Sicilia. I serie. Diplomatica* 23), doc. XL, pp. 93–95.

54 Bartholomaeus de Neocastro, *Historia Sicula* (1250–1293), ed. by Giuseppe Paladino, Bologna 1921–1922 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 13,3), p. 118; Tramontana, *Il Regno di Sicilia* (see note 4), p. 308. “Most Venerable Father, if You notice my old age, since I have passed the curved limits of life and my age is already paralysing me, and my senses are no longer strong, as they were from the beginning, You will judge with right discretion, that this old man, because he already longs for heaven, was not called to go from the distant parts of the island of Sicily to the feet of Your Holiness before the roar of the world” (own translation).

55 On Arnau de Vilanova, cf. Juan A. Paniagua, *Studia Arnaldiana. Trabajos en torno a la obra médica de Arnau de Vilanova*, c. 1240–1311, Barcelona 1994; Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion* c. 1300. The Case of Arnau de Vilanova, Oxford 1998 (*Oxford Historical Monographs*).

“De conservanda iuventute” or “De retardatione accidentium senectutis”, first ascribed to Roger Bacon,<sup>56</sup> this medieval ‘proto-gerontological’ treatise aims to avoid old age and diseases related to it, drawing on astrology, alchemy, medicine and theology. The classic medical theory is taken up according to which ageing is caused by the cooling and drying out of the body, which must be counteracted with abundant food, wine and baths. The proponents of the idea of increasing longevity, such as the scholars mentioned here, recommended an ordinary regimen of health, but also raised the possibility of significantly extending the life span, postponing old age and even rejuvenating the elderly.

Around 1305, Arnau wrote a *regimen sanitatis* for King James II of Aragon (1264–1327), whose physician and counsellor he had become.<sup>57</sup> He gave great importance to psychic factors: “what is harmful must be carefully avoided, especially anger and sadness” (“que nociva sunt debent studiose vitari, et specialiter ira et tristitia”). Arnau advises those who are subjected to worries and stress to reduce sadness and to cultivate a well-being made of small pleasures that recreate the spirit through joyful and relaxing situations.<sup>58</sup> The recreation of the soul is not restricted by any hygienic rules. In order to increase it, medieval physicians suggested to enjoy life from all points of view, for example, through a correct diet, listening to pleasant music, and spending time with friends.<sup>59</sup>

Clothing can also contribute to personal well-being. Arnau advises James to wear a long tunic made of linen or silk, lined with cotton, which is suitable for people with a choleric or sanguine temperament: it does not increase the temperature of the blood and prevents hot air from entering the body.<sup>60</sup>

In “De regimine sanitatis”, Arnau even promises to restore virility to those who have become impotent if they adopt the measures he proposes.<sup>61</sup> His advice was also useful for the brother of the Aragonese king, Frederick III, who – being of a different character

56 Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Ruggero Bacone autore del *De retardatione accidentium senectutis?*, in: *Studi Medievali* 28 (1987), pp. 707–727.

57 Arnau de Vilanova, *Regimen de sanitat per al rei d'Aragó. Aforismes de la memòria*, ed. by Antònia Carré, Barcelona 2017 (Filologia UB).

58 Arnaldus Vilanovanus, *Regimen sanitatis ad regem Aragonum*, ed. by Luis García-Ballester / Michael R. McVaugh, Barcelona 1996 (Arnaldi de Villanova opera medica omnia 10,1), 6.1–18.

59 Pedro Gil Sotres, *Le regole della salute*, in: Mirko D. Grmek (Ed.), *Storia del pensiero medico occidentale*, 3 vols., Roma-Bari 1993–1998, vol. 1: *Antichità e Medioevo*, pp. 399–438, at p. 428. Regarding the old-age regime, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 432–435.

60 Arnaldus Vilanovanus, *Regimen sanitatis* (see note 58), 1.44–47.

61 Shulamith Shahar, *The Old Body in Medieval Culture*, in: Sarah Kay / Miri Rubin (Eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies*, Manchester 1996, pp. 160–186.

than James II – was particularly influenced by the mystical views of Arnau de Vilanova and Franciscan spiritualism.

Fascinated by Arnau's ideas concerning religion, Frederick III issued rules for the control of Sicilian society. For example, the king prohibited Jews to treat Christians, (“ut nullus judeus audeat medendi artem exercere in christianum vel medicina sibi dare, vel conficere”), while Christians were forbidden to contact Jewish physicians.<sup>62</sup> However, Frederick III's physician, Gaudio de David, was a Jew from Palermo. In 1329, the *universitas* of Palermo exempted him by certain *corvées* established in the city customs, due to the privileges granted by the Sicilian kings. The medical profession was to become prestigious for those who were able to gain the sovereign's favour, and in fact, the king did not deny privileges, concessions and exemptions in order to secure for himself the best and most famous doctors.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike that of Frederick II, the diet of Frederick III was not strict: after traveling with his wife and children from Palermo to Enna where he loved to spend the summer, the king died in June 1337, long since struck by gout in his hands and feet.<sup>64</sup> The Black Death was about to arrive on the island (1347), and when King Louis the Child died of plague at only 17 years of age (1355), he was succeeded by the “fourteen years old and sickly” Frederick IV. As a result of the barons' power and due to increasing economic difficulties, the king was surrounded by a staff of dozens of physicians.

In February 1374, Frederick IV – a king characterized by unsteady physical, and perhaps even psychic, health – embarked from Messina and after long months of travel and various stages, in May he arrived at Palermo. The whole court followed him, among them there was the faithful Leonardo Salvacoxa, “professor of the arts and medicine” (“artium et medicine professor”), and physician. Frederick died at Messina on 27 July 1377, officially from bowel cancer or dysentery, but it was also suspected that he had been poisoned.<sup>65</sup>

62 Daniela Santoro, *Sapere medico e conoscenze farmaceutiche. Circolazione e scambi nel Mediterraneo del Trecento*, in: *Schede Medievali* 49 (2011), pp. 375–394, at p. 391. “No Jew should dare to practise the art of medicine on a Christian or to administer or prepare remedies for him” (own translation).

63 Santoro, *Medici del re* (see note 52), p. 90.

64 Salvatore Fodale, *Federico III (II) d'Aragona, re di Sicilia (Trinacria)*, in: *DBI*, vol. 45, Roma 1995, pp. 682–694.

65 *Id.*, *Federico IV (III) d'Aragona, re di Sicilia, detto il Semplice*, in: *DBI* (see note 64), pp. 694–700.

In the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the court physicians were able to satisfy the health needs of their kings. They benefited from the closeness to men who were often afraid, worried about managing baronial power, finding money, and controlling fears and obsessions related to their own characters. In those years, the royal physicians tried to participate intensively in court life and to protect and increase the position they had already reached thanks to their closeness to the sovereigns, rather than to dispense knowledge and advice, as highly regarded men of science had done in Norman and Swabian times, when they distinguished themselves by the preparation of dietary regimes, or the royal *conservatio sanitatis*.<sup>66</sup>

## 6 *Decorum* and Triumph, between Beauty and Death. The 15<sup>th</sup> Century

Martin I of Aragon, king of Sicily, arrived on the island after his wedding with the heiress to the throne, Maria of Aragon. If, previously, the royal physicians had been men close to the king – understood as a physical, political, material, spiritual closeness – endowed above all with the ability to give advice and guidance, things changed somewhat under Martin's rule: the relationship between the king and his physicians became exclusive and was based on different methods of selection and recruitment. In 1398, Martin created a judiciary, the “protomedicato”, with the role of controlling all types of medical activities. It was a judicial body appointed to enforce the laws concerning the practice of medicine and related activities, and which proved to be an important stepping stone for the careers of doctors in the king's service.<sup>67</sup> In the wake of the *regimina sanitatis*, which were influenced by Galenic medicine, the Sicilian kings of the 15<sup>th</sup> century appear more and more interested in an overall well-being. Galen is credited with the first comprehensive theory of the ageing process, according to which old age is not a disease: every disease is against nature, but old age is not a state against it.<sup>68</sup> This way of thinking turned attention to the effects exercised on man by everything that surrounds him. Health arises from a balance between the individual complexion and the external world. The types of behaviour and environmental conditions that can be controlled by man are called the

66 Santoro, *Medici del re* (see note 52), pp. 92–93, 99.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103. On the regulatory activity of proto-medics, cf. Daniela Santoro, *Lo speciale siciliano tra continuità e innovazione. Capitoli e costituzioni dal XIV al XVI secolo*, in: *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche* 8 (2006), pp. 465–471.

68 Minois, *Storia della vecchiaia* (see note 7), p. 119. Cf. Simon Byl, *La gérontologie de Galien*, in: *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 10 (1988), pp. 73–92.

“sex res non naturales” and comprise the following aspects: air and environment (*aer*), exercise and rest (*exercitium*), sleep and wake (*somnus et vigilia*), food and drink (*cibus et potus*), what is swallowed and expelled (*repletio et evacuatio*), and emotions (*accidentia animae*). Besides, positive feelings of joy do not have any harmful consequences from the point of view of dietetics. Instead, one has to avoid anxiety, fear, anger, and sadness: all these are passions that cause a cooling of heart and body, due to their negative effects on health.<sup>69</sup> Thus amusement, entertainment, and laughter were advisable. King Martin I was a music lover and learnt to play the harp, so between the *familiares* and *fideles* of Maria and Martin, there were two actors and musicians, “instriones”.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, herbs, spices and plants made up the therapeutic arsenal that provided for the rebalancing of the organism, in the wake of Hippocratic and Galenic theory, according to which disease originates from a lack of compensation of the four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile).<sup>71</sup> Herbs and spices, condiments and sauces, cure and correct certain food effects, and pharmacopoeia – based on the use of plant and animal products combined with each other and sometimes with minerals – were a fully-fledged part of food culture.<sup>72</sup> In 1397, the two Martins – father and son – ordered pepper (appetite stimulant), cinnamon (digestive), saffron (calming and eupeptic), and cloves (with anaesthetic and antiseptic virtues).<sup>73</sup>

In that period, the *tacuina sanitatis* enjoyed an increasing diffusion. The Latin text is based on an Arab medical treatise by Ibn Butlān, an Arab doctor who lived in Baghdad in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (“Taqwīm al-sihha”, “Almanacco della salute”). The “tacuinum sanitatis” was translated into Latin at the Norman-Swabian court of Manfred, in Palermo, between 1258 and 1266, or perhaps at the court of Charles I of Anjou (1263–1285), in Naples, by the translator Ferraguth (Faraj Ibn Salm). The *tacuina* quickly spread from Sicily to other parts of Europe and contributed to making known the dietetic and hygienic practices

69 Marilyn Nicoud, *Savoirs et pratiques diététiques* (see note 41), pp. 239–247; ead., *Les savoirs diététiques. Entre contraintes médicales et plaisirs aristocratiques*, in: *Micrologus* 16 (2008), pp. 233–355; Gil Sotres, *Le regole della salute* (see note 59), pp. 403–404, 428–429.

70 Archivio di Stato di Palermo, Real Cancelleria, reg. 18, fol. 12r (2. 5. 1393); Giuseppe Beccaria, *Spigolature sulla vita privata di re Martino in Sicilia*, Messina 1993 (reprint of the edition Palermo 1894), pp. 21–23, 122.

71 Mireille Ausécache, *Des aliments et des médicaments*, in: *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 13 (2006), pp. 249–258, at p. 249.

72 Massimo Montanari, *Alimentazione e cultura nel Medioevo*, Roma-Bari 2019 (Biblioteca universale Laterza 687), p. 208.

73 Archivio di Stato di Palermo, Real Cancelleria, reg. 29, fol. 9r (6. 9. 1397).

of Arab medicine.<sup>74</sup> It points out the mentioned *sex res non naturales* that are necessary for everyday health. Sleep for example, is best for the elderly in any season and in any region. Its nature consists of immobilising the senses, giving heat and moisture, albeit moderately. The optimum is to sleep for eight hours between the first and last hours of the night to the benefit of the restoration of the senses and of physical strength, and also to the advantage of an improved digestion.<sup>75</sup>

*Regimina* and *tacuina* also explain the benefits of different kinds of food. Culinary art and medical knowledge ended up drawing on a collective knowledge, a common language that goes from dietetic treatises to cookbooks and vice versa. The physician takes care of what is brought to the table and makes detailed reference to the culinary field: Arnau de Vilanova and Maino de' Mainieri, for example, included food recipes similar to those of cookbooks.<sup>76</sup> Physicians were highly interested in the 'manipulation' of foods that ensure and improve health. Cooks must know the medical properties of food and drink and should be aware of the consequences, on a gastronomic and physical level, when they choose a specific type of cooking. This art gradually became the business of cooks following Galen<sup>77</sup> and dietetics increasingly became court knowledge.<sup>78</sup> An incorrect diet ("a roasted duck", "pato asado", to fight impotence), given to Martin the Humane, king of Aragon, also called "the Elder" (1356–1410), probably led to his death.<sup>79</sup>

Dietary literature was written for the aristocratic, secular and ecclesiastical elites. It consisted of advice, and rules of lifestyle to follow, to live well and for a long time. We

74 Florence Moly Mariotti, *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, in: *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, Roma 2000, (URL: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tacuinum-sanitatis\\_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tacuinum-sanitatis_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale%29/); 7.6.2022); al-Muhtār Ibn-al-asan Ibn-Butlān, *Le Taqwīm al-sihha (Tacuini sanitatis) d'Ibn Butlān. Un traité médical du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Hosam Elkhadem, Louvain 1990 (Fonds René Draguet 7); id., *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, ed. by Luisa Cogliati Arano, Milano 1973.

75 *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, Bibliothèque nationale de France Ms. Lat. 9333, fol. 97r.

76 Gil Sotres, *Le regole della salute* (see note 59), p. 423.

77 Alberto Capatti/Massimo Montanari, *La cucina italiana. Storia di una cultura*, Roma-Bari 1999, pp. 145–149.

78 Marilyn Nicoud, *Diététique et alimentation des élites princières dans l'Italie médiévale*, in: Jean Leclant / André Vauchez / Maurice Sartre (Eds.), *Pratiques et discours alimentaires en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris 2008 (Cahiers de la Villa Kérylos 19), pp. 317–336.

79 Martin probably died of the plague, but his death was believed to have occurred "due to meals and ointments given to him by the women without the doctors' approval", "de comidas y unciones que le daban las mujeres sin consenso de los medicos" (*Historia de los condes de Urgel*, ed. by Diego Monfar y Sors / Próspero de Bofarull y Mascaró, Barcelona 1853 [Colección de documentos inéditos del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón 10], vol. 2, ch. 63, pp. 337–338).

have some *regimina sanitatis* entirely dedicated to dietetics.<sup>80</sup> But if the Milanese or Este courts could count on an educated entourage,<sup>81</sup> the same did not apply to 14<sup>th</sup> century Sicily: after the ‘dazzling’ period of Norman rule and the political passion of the first Aragonese, economic and power interests prevailed. In a changed institutional and political framework, the court doctors managed to build stunning careers in the shadow of the sovereigns: men with a variety of characters and profiles, always ready to support and listen.

At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, according to the architect and humanist Leon Battista Alberti, time became one of his most precious assets with the affirmation of the individual.<sup>82</sup> The “Triumphs of Death” spread. The revenge of time, the death that affects men of all ages and social conditions, the triumph of the transience of human life was counterbalanced by a desperate love for and attachment to things. In 15<sup>th</sup> century Palermo, a city that was increasingly attentive to urban *decorum*, during the reign of the cultured and refined Alfonso V, a splendid fresco was produced, initially placed in the city hospital: a triumph of death in which skeletal death rides a skeletal horse, striking the rich and apparently sparing the poor. In one part of the scene one can glimpse a lush and, at the same time, disturbing garden full of pale and lifeless bodies, and also a fountain of youth which continues to gush in spite of the presence of death.

## 7 Conclusion

Regarding the age at which old age commenced in the Middle Ages, we do not have any certain or definitive answers, but rather answers with fluctuating contours that are socially and culturally influenced. Every society has its own image of old age.<sup>83</sup> We have seen how philosophers, physicians and intellectuals of different backgrounds reflected

80 On the revival of dietary writing (mid-14<sup>th</sup> to late 15<sup>th</sup> century), cf. Marilyn Nicoud, *Les régimes de santé au Moyen Âge. Naissance et diffusion d'une écriture médicale. XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 1, Rome 2007 (BEFAR 333), pp. 339–395.

81 Cf. Monica Ferrari, “Per non manchare in tuto del debito mio”. *L'educazione dei bambini Sforza nel Quattrocento*, Milano 2000 (Storia dell'educazione 3).

82 Jacques Le Goff, *Tempo*, in: id./Schmitt (Eds.), *Dizionario dell'Occidente medievale* (see note 50), vol. 2, pp. 1147–1156, at pp. 1154–1155; Elisabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man. Medieval Interpretations of the Life-Cycle*, Princeton 1986.

83 Cf. the famous article by Josiah Cox Russel, *Late Ancient and Medieval Population*, in: *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 48 (1958), pp. 1–152.

on the meanings and experiences of ageing. And, as has been noted, physicians seem to have lived longer than their contemporaries, especially between 1350 and 1500.<sup>84</sup>

If several approaches to medieval medical care of the aged may be discerned, Sicily is distinguished, based on the level of knowledge at court, for an extremely creative and varied approach. Remedies and medicines served to delay the ageing process, rather than to extend life. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially in Italy and Iberian Peninsula, great numbers of works containing this kind of scientific knowledge were translated from Greek and Arabic into Latin.<sup>85</sup> In Sicily, a coexistence of knowledge (Greek, Roman, Arabic and Jewish) generated a unique environment. In this article, we have focused on some selected kings, and tried to point out their perspectives on old age and care of the ageing body, and we have also highlighted the contribution of many intellectuals and physicians active at the royal court at different times.

Being a biological phenomenon, that entails psychological consequences, and also being a cultural phenomenon, which is especially relevant for the humanities, old age varies according to social contexts. It is therefore a compelling and rich topic that encourages many different intellectual approaches and forms of analysis.<sup>86</sup> The study of ageing borrows from a variety of other disciplines. The perspective is – in line with the most recent approaches of modern gerontology which has opened up to the humanities – to investigate the possibilities of interdisciplinary collaboration, not only with traditional disciplines such as medicine, but also with sociology and anthropology, while trying not to overlook some key topics in the field ranging from theories of ageing, the social context, cross-cultural perspectives, physical aspects, and mental processes.

To sum up, we have opened up a research trail that we intend to continue in the future: drawing on a variety of sources, ranging from medical treatises to figurative art, we aim to investigate more specifically the relationship between rulership and corporeality, illness, food and dietetics, and the therapeutic practices which were proposed by physicians, philosophers and cooks as well. Another aim is to extend the research on old age – from an external as well as an internal point of view – to other social groups

84 Danielle Jacquart, *Le milieu médical en France du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Genève 1981 (Centre de Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie de la IV<sup>e</sup> Section de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études 5), pp. 146–148.

85 Luke Demaitre, *The Care and Extension of Old Age in Medieval Medicine*, in: Michael M. Sheehan (Ed.), *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, Toronto 1990 (Papers in Mediaeval Studies 11), pp. 3–22.

86 Anderson, *Old Age* (see note 5), p. 1291; Pat Thane, *Social Histories of Old Age and Aging*, in: *Journal of Social History* 37,1 (2003), pp. 93–111.

for which documentation is available, for example nuns, for whom one can find sufficient information on nutrition, illness and life expectancy. And finally, one can consider questions of gender through the investigation of the life course and ageing of Sicilian queens.

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