

Generation Conflicts and the Crisis of the Late Roman Republic

Remarks on Sallustius and Cicero

Abstract

This short paper takes its starting point from modern theoretical discussions of ‘generations’ (age groups or historical cohorts mainly based on common experiences?). After a brief overview of modern scholarship regarding the late Roman Republic (the leading question is: can the crisis of the late Roman Republic from 133 to 44 BC be regarded as a manifestation of generational conflicts?) we will look for evidence of generational consciousness, generational attributions and generational self-concepts (especially of the elderly) in late Republican literature. The second part of the paper will concentrate on texts and letters of Sallustius and Cicero and on the question whether and – if applicable – to what extent the crisis of the late Roman Republic can be understood as being the result of generation-based conflicts and diverging generational interests.

1 Generations, Old Age and Socio-Historical Analysis

Not only in Germany has the category “generation” become a prominent and fruitful analytical tool in the historical disciplines of premodern times during the past twenty years.¹ The theoretical background of these research activities was strongly influenced

1 In Bamberg an interdisciplinary research group worked for ten years (2004–2014) on a common project under the title “Generational Awareness and Generational Conflicts in Antiquity and the Middle Ages”, directed by Hartwin Brandt. Cf. the following volumes of collected papers: Hartwin Brandt/Maximilian Schuh/Ulrike Siewert (Eds.), *Familie – Generation – Institution. Generationenkonzepte in der Vormoderne*, Bamberg 2008 (Bamberger historische Studien 2); Hartwin Brandt/Katrin Köhler/Ulrike Siewert (Eds.), *Genealogisches Bewusstsein als Legitimation. Inter- und Intragenerationelle Auseinandersetzungen sowie die Bedeutung von Verwandtschaft bei Amtswechseln*, Bamberg 2009 (Bamberger historische Studien 4); Hartwin Brandt et al. (Eds.), *genus & generatio. Rollenerwartungen und Rollenerfüllungen im Spannungsfeld der Geschlechter und Generationen in Antike und Mittelalter*, Bamberg 2011 (Bamberger historische Studien 6); Hartwin

by two fundamental key concepts: firstly, the concept of “generational interrelations” (“Generationszusammenhänge”, proposed in the year 1928 by Karl Mannheim),² and secondly, the idea that a common kind of generational experience is a characteristic of a specific generation (“Erfahrungsraum”, as it is called by Reinhart Koselleck).³

Following Karl Mannheim, we can distinguish two basic understandings of the concept of “generation”: Firstly, we can identify the “vertical-diachronic” notion: this is a genuine ancient concept, closely linked to the Latin word *generatio*, that means the genealogical sequence of generations within a family (in Latin: a *gens*). It concerns the relationship between grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren etc.⁴ Secondly, the “horizontal-synchronous” notion which is the main category for Karl Mannheim. According to this concept coherent age groups develop a kind of collective identity, a relatively homogeneous attitude with congruent values, ideas and rules. But age alone is not the decisive factor – it is possible, according to Mannheim, that among the same age cohorts different generational units emerge with different codes, interests, attitudes and lifestyles. The Mannheim-based model has often been used for macro-sociological studies.⁵

With these introductory remarks we now cross over to the Roman Republic and to the questions Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp deals with in his recent book “Reconstructing the Roman Republic”.⁶ Hölkeskamp tries to decipher collective political, social and moral codes, and he looks for the ways in which political groupings came into being; hence

Brandt/Benjamin Pohl/W. Maurice Sprague/Lina K. Hörl (Eds.), *Erfahren, Erzählen, Erinnern. Narrative Konstruktionen von Gedächtnis und Generation in Antike und Mittelalter*, Bamberg 2012 (Bamberger historische Studien 9).

2 Karl Mannheim, *Das Problem der Generationen*, in: id., *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk*, Berlin 1964 (Soziologische Texte 28), pp. 509–565.

3 Reinhart Koselleck, “Erfahrungsraum” und “Erwartungshorizont” – zwei historische Kategorien, in: id., *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt a. M. 192017 (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 757), pp. 349–375.

4 Ohad Parnes/Ulrike Vedder/Stefan Willer, *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte*, Frankfurt a. M. 2008 (Suhrkamp Taschenbücher Wissenschaft 1855); Andreas Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein, Generationenwechsel und Generationenkonflikte in der Aristokratie des spätrepublikanischen Roms*, Hamburg 2012 (Studien zur Geschichtsforschung des Altertums 25), pp. 15–25.

5 Parnes/Vedder/Willer, *Generation* (see note 4), pp. 260–290 (especially pp. 274–279: “Altersgruppen und Lebensphasen”).

6 Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic. An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research*, Princeton 2010.

he investigates collective mentalities and the key elements of collective identities. For example, the *mos maiorum* is one of the fundamental key concepts of the aristocratic-senatorial *nobilitas*, and it includes basic values like *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *honos*.⁷ As a consequence, the following questions arise:⁸ is the formation of political groupings in Republican Rome connected to specific experiences, codes and feelings of age-dependent coherence? Is it possible to observe and to describe homogeneity in various age cohorts in late Republican Rome? And, finally, can the fatal crisis of the late Roman Republic be conceived as being the result and outcome of generational conflicts on the basis of Karl Mannheim's vertical-diachronic and / or horizontal-synchronous notions of generations? Before coming to these points, we first have to clarify and to explain the age-dependent socio-political units – especially that of the young and the old. The best way to do this is to consult Tim Parkin's excellent book on old age in the Roman world, chapter one: "Roman Definitions and Statements of Age".⁹

2 Old and Young in Late Republican Rome

Let us start with the elderly: the Latin *senex* normally means "old person" – in most cases "old man" – but can we link this to a specific number of years? The *senatus*, the dominant political institution in Republican Rome, is etymologically linked to *senes*, but by no means all or even most members of the senate were, for example, over the age of sixty years.¹⁰ Roman society was not (and had never been) a gerontocracy (as, for

7 Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing* (see note 6), p. 17. "The most important concept was of course *mos maiorum*. The literal translation of this term – ancestral custom – is (at best) rather vague. Its range of reference and meanings was almost unlimited and indeed, as it were, defied limitation: any modern attempt to narrow it down must fail to grasp its true constitutive importance" (ibid.).

8 Elena Isayev discusses these and other questions in her brilliant paper: Elena Isayev, *Unruly Youth? The Myth of Generation Conflict in Late Republican Rome*, in: *Historia* 56 (2007), pp. 1–13. The present contribution owes much to Isayev's article, based on a talk presented at Bamberg in June 2004.

9 Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World. A Cultural and Social History*, Baltimore-London 2003 (Ancient Society and History), pp. 15–35, with the review of Parkin's book by Hartwin Brandt (Hartwin Brandt, *Review of "Old Age in the Roman World. A Cultural and Social History by Tim G. Parkin*, in: *Gnomon* 78 [2006], pp. 470–472); cf. also id., *Wird auch silbern mein Haar. Eine Geschichte des Alters in der Antike*, Munich 2002 (Beck's Archäologische Bibliothek), pp. 117–153.

10 Marianne Bonnefond-Coudry, *Le sénat de la république romaine de la guerre d'Hannibal à Auguste. Pratiques délibératives et prises de décision*, Rome 1989 (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises

example, the archaic and classical Sparta in Greece definitely was).¹¹ Rome rather was a patriarchal society, with a legally grounded, on all sides respected dominant position of the *pater familias* which did not, however, include leadership of the *senes*. According to the famous author and scholar Marcus Terentius Varro, who lived in the 1st century BC, *senectus* commences at the age of sixty.¹² However, there are many other positions and opinions to be found in Roman texts. In the military context age limits are much clearer: between seventeen and forty-five years the Roman citizen was a *iunior*, and between forty-six and fifty-nine years he was called a *senior* – only afterwards he became a *senex*.¹³ Therefore, sixty years can be used as a heuristic boundary, but much more important for the present context is the question regarding whether certain attitudes and images were seen as ‘typical’ for the elderly. A key text in this respect is Cicero’s “Cato maior de senectute” written in 44 BC, shortly before the murder of Caesar on the Ides of March in 44 BC. When reading this treatise, we should be aware of the fact that this is a highly subjective text, written from the ideological, conservative, and aristocratic standpoint of a former consul (*vir consularis*), a man of the highest socio-political rank in Rome. The whole text is a praise of the advantages of old age that gives old men *auctoritas* and the freedom for intellectual pursuits. In the eyes of Cato (and Cicero) a generational conflict would be absurd because the good and wise *patres* were the true and unchallengeable leaders of Roman society.

The perspective of the younger people was, of course, a different one. But how ‘young’ were the members of the Roman ‘youth’ actually? Even a man of about forty years is called a *iuuenis* in Latin texts, normally young men between 17 and approximately 30 years are regarded as *iuvenes* in modern scholarship. Emiel Eyben, author of an influ-

d’Athènes et de Rome 273); ead., Le sénat républicain et les conflits de générations, in: Mélanges d’École Française de Rome 94 (1982), pp. 175–225.

11 For Sparta, cf. Brandt, Wird auch silbern (see note 9), pp. 43–48; Winfried Schmitz, Nicht ‚altes Eisen‘, sondern Garant der Ordnung – Die Macht der Alten in Sparta, in: Andreas Gutsfeld/Winfried Schmitz (Eds.), Altersbilder in der Antike. Am schlimmen Rand des Lebens?, Göttingen 2009 (Super alta perennis 8), pp. 87–112.

12 Emiel Eyben, Die Einteilung des menschlichen Lebens im römischen Altertum, in: Rheinisches Museum 116 (1973), pp. 150–190, at pp. 172–178. Parkin objects: “Because this is in line with some modern conceptions of the onset of old age in ancient times, Varro’s system is regularly adopted by modern scholars as definitive of Roman (and Greek) reality. But there is no good reason for this, since Varro’s figures are only one set in a long tradition, and ... the system ... is Varro’s, not Rome’s” (Parkin, Old Age [see note 9], p. 17).

13 Jan Timmer, Altersgrenzen politischer Partizipation in antiken Gesellschaften, Berlin 2008 (Studien zur Alten Geschichte 8), pp. 242–249.

ential book on the youth of ancient Rome, argues that generational conflicts between young and old were in fact “unavoidable” and that the rebellious Catiline himself in his uprising in the years 63 and 62 BC regarded his fight as being the result of a “conflict” between different generations.¹⁴ Even if we accept such an interpretation, we have to ask with Elena Isayev:¹⁵ was there really a homogeneous Roman ‘youth’, with common experiences that were decisive for building more than a life-phase-cohort? Which common experiences took place at what point in time? Did these experiences really occur or were they only patterns of ex-post-interpretations? What was it that connected those *iuvenes* – was it more than the lack of power and of political influence and the desire to spend as much money as they liked for private purposes? In sum: who were the “barbatuli iuvenes”, “the young men with small beards”, of Cicero?

3 “Barbatuli Iuvenes”

Early in the year 61 BC, Cicero wrote one of his numerous letters to his close friend Pomponius Atticus, and told him some details about a senatorial decree against a man named Publius Clodius Pulcher who had committed a religious offence, which was the so-called “Bona Dea scandal”. In the assembly of the people, which resulted from that event, this Clodius Pulcher, who was the leader of a group of followers (*factio*), mobilised his supporters against the senatorial (and Ciceronian) position, and Cicero described these supporters as follows:

“Nam cum dies venisset rogationi ex senatus consulto ferendae, concursabant barbatuli iuvenes, totus ille grex Catilinae duce filiola Curionis, et populum ut antiquaret rogabant.” (“For when the day came for proposing the bill in accordance with the vote of the senate, a crowd of our dandies with their chin-tufts assembled, all the Catiline set, with Curio’s girlish son at their head, and implored the people to reject it.”)¹⁶

14 Emiel Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*, London 1993, pp. 47–65; Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 2 (notes 7–8).

15 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 8–11.

16 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, ed. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, Cambridge, Mass. 1999 (The Loeb Cassical Library 7), vol. 1, letter 14.5; for an English translation: URL: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0022:text=A:book=1:letter=14;29.7.2022>; Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 11.

A few months later, in July of 61 BC, in another letter to Atticus, Cicero again mentioned these *barbatuli iuvenes*: “*isti commissatores coniurationis, barbatuli iuvenes*” (“these boon companions of the conspiracy, the young chin-tufts”).¹⁷

Who were these gangs of youths who tried to win influence over the most important institutions in late Republican Rome? A few years ago, Jan Timmer tried to shed more light on these youngsters, and he argues that they only appear in the contemporary sources in contexts of emerging violence, and thus in situations of political disruption, when the political system of the Roman Republic, that was based on the finding of consensus, was not able to create a political settlement.¹⁸ Those *iuvenes* were not, according to Timmer, a separate generational cohort, with a specific common experience and common ideas, but a heterogeneous crowd of young men who were canvassed by the dominating political players, conservative-senatorial *optimates* (who tried to realise their political aims in the senate) as well as *populares* (senators who counted on the support of the assemblies of Roman citizens). In short: unruly *barbatuli iuvenes*, young green-horns and wine-loving dandies, were not a product of a structural generation conflict but rather a symptom, an indication of the increasing inability of Roman politics to keep the balance and to organise a peaceful debate of political opinions.

Another political episode, the so-called “Vettius scandal” of the year 59 BC, confirms this interpretation of Timmer. The scandal took place when Caesar was *consul* for the first time and attacked the *tribunus plebis* Curio, perhaps with the help of a man named Vettius. The conspiracy was exposed and Vettius argued that a plot of *iuvenes* led by Curio had been planned. The details are not important here, but remarkable is the fact that the assertion that *iuvenes* intended to organise a violent political conspiracy was regarded as plausible.¹⁹

It becomes clear that in the political communication between late Republican protagonists *iuvenes* or *adulescentes* were regarded as an identifiable group and as part of the supporters of leading senatorial *patroni*. They are mainly mentioned in the sources in the context of conflicts, in connection with violence, scandals and hot political controversies. The *iuvenes* surely were not connected to certain political programmes or ideas. In all relevant sources, the *iuvenes* do not emerge as a “horizontal-synchronous” generation

17 Cicero, Letters to Atticus (see note 16), letter 16.11 (English translation: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0022:text=A:book=1:letter=16; 29. 7. 2022>).

18 Jan Timmer, *Barbatuli iuvenes* – Überlegungen zur Stellung der „Jugend“ in der späten römischen Republik, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 13 (2005), pp. 197–219.

19 Karl Christ, *Krise und Untergang der römischen Republik*, Darmstadt 1979, pp. 299–300; Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 8–11.

with congruent values, ideas and rules, but rather and simpler as a “vertical-diachronic” generation, mainly described and characterised from the standpoint of the elderly. This also holds true for the *coniuratio Catilinae* to which we come now.

4 Sallustius and Catiline

The most prominent specific event readily seen as a manifestation of the conflict of generations in late Republican Rome is the famous Catilinarian conspiracy.²⁰ Often the Catiline group is regarded as a kind of ‘protesting youth movement’ pitted against the old senatorial establishment.²¹ But one of the main problems is that the relevant sources are altogether composed from this conservative standpoint: Sallustius’ “Catilina”, Cicero’s Catilinarian speeches, and Plutarch’s “Life of Cicero”. We can find a short overview of the events in the words of Elena Isayev:

“Catiline was a charismatic politician and leader, who in 64 BC unsuccessfully ran for the consulship against Cicero. To sustain his power, Catiline energetically increased his following by targeting various groups, and among them the youth, who were an important pawn for the politicians. In their desperation in 63 BC Catiline and his followers conceived a plot to use revolutionary means to bring down the Republic. The plot was uncovered by Cicero, allowing him to claim that he had saved the Republic. After the creation of an atmosphere of fear, much debate followed at the outcome of which it was decided, with strong support from Cicero, that the captured conspirators should be put to death without trial. Catiline, seeing that he had lost all hope of pursuing his political ends, fled Rome and tried to gather forces on the periphery, but he was eventually killed, trapped between two Roman armies in 62 BC.”²²

So far, these are the pure facts. It is remarkable that neither Cicero nor Plutarch, but only Sallustius identifies the youth as a distinguishable supporter group of the rebel, especially in the following passage:

20 Modern scholarship concerning Catiline and his conspiracy is abundant; still useful is Christ, *Krise* (see note 19), pp. 262–268.

21 For Sallustius, the conspiracy and generational relationships, cf. Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein* (see note 4), pp. 87–130.

22 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 8–9.

“Sed maxume adulescentium familiaritates adpetebat; eorum animi molles etiam et fluxi dolis haud difficulter capiebantur. Nam ut cuiusque studium ex aetate flagrabat, aliis scorta praebere, aliis canes atque equos mercari, postremo neque sumptui neque modestiae suae parcere, dum illos obnoxios fidosque sibi faceret.” (“But most of all Catiline sought the intimacy of the young; their minds, still pliable as they were and easily moulded, were without difficulty ensnared by his wiles. For carefully noting the passion which burnt in each, according to his time of life, he found harlots for some or bought dogs and horses for others; in fine, he spared neither expense nor his own decency, provided he could make them submissive and loyal to himself.”)²³

It is again to be stressed, that these young *adulescentes* were not an entirely homogeneous group – there were some young lads among them who were much more radical than others:

“Nam postquam Cn. Pompeio et M. Crasso consulibus tribunicia potestas restituta est, homines adulescentes, summam potestatem nacti, quibus aetas animusque ferox erat, coepere senatum criminando plebem exagitare, dein largiundo atque pollicitando magis incendere, ita ipsi clari potentesque fieri.” (“For after the tribunician power had been restored in the consulship of Gnaeus Pompeius and Marcus Crassus, various young men, whose age and disposition made them aggressive, attained that high authority; they thereupon began to excite the commons by attacks upon the senate and then to inflame their passions still more by doles and promises, thus making themselves conspicuous and influential.”)²⁴

Obviously, in the eyes of Sallustius all *adulescentes* had one thing in common: they shared a fundamentally anti-senatorial attitude. As a consequence, Sallustius puts the following words into the mouth of Catiline who tries to encourage and to spur on his supporters:

“Verum enim vero, pro deum atque hominum fidem victoria in manu nobis est; viget aetas, animus valet; contra illis annis atque divitiis omnia consenuerunt.” (“Assuredly

23 Gaius Sallustius Crispus, *Catilina*, in: Sallust, ed. by John C. Rolfe, London 1971 (The Loeb Classical Library 116), pp. 20–148; at 14, 5–6; this and all other English translations from Sallustius’ “*Catilina*” are taken from the cited edition; cf. also for this and further relevant passages from Sallustius: Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), pp. 9–11; Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein* (see note 4), pp. 95–112.

24 Sallustius, *Catilina* (see note 23), 38.1; Zerndl, *Generationenbewusstsein* (see note 4), p. 104.

[I swear it by the faith of gods and men!] victory is within our grasp. We are in the prime of life, we are stout of heart; to them, on the contrary, years and riches have brought utter dotage.”²⁵

Of course, we do not know whether such arguments and strategies were really used in the messages that Catiline addressed to his young followers, but it is significant that Sallustius is using this set-up in order to make understandable what had happened. Evidently this figure of thought, based on the generation gap and on the contrast of interests between the youth and the elderly, worked as a plausible explanatory model in the eyes of Sallustius – and this alone is significant, because Sallustius obviously could expect that his listeners or readers would regard this explanation as being plausible and adequate.

The same holds true for the supposed ‘secret plan’ of the Catilinarians that was discovered and delivered to the senate:

“sed filii familiarum, quorum ex nobilitate maxuma pars erat, parentis interficerent; simul caede et incendio percussis omnibus ad Catilinam erumperent.” (“The eldest sons of several families, the greater number of whom belonged to the nobility, were to slay their fathers. Then, when the whole city was stunned by the bloodshed and the fire, they were all to rush out and join Catiline.”)²⁶

Again: regardless of the question of authenticity – probably this alleged bloody plan of the conspirators is an invention of Sallustius, because Cicero in his anti-Catiline speeches does not mention it – the fact that Sallustius has this dramatic escalation of the generational conflict in his scenario, is remarkable.

Nowhere in Sallustius’ work is it “suggested that the (late Republican) youth had a common cause of their own”²⁷ – with the single exception that they had all “dissociated themselves”²⁸ from their families, and from the traditional rules and norms of Roman politics. They did not (according to Sallustius) feel any commitment to the *patria*, to the *mos maiorum*, to *dignitas* and to *honos*. But, and this is the crucial point: all these impressions form part of a literary construction, put into place by intellectuals like Sallustius or Cicero who transformed political and social conflicts into a conflict

25 Ibid., 20.10; *ibid.*, p. 107 with note 565.

26 Sallustius, *Catilina* (see note 23), 43. 2.

27 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 10.

28 Ibid., p. 10.

between generations, between old and young, and between right and wrong. Thus, we have to ask at the end of this short contribution: what does the literary construction of deep generational conflicts contribute to the understanding of the crisis and the failure of the Roman Republic?

5 The Crisis of the Roman Republic

The family (*gens*), the ancestors (*maiores*) and the *patria potestas* were key elements of Roman Republican society. When a famous member of an aristocratic *gens* had died, public celebrations were organised to highlight the glorious history not only of a single person, but also of the whole family. In the public funeral speech (*laudatio funebris*) and during the funeral procession (*pompa funebris*) wax masks of the ancestors were carried by family members, *honores* and glorious actions (*res gestae*) of the ancestors were brought to mind, family trees and genealogical presentations underlined the meaning of the family; the inner familiar harmony and the prestige of the *gens* functioned as symbolic and political capital.²⁹ What kind of impression did such manifestations of the dominance of the elderly make on the youth? Without any doubt, they learnt that the rules of making a career were fixed and remained inflexible – tradition regulated the future. Peter Scholz in his excellent book “Den Vätern folgen” (“Following the Fathers”) analysed the strict code of the *imitatio patris* in detail.³⁰ This was the leading norm of the relationship between fathers and sons. An instructive document of this fundamental principle is one of the famous sepulchral inscriptions of the Scipiones, for Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Hispanus, praetor 139 BC, contemporary of Scipio Aemilianus and of the Gracchi brothers:³¹

“Cn(aeus) Cornelius Cn(aei) f(ilius) Scipio Hispanus / pr(aetor) aid(ilis) cur(ulis) q(uaestor) tr(ibunus) mil(itum) II, X vir s(t)l(itibus) iudik(andis) / X vir sacr(is) fac(-iundis). / virtutes generis meis moribus accumulavi / progeniem genui, facta patris petiei. / maiorum optenui laudem, ut sibi me esse creatum / laetentur: stirpem nobilitavit honor.” (“Gnaeus Cornelius, son of Gnaeus, Scipio Hispanus, *praetor*, *cu-*

29 For all this and similar aspects, cf. Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing* (see note 6), *passim*.

30 Peter Scholz, *Den Vätern folgen. Sozialisation und Erziehung der republikanischen Senatsaristokratie*, Berlin 2011 (*Studien zur Alten Geschichte* 13).

31 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (= CIL), vol. 1,1: *Fasti consulares ad a. u. c. DCCLXVI. Elogia clarorum virorum. Fasti anni Iuliani*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen / Wilhelm Henzen, Berlin 1893, inscription no. 15 (abbreviated reference: CIL 1 I 15).

rule aedile, military tribune twice, member of the board of ten men regulating the legal position of persons, member of the board of ten men regarding the organization of cult rituals. I have augmented the virtues of my *gens* by living according to the customs, I have created a progeny, I have emulated the deeds of my father. I have preserved the praise of my ancestors, so that they could be happy because of me having been born. Public approval has refined my parentage.”)

This inscription is a poetic document of the compulsory generational code. Due to this code, young aristocrats who loved the ‘*dolce vita*’ could easily come into conflicts with their severe fathers. But on the other hand, they realised during the last decades of the Roman Republic that this code had become pure ideology. For it was one of the fundamental experiences of late Republican youth that the *nobiles* themselves, from the late 2nd century BC onward, continually broke traditional rules, their own rules: long-term extraordinary military commands, violence against co-magistrates, illegal iteration of *honores* are only few key phenomena of this general process of disintegration of the Roman aristocracy and of the whole political system. As a consequence, the youth learnt and realised that the *mos maiorum* had become an empty phrase, and even aristocratic *adulescentes* were no longer always willing to accept the prescribed way of *patres sequi*, of “following their fathers”. Hence, an increasing generation gap was a serious and important symptom of the dramatic crisis of the late Roman Republic – but it was definitely not the reason for this crisis.

Additionally, a generational conflict, that from the peer’s view was the result of increasing deviation from the norms on the part of the youth, was an interpretative pattern, readily used by the peers for explaining why things had taken a turn for the worse. It was comfortable for the old to blame the young for breaking the rules and to ignore their own misconduct. Sallustius and other authors show a kind of generational awareness and they use the complicated relationship between young and old as an explanatory model for a better understanding of the fact that the social and political consensus no longer remained uncontroversial. The crisis of the Roman Republic, however, was a more complex phenomenon; to say it again with Elena Isayev: “This turbulent period affected all age groups, young and old, and hence by definition the experience was intergenerational. Generational conflict is not what drove or resulted from these turbulent years”.³²

The situation of the elderly remains a key topic in the social relations during the following six centuries of the Roman Empire, and it is still not clear whether Tim Parkin’s

32 Isayev, *Unruly Youth* (see note 8), p. 12.

formula of “the marginality of old age” gets to the heart of the matter.³³ Conflicts between generations did not stop with the end of the Roman Republic: Conflicts within families, especially between fathers and sons, were typical phenomena of Roman society, and “the potentially more serious conflict of the younger generation of a society with the elder members is a public one that breaks out in particular during times of crisis”.³⁴ We know of many crises under Roman emperors – there is still much to do for scholars of various disciplines.

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33 Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 9), pp. 239–272; Brandt, *Wird auch silbern* (see note 9), pp. 157–171.

34 Parkin, *Old Age* (see note 9), p. 227.