

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 19th 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”.¹ 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.² 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.³ This development, for which Peter Laslett employs the term “secular change”, already began in the late 19th century.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ Life expectancy was significantly lower, ranging between 35 and 40 years, and the proportion of people who grew old was significantly smaller.⁹ Nevertheless, once youth (or approximately the 20th 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.¹⁰ For the reasons mentioned, premodern populations were structurally young.¹¹ 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.¹² With regard to such general numbers, regional, periodical, generational, social and gender differences must be taken into account.¹³ 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.¹⁴ Regardless of their exact number, it becomes evident that the elderly were also an integral part of past societies.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ The latter two approaches also make use of archaeological and osteoarchaeological methods, which are employed to analyse human skeletal remains.¹⁹ 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 Antiquity²⁰ and (Early) Modernity²¹, 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 16th 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.²² 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,²³ while Raquel Homet concentrates on the history of ideas and the social history of old age by using numerous examples from the Iberian Peninsula.²⁴ Josephine Cummins' book is mainly concerned with medicine, the body, theology and literature.²⁵ Pat Thane examines a period from pre-modernity to the present day, with a particular emphasis on the period after 1800.²⁶ Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller treats old age with reference to the history of the Holy Roman Empire in the Middle Ages.²⁷ David Troyansky's monograph offers a cross-cultural perspective over a long period, from prehistory to the present day.²⁸ Thijs Porck analyses old age in Anglo-Saxon England, for example with regard to warfare, rulership and gender.²⁹

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.³⁰

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,³¹ the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers and other theological works,³² the clergy and monastic communities,³³

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 Fitzon / 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 nobility³⁴ and the care of the elderly³⁵. 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

note 18); Henri Dubois (Ed.), *Les âges de la vie au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1992 (Cultures et civilisations médiévales 7); *Veillesse 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”, “Titulrel” 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^e–XV^e 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. 14th–16th 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 19th century (and even further) when one also considers historical works from Antiquity and the Middle Ages.³⁸ 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 Schlothgeber, *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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

The conceptions of the ages of man vary diachronically and are culturally constructed.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ Georges Minois and Raquel Homet speak of 50 years for the Middle Ages.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ This concept refers to an individual's ability to physically and mentally fulfil expected roles and tasks.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ According to Joseph de Ghellinck, the Late Middle Ages in particular are characterised by great variability in the use of age-designating terms.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ “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.⁵⁸ Because of this, the choice of age-designating terms can also be based on criteria independent of chronology.⁵⁹ ‘Old’ in contrast to ‘young’ or ‘new’ can thus be a relative term that must be considered in this context as well.⁶⁰ In terms of people, an older man was usually called a “senior”, an old man a “senex”.⁶¹ To describe an old woman, the terms “vetula” and “anus” were applied.⁶² Regardless of the actual chronological age, “seniores” and “senes” could also be used to express social distinction.⁶³

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^e, XI^e 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ 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),⁶⁸ Boncompagno da Signa’s “De malo senectutis et senii” (around 1240),⁶⁹ (pseudo) Roger Bacon’s “Liber (Epistola) de retardatione accidentium senectutis” (most probably around 1240)⁷⁰ and, finally, Gabriele Zerbi’s “Gerontocomia” (1489)⁷¹ – 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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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 20th century.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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 15th century and early 17th 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.⁷⁶ They integrated the knowledge of their medieval predecessors, above all of the “regimens of health”, the “regimina sanitatis”.⁷⁷

Due to its historical development, gerontology has a strong medico-biological,⁷⁸ psychological⁷⁹ and sociological⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹

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^e–XVIII^e siècle), Firenze 2013 (Micrologus’ Library 52); Marilyn Nicoud, *Les régimes de santé au Moyen Âge. Naissance et diffusion d’une écriture médicale (XIII^e–XV^e 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 Bengston/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.⁸² 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 19th century, i. e. the time before the great demographic shift initially described.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ 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).⁸⁵ 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,⁸⁶

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 gerontology⁸⁷ and critical gerontology,⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹

In contrast to the earlier functionalist theories of gerontology,⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹ 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”.⁹² 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.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ 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”.⁹⁸

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.⁹⁹ 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 12th 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 15th 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 16th 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.

ORCID®

Christian Alexander Neumann  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7552-4536>