

ON WRITING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY  
OF ROMAN YOUTH AND ITS RESTLESSNESS:  
A reappraisal and views on future research<sup>1</sup>

---

*Christian Laes\**

*Salesianum 79 (2017) 717-732*

## 1. Introduction

Youth in the Roman Empire appears like a straightforward and appealing research topic. However, when one takes a closer look at the subject, it seems to be studded with both methodological and practical difficulties.

‘The Roman Empire’ is often used in a broad sense, with a time span of about 200 BCE upto 600 CE, also covering the Greek world during the Roman rule and the early Byzantine period. With a territory that embraces over forty nowadays states and with a population of over fifty million inhabitants, the Roman world included dozens of local and regional cultural traditions which remain forever unknown to us. Only in Late Antiquity, some of these traditions emerged and were saved from oblivion by their

\* With many thanks to Johan Strubbe, with whom the exploration of the subject of youth in the Roman Empire was a most pleasant task, and who also read through the first version of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> This article is meant as a response to the extended review article by JEWELL, E. (2016) ‘Another social history of Roman “youth”, with questions about its restlessness’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 29: 642-50. I take the opportunity to introduce the readers into the research theme of Roman youth and to present some recent studies and developments after the completion of the manuscript in 2009 (see footnote 7).

rich literary sources: Coptic, Aethiopic, Aramaic-Syriac, Persian are only a few examples of cultures which existed within the Roman world. When one points to the essentially bilingual or bicultural, that is Greek and Latin, character of the Empire, such statement underestimates the Jewish component which is essential to understand Christianity, a religion that can only be understood by the way it was shaped in the Roman world.

The same complexity marks the concept of youth. This phase of life is generally understood as the period between childhood and full adulthood. However, both the beginning and the end of youth are not that easy to determine. Most would agree that the physiological signs of puberty mark the beginning of youth and thus the end of childhood. Catholic countries nowadays may point to the receiving of the sacrament of confirmation, often connected with the last year of primary school. There is even more disagreement on the upper limit of the youth phase. Entering the labour process is a possible criterion, though already in the western world, such would create significant differences among peers. The same counts for the age of first marriage or leaving the parental home and being financially independent. In the contemporary western world one sees considerable differences between countries and their traditions, with marked 'new' tendencies as singleness or cohabitation due to the effects of unemployment and financial crisis. Even legislations disagree about a fixed age for legal adulthood. The differences only become more pronounced if one takes into account the world context. Surely, language and terminology are not helpful either to make matters less complicated. One only has to think about the English 'puberty', which in contrast to the Dutch 'puberteit' strongly emphasises the biological side of the matter, or about the vague way one uses terms as 'youth' or 'young' in a society where everybody seems to strive for the ideal of eternal youth.<sup>2</sup>

Classicists and ancient historians only took interest in the topic in the wake of sociological, anthropological and historical studies which had strongly emphasised the cultural side (*nomos*) of the matter. In such approaches, youth is very much a social construct, and it remains to be seen and studied whether and how a specific society shaped a concept of youth.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, SAVAGE, J. (2008), *Teenage. The Creation of Youth Culture*. London.

<sup>3</sup> MEAD, M. (1918) *Coming of Age in Samoa*. New York; VAN DEN BERG, J. H. (1957) *Metabletica of leer der veranderingen*. Nijkerken; ARIÈS, Ph. (1973) *L'enfant et la vie fami-*

Did the same count for ancient society, and is it possible to claim that 'the ancients did not know youth'? The Belgian historian Emiel Eyben from the Catholic University of Leuven, strongly opposed such constructionist views. To him, there *was* something as Roman youth, at least for the male well-to-do. To Eyben, Roman 'adolescence' and youth was an extended period, which ranked from about fifteen to thirty years of age. It was marked by a series of postponed responsibilities, and consequent leisure or free time. Eyben spent about his whole scholarly career in drawing the psychological portrait of the Roman young man -- both his books and articles testify of his deep knowledge of Latin and Greek literary sources, in which he again and again found similarities between youthful thinking, feeling and behaviour from the past and from the present day.<sup>4</sup> Critics have suggested that Eyben's depiction of Roman youth came very close to a 'modern' picture of ancient adolescents with sweaty hands and blushing cheeks. Already in the nineties of the former century, Eyben's theses were severely criticised by two scholars from the University of Leiden. Both Harry Pleket and his student Marc Kleijwegt were versed in Greek and Latin epigraphy, and in the study of institutions, both on the level of the Roman state and in the municipalities from the Greek East and the Latin West. Their main critique concerned the most ambivalent meaning of the word 'youth'. Of course, people in Antiquity discerned between youthful vigour and more moderate old age. But they never came as close as a concept of 'adolescence'. To them, children and teenagers only were adults with defects. What mattered was to reach the stage of full adulthood as soon as possible. In such educational views, there was not much time nor space for a separate phase of youthful life experience.<sup>5</sup>

*liale sous l'Ancien Régime*, 3rd edn. Paris; GILLIS, J. R. (1974) *Youth and History. Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present*. New York; SHORTER, E. (1975) *The Making of the Modern Family*. New York; STONE, L. (1977) *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England (1500-1800)*. London.

<sup>4</sup> Eyben's views and numerous articles are conveniently brought together in two volumes: EYBEN, E. (1977) *De jonge Romein volgens de literaire bronnen der periode ca. 200 v. Chr. tot ca. 500 n. Chr.* Brussels; EYBEN, E. (1993) *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*. London. His most extended response to his critics is EYBEN, E. (1981) 'Was the Roman "youth" an "adult" socially?', *Antiquité Classique* 50: 328-50.

<sup>5</sup> PLEKET, H. W. (1979) 'Licht uit Leuven over de Romeinse jeugd?', *Lampas* 12: 173-192 and PLEKET, H. W. (1981) 'Repliek', *Lampas* 14: 140-143; KLEIJWEGT, M. (1991)

Quite surprisingly, the debate came to an end somewhere in the mid of the nineties, and no significant new studies saw the light. At the occasion of Eyben's 65th anniversary in 2008, a monograph by myself (PhD at the Catholic University of Leuven) and Johan Strubbe (University of Leiden) took up the question of whether young (male) Romans experienced a period of free time and a youthful phase of restlessness. In this book, we not only delved into the methodological and historiographical background of the debate about the existence or absence of youth. More importantly, we offered an important corrective to the controversy and we charted a middle course between the two extremes in previous scholarship.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, we carefully considered both the literary and the documentary sources (mainly epigraphical, but to a less extent also papyrological). An English version of our monograph appeared in 2014.<sup>7</sup> Only recently, a thorough review article by Evan Jewell appeared (see note 1). Jewell's approach is strongly embedded in a post-modern vogue, primarily and almost exclusively paying attention to representation and construction of identity as it appears in the highly rhetorical, literary constructions. It seems as if the topic of Roman youth again sparks severe criticism, and it is precisely the aim of this article to respond to Jewell's keen and interesting observations.

At the onset, I would like to emphasise that the study of the representation of youth or the 'discourse' on youth seems an interesting and valuable approach, which might correct certain statements of ancient authors (see 2.2). But that will not destroy the overall image of the lived reality of youth, which Strubbe and I sketch from a very large number of sources. The quest

*Ancient Youth. The Ambiguity of Youth and the Absence of Adolescence in Greco-Roman Society.* Amsterdam.

<sup>6</sup> Quite remarkably, KLEIJWEGT, M. (2016) 'The In-Betweeners', *The Classical Review* 66, 2: 506-8 fails to notice the instances in which we give credit to his and Pleket's work or in which we correct Eyben's points of view. Kleijwegt's statement that we "demonstrate that a youthful phase of life comparable to modern adolescence was present in the ancient world" (p. 506) is simply untrue and does injustice to the tenour of our book, as is his argument that we too heavily rely on sociobiology. In all, Kleijwegt's biased review (he only treats details pertaining to three chapters) once again proves how much a new overview which balances the two extremes was needed.

<sup>7</sup> LAES, Chr. and STRUBBE, J. (2008) *Jeugd in het Romeinse rijk. Jonge jaren, wilde haren?* Leuven; LAES, Chr. and STRUBBE, J. (2014) *Youth in the Roman Empire. The Young and the Restless Years?* Cambridge. The Dutch version also contains an extended index locorum.

for that image is by no means “a now dated question”, as Jewell states [p. 650]. The reader will notice that in the field of education, associations, occupations, politics we frequently emphasise the clash between representation and reality, stressing that we often have to do with ideals, hopes and expectations -- constructions of identity exactly in the scope of masculine citizen aristocratic identity.

The following reappraisal will be structured according to the twelve different chapters in the book, and the critics Jewell raised against the points made. In treating these topics, I take the occasion of referring to some recent studies, which have not been included in the monograph from 2014.<sup>8</sup> More fundamentally, I will raise the question of the possibility of writing a socio-cultural history which goes beyond the studying of text and discourse, thereby pointing to ‘universal’ and ‘transcultural’ items as restlessness with young people. Also, I will suggest some ways for further research in an area of study where the last word has definitely not yet been said.

## **2. In search for Roman youth: reality and/or representation?**

2.1. ‘Looking for youth’ is the way Jewell characterises the content of the first chapter of our book on Roman youth. In fact, we have tried to do what any decent study of socio-cultural themes from the past should do, whether it is on, say, childhood, homosexuality, or fatness and thinness. We carefully ponder the terminology, reflect upon the demarcation of the subject and display the cultural chasms that separate ancient from modern concepts. In doing so, we face the methodological challenge that is often called the ‘etic’ versus the ‘emic’. The former is a shorthand for an external observer of a social group, the latter for a view from the perspective of a subject within the group.<sup>9</sup> In other words: in each society and in each pe-

<sup>8</sup> The English version only includes a few studies published after 2009, the year in which this version was completed.

<sup>9</sup> The distinction has recently been used in a chapter on ancient childhood: AASGAARD, R. (2017) ‘How close can we get to ancient childhood?’, in *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Chr. LAES and V. VUOLANTO. London and New York: 318-331, spec. p. 323. For classicists and ancient historians, PARKER, P. (2001) ‘The myth of the heterosexual: anthropology and sexuality for classicists’, *Arethusa* 34, 3: 313-362 is a must read on the subject.

riod of time, people can be observed as not children anymore, but not yet full adults either (or as outspokenly heavy weight or thin, or as having sex with a person of the same gender), but it remains to be seen whether within the group or society such phenomena are considered as marked differences which possibly shape the psychological make-up and even the identity of the subjects concerned. Although this is exactly the methodology we apply for our study of youth [*Youth*, p. 22], Jewell does not seem to be aware of the fact that we do so [on p. 644 his distinction between representation and lived reality points to very much the same]. Moreover, he repeats the mantra about both the geographical and chronological leaps we make in our study: “did nothing change in centuries?/ “what, no change at all, in half a thousand years?”.<sup>10</sup> However, socio-cultural historians of Antiquity have already frequently answered such concerns.<sup>11</sup> For many aspects of life, this was indeed a quite stable society, where differences between centuries were no way as marked as they are now between decades. Classical Greek literary sources can indeed be used to reveal something about the mentality of the Roman elites, since such texts were almost part and parcel of their mental universum and helped to shape their minds and thoughts. For sure, chronological and geographical factors must have played a role, but the sources often do not allow us to make such distinctions, unless one would study particular details as, for instance, representations on gravestones or wording in grave inscriptions of a particular area. Valuable as such studies are, they do not make for a monograph which aims to give a balanced overview of the subject both for specialists and a somewhat larger audience. Very recently and following the same ‘daring path’, about twenty ancient historians have gathered to write about children’s daily life agency in the Roman and late antique world, which are defined from about the first century BCE upto ... the ninth century CE!<sup>12</sup>

2.2. Chapter 2 (“Minority, majority”) extensively deals with the life-cycle divisions. Here, we fully acclaim the fact that such divisions reveal more

<sup>10</sup> JEWELL (2016) 642, 647 and 650, alluding to former critics on e.g. C. William’s work on Roman homosexuality or Eyben’s work on youth.

<sup>11</sup> See our Preface p. xii, referring i.a. to LAES, Chr. (2011) *Children in the Roman Empire. Outsiders Within*. Cambridge, 1-13, where I discussed this point extensively.

<sup>12</sup> LAES, Chr. and VUOLANTO, V. (eds.) (2017) *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London and New York.

about power relations and the focus on the adult male citizen, than about the assessing of age.<sup>13</sup> However, such approach should not take away the studying of passages where ancient authors for one reason or other seem to diverge from the terminology – a point Tim Parkin has often made.<sup>14</sup> Here, Jewell is right that it is crucial not to ignore the rhetorical aims or literary context of a text. For this, he points to Cicero's assertion of his being an *adulescens* in the year 63 BCE as a representational strategy in the context of young Octavian bidding for Imperium.<sup>15</sup>

As to the context of Roman law [*Youth*, p. 30-36], we do make a strong case for the 'reality' of at least some divisions, leaving young people *de facto* out of commercial transactions, in a concern to protect them from exploitation. Despite Jewell's laments about our 'haphazard' use of fragments from Plautus to 'prove' young people's exclusion from business affairs in the second or third century CE, new overviews time and again show that special measures for the young indeed were often a reality.<sup>16</sup> No matter the still debated origin of the Lex Laetoria from c. 200 BCE, later Roman jurists interpreted this law as a sort of natural protection against the fragile and unstable character of youth.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, such protection seems to have been granted regularly by Roman judges.<sup>18</sup> In some interpretations, the application of the

<sup>13</sup> LAES, STRUBBE (2014) 23-30.

<sup>14</sup> PARKIN, T. (2003) *Old Age in the Roman World. A Cultural and Social History*. Baltimore, 15-35 on Roman definitions and statements of age. Quite remarkably, Jewell [p. 646] refers to HARLOW, M. and LAURENCE, R. (2010) "De Amicitia: the role of age", in *De Amicitia. Friendship and Social Networks in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. K. MUSTAKALLIO and Chr. KRÖTZL. Rome: 21-32 as an example of literary-minded rigour. In fact, Harlow and Laurence also point very much to 'reality' in their study where discourse is indeed important.

<sup>15</sup> Cic., Phil. 2.118.

<sup>16</sup> See the most useful surveys by MUSUMECI, F. (2012) 'L'editto pretorio relativo ai minori di 25 anni e la sua interpretatio in età imperiale', *Iuris Antiqui Historia. An International Journal on Ancient Law* 4: 53-65; PULLATTI, S. (2012) 'Ut patres existamus eorum qui sibi ipsi opem ferre nequeunt. Alcuni aspetti della disciplina dei minori in età tardoimperiale', *Iuris Antiqui Historia. An International Journal on Ancient Law* 4: 77-91.

<sup>17</sup> Dig. 4.4.1 pr. (Ulpianus 11 *ad ed.*): *Hoc edictum praetor naturalem aequitatem secutus proposuit, quo tutelam minorum suscepit. Nam cum inter omnes constet fragile esse et infirmum huiusmodi aetatum consilium et multis captionibus suppositum, multorum insidiis expositum: auxilium eis praetor hoc edicto pollicitus est et adversus captiones opitulationem.*

<sup>18</sup> Dig. 4.4.7.8 (Ulp. 11 *ad ed.*): *et cottidie praetores eos restituunt* (about *restitutio* when a second buyer comes with a better offer).



protection seems to have been absolute: when one was younger than 25, the transaction could always be annulated and restitution been granted.<sup>19</sup> Age *per se* could be a sufficient reason to award restitution.<sup>20</sup> Some young people apparently went as far as to contract a deal without having a legally obliged curator (also the assignment of a curator was connected to the fact that minors could not yet take care of themselves).<sup>21</sup> Even in such cases they could claim restitution afterwards, because of their age.<sup>22</sup> Others would look at the concrete psychological condition, that is whether certain minors indeed suffered loss or were deprived of greater benefit because they had been cheated, due to their credulity or the cunning of others.<sup>23</sup> As such, a person below age 25 who had already acted as a dutiful father or as a councilor for his city, should not be automatically exempted, although he might still be helped when he was obviously the victim of deliberate fraud.<sup>24</sup> Only in rare cases, *venia aetatis* could be granted. It was Emperor Constantine who granted this right to males of twenty years of age and females of eighteen years old. Such *venia* basically meant that the parties lost their *restitutio in integrum propter aetatem* (again exceptions were possible), but the application of it was really exceptional. Indeed, special protection of minors, because of their

<sup>19</sup> Dig. 4.4.45 pr. (Callistr. 1 ed. monit.): *Etiam ei, qui priusquam nasceretur usucaptum amisit, restituendam actionem Labeo scribit* (on a newborn who had suffered damage while his father died and he himself was still in the womb).

<sup>20</sup> CJ 2.38.1 (a. 198): *Quod si pro herede gessistis vel bonorum possessionem accepistis, propter aetatem, cui subveniri solet, in integrum restitutionis auxilium accipere debetis.*

<sup>21</sup> Inst. 1.23 pr.: *Masculi puberes et feminae viripotentes usque ad vicesimum quintum annum completum curatores accipiunt; qui licet puberes sint, adhuc tamen huius aetatis sunt, ut negotia sua tueri non possint.*

<sup>22</sup> CJ 2.21.3 (a. 293): (...) *Si vero sine curatore constitutus contractum fecisti, implorare in integrum restitutionem, si necdum tempora praefinita excesserint, causa cognita non prohiberis.*

<sup>23</sup> Dig. 4.4.44 (Ulp. 5 opin): *Non omnia, quae minores annis viginti quinque gerunt, irrita sunt, sed ea tantum, quae causa cognita eiusmodi deprehensa sunt, vel ab aliis circumventi vel sua facilitate decepti aut quod habuerunt amiserunt, aut quod adquirere emolumentum potuerunt omiserint, aut se oneri quod non suscipere licuit obligaverunt.*

<sup>24</sup> CJ 2.41.1 (a. 232): *In consilio quidem cognoscentis de restitutione in integrum esse oportet, num is, qui se minorem annis laesum esse dicat, diligens pater familias fuerit actibusque publicis industrium se docuerit, ut lapsum eum per aetatem verisimile non sit. Verum si causa cognita circumventus deprehendatur, propter hoc solum velut praescriptione a solito auxilio removeri non debet, quod urgentibus patriae necessitatibus decurio minor annis creatus sit vel propagandae suboli liberorum educatione prospexerit.*



“slippery/ lubricous” age is a principle we find in the Latin West up to the sixth century with Cassiodorus.<sup>25</sup> I insist on this matter because it is a very good example of application and reality -- not just discourse -- for the subject of Roman youth.

As for Jewell’s suggestion that it would be good to study age indications and awareness of ‘adolescents’ over a vast corpus of inscriptions [p. 645], I have actually done so for a small sample. Other publications also point to the fact that such enormous project (indeed more than one PhD) might indeed show key ages in the age category fifteen-twenty, and a tendency to emphasise younger years over old age.<sup>26</sup>

2.3. Jewell offers useful observations for the next sections too. For chapter 3 (“Terminology and characteristics of youth”) he points to the absence of any substantial treatment of the visual vocabulary of young age; on p. 643 already he reproached us a lack of art-historical or archaeological material (and again on p. 649). This is a little bit unfair, since Jewell himself acknowledges that there exists no specific treatment of the subject (only of children, as he piles up in note 10). It is to be hoped that iconographical studies will add to our knowledge in the near future, surely since valuable new collections now exist to facilitate such work.<sup>27</sup> As for chapter 4 (“Rites of passage”), Jewell praises our approach which makes practical distinctions in the literary and epigraphical material to discern between the customs of different regions. Here too, valuable new studies which appeared after 2008 added to our knowledge of specific regional rites of passage which existed throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>28</sup> Chapter 5 (“Youth and ancient medi-

<sup>25</sup> PULIATTI (2012) 85-87. See Cassiodorus, Var. 4.35.1: (...) *minores contractus liberos non habere, ut et insidiantium laquei frustrarentur et lapsis aetas lubrica subveniret*.

<sup>26</sup> LAES, Chr. (2012) ‘Latin inscriptions and the life course. Regio III (Bruttium and Lucania) as a test case’, *Arctos* 46: 93-111. See also LAURENCE, R. and TRIFILÒ, F. (2012) ‘Vixit Plus Minus’. Commemorating the age of the dead – towards a familial Roman life course?, in *Families in the Roman and Late Antique World*. ed. M. Harlow and L. Larsson Lovén. London: 23-40.

<sup>27</sup> MANDER, J. (2012) *Portraits of Children on Roman Funerary Monuments*. Cambridge. Also BOBOU, O. (2016) ‘rev. Youth in the Roman Empire’, *Latomus* 75, 1: 240-242, esp. p. 242 points to our lack of treatment of the iconographical sources, and gives useful comments on the images used in the book.

<sup>28</sup> DERKS, T. (2009) ‘Van toga tot terracotta: het veelkleurige palet van volwassenwor-

cine”) is a good example of how ancient observations on youthful bodies were indeed used and reused in a medical discourse with a *longue durée* of sometimes thousand years.<sup>29</sup> One wonders why Jewell does not mention anything about this point, though he rightly emphasises how our approach of the medical sources differs from Eyben’s (we stress the matter of agency and caution readers not to equate the literary passages on ‘crisis of youth’ with the physiological changes of puberty perceived by doctors). Little is said on our observations on the female side of the matter. The study on adolescent girls has now received due attention in a recent, admirable book.<sup>30</sup> Also for chapter 6 (“Youth and education”), Jewell argues that we offer a useful summary of the ancient evidence and recent scholarship, but no new insights. I think this remark is unfair again, since there is no objection against drawing on the excellent work of predecessors, in the scope of presenting for the general reader an overall picture of the lives of ancient boys and girls (Preface p. xiii, where we predicted that many subjects will be familiar to the Roman social historian). Jewell has no eye for the details we added or the introduction of new sources into the discussion, for example on p. 76-77. As to universities, one wonders about Jewell’s silence. Indeed, for ancient ‘universities’, even critics as Pleket acknowledged the fact that there were indeed young males, roughly between age sixteen and twenty, who spent time away from their parental homes and indulged in activities which were only allowed by society because they were students. For Antiquity, this is perhaps the closest one comes to a sort of youthful subculture.<sup>31</sup> One indeed finds complaints and sorrows on student’s behaviour in sources as wide ranging as Cicero’s letters, papyri, Libanius and extended passages with both Latin

dingsrituelen in het Romeinse rijk’, *Lampas* 42: 204-28; HUEBNER, S. (2009) ‘Female circumcision as a *rite de passage* in Egypt -- continuity through the millennia?’, *Journal of Egyptian History* 2, 1, 149-171.

<sup>29</sup> See for many instances of such continuity: LEVEN, K.-H. (ed.) (2005) *Antike Medizin. Ein Lexikon*. München.

<sup>30</sup> CALDWELL, L. (2015) *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity*. Cambridge. Note that this monograph is critically assessed too in the same journal. See TREGGIARI, S. (2016) ‘Training for marriage’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 29: 635-642.

<sup>31</sup> See the vivid accounts in CRIBIORE, R. (2001) *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Princeton and Oxford; CRIBIORE, R. (2007) *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*. Oxford and Princeton; WATTS, E. (2006) *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*. Berkeley, London and Los Angeles.

and Greek Church Fathers from the fourth and fifth century, even upto late ancient sources of the sixth century. Such proves that the self-regulating system of ancient schools produced a schooling system with remarkable similarities that lasted over centuries.<sup>32</sup> As for agency of young people in such system, which was deeply rooted in ancient concepts about cognitive development and the authority of tradition, new studies have added to the picture.<sup>33</sup>

For chapters 7 (“Associations of adolescent youth”) and 9 (“Youth in public office”) Jewell rightly points to our unawareness of a highly valuable, contextualised set of epigraphic data: the graffiti, and not the least the corpus of painted electoral programmata from Pompeii, in which individuals identify themselves as either *adulescentes* or *iuvenes*. I acknowledge this shortcoming, and stress the fact that very recently, new progress has been made in this field too.<sup>34</sup>

2.4. “One uses what one has”. This could surely have been the motto of chapters 10 (“Occupational training”) and 11 (“Marriage”) where we freely made use of the possibilities of narrative history, sketching possible scenarios and recurring to anthropological comparisons and sometimes empathic imagination to picture what might have been going on. We realise that such approach might be subject to critique, but again point to similar recent approaches, which we feel have added to our knowledge of the ancient world. *Alii aliter iudicent* - but what we offer is surely more than “the most cursory of treatments” [p. 648].<sup>35</sup> Also, I do not think it is fair to describe chapter 11 (“Youth and Christianity”) as “the briefest of sketches of the work of other scholars” [p. 649]. It is indeed intended as a nod to Eyben’s work, who

<sup>32</sup> There is wide agreement on this with historians of ancient education. See e.g. MORGAN, T. (1998) *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*. Cambridge.

<sup>33</sup> BLOOMER, M. W. (2017) ‘Becoming a Roman student’, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Chr. Laes and V. Vuolanto. London and New York: 166-176.

<sup>34</sup> Apart from the studies mentioned by Jewell (2016) 647 there now is HUNTLEY, K. V. (2017) ‘The writing on the wall: age, agency, and material culture’, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Chr. Laes and V. Vuolanto. London and New York: 137-154.

<sup>35</sup> See on narrative approaches, various contributions in BURKE, P. (ed.) (2001) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Cambridge, 2nd rev. ed.

has contributed greatly to the study of youth in early Christianity.<sup>36</sup> It also serves as an antidotum to the ‘long continuity’, pointing to change which is apparent from the Christian material.<sup>37</sup> And above all, the chapter tried to hint at possible directions for further research, since I believe that ancient historians may learn a lot from the dialogue with scholars who have been traditionally left out of the discussion, not the least canonists, specialists of early Christian iconography or those focusing on monasticism in late Antiquity.

2.5. Jewell puts much emphasis on our treatment of “Youthful behaviour” in chapter 8. This section is central to his treatment of the book, since he believes that “in asking how Roman youths behaved in *lived* experience, the nature of the evidence (...) does not lend itself to the task of finding any coherent answer” [p. 649]. He adds that “more fruitful questions about the construction of elite male identity and the power relations mediating youth at Rome still remain to be posed to this discourse” [p. 649]. What we actually do in this chapter, is going through all sorts of sources which hint at possible restless behaviour: a wide range of leisure activities, the possibility of youthful poetry, and generational conflicts between fathers and sons. Though the literary sources indeed often mention *iuvenes* or *adulescentes* in such situations, we emphasise that they should in no way be equated with nowadays rebellious teenagers, since the context of such *iuventus* was profoundly different. In the same way, Jan Martin Timmer has treated the *iuvenes* who appear as a group resorting to violence in the period of the late Roman Republic, when the long time cherished ideal of political consensus was gradually and steadily collapsing. Instead of viewing them as angry young men, he compares them to *charivari* (English “Skimmington”, German “Rühgebrauch”). Many pre-modern societies, alongside annual cycles of seasonal customs, deployed occasions of customary demonstrations of disapproval against individuals, groups or households. Such demonstrations

<sup>36</sup> EYBEN, E. (1995) ‘Young priests in early Christianity’, *Panchaia. Festschrift für Klaus Thraede*. Münster: 102-120; EYBEN, E. (1996) ‘The early Christian view of youth’, *Satura Lanx. Festschrift für Werner A. Krenkel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. C. Klodt. Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: 239-255; EYBEN, E. (1999) art. ‘Jugend’, *RLAC* 19: col. 388-442.

<sup>37</sup> The brilliant book by HARPER, K. (2013) *From Shame to Sin. The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge, MA already is a classic in the field.

were often performed by groups referred to as 'young men'.<sup>38</sup> In an important article on *iuventus*, Mireille Corbier has made the point of the two sides of the medal. While most of the Roman literary sources (not the least historiography) and the 'official' representations of epigraphy either implicitly or explicitly adopt a 'static perspective' of a (fragile) societal equilibrium, where young people were supposed to behave as 'decent and full grown citizens', little hints and side remarks testify that such idealised behaviour was not always the case.<sup>39</sup> I believe that the approaches by Timmer and Corbier again prove that *also* on lived reality, fruitful observations can and should be made.

### 3. No need to exclude 'lived reality'

Jewell's critical remarks on our observations on lived reality go to the heart of the matter of a fundamental debate. They are in fact about the possibility of meeting 'other people', both from foreign cultures or other periods of time. For this, Wittgenstein has expressed the idea of 'form of life' (a fundamental condition which enables understanding between people of different cultures), and intercultural interpretations of his thoughts have reinforced such interpretation.<sup>40</sup> On a more practical level, Aristotle has already expressed the same idea.<sup>41</sup> For ancient history, Mark Golden has dealt with the question in an article which became a 'classic' in the field:

<sup>38</sup> TIMMER, J. (2005) 'Barbatuli iuvenes - Überlegungen zur Stellung der "Jugend" in der späten römischen Republik', *Historische Anthropologie* 13: 197-219; TIMMER, J. (2008) *Altersgrenzen politischer Partizipation in antiken Gesellschaften*. Berlin.

<sup>39</sup> CORBIER, M. (2012) 'Iuvenis, Iuvenes, Iuventus', *Iuris Antiqui Historia. An International Journal on Ancient Law* 4: 15-27. A key text is Dig. 48.19.28.3 (Callistratus 6 de cogn.): *Solent quidam, qui volgo se iuvenes appellant, in quibusdam civitatibus turbulentis se adclamationibus popularium accommodare. Qui si amplius nihil admiserint nec ante sint a praeside admoniti, fustibus caesi dimittuntur aut etiam spectaculis eis interdicuntur. Quod si ita correcti in eisdem deprehendantur, exilio puniendi sunt, nonnumquam capite plectendi, scilicet cum saepius seditiose et turbulente se gesserint et aliquotiens adprehensi tractati clementius in eadem temeritate propositi perseveraverint*. See LAES, STRUBBE (2014) 131 and 135 (also referring to the *charivari*). CORBIER (2012) 19 rightly interpretes *volgo* as "currently, in common parlance".

<sup>40</sup> LAES (2011) 19-21.

<sup>41</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Eth. Nic.* 1155 a 16-23.

“speculation about interpersonal relations must inevitably be sterile if we cannot assume some similarity or at least comprehensibility in the feelings of those long since beyond direct appeals for clarification”. In this, Golden fully takes into account the mere fact that, as human beings, we all share bodies: “the way we shape our feelings is culturally determined, the feelings have some physiological and even biological basis”.<sup>42</sup> This is exactly what we intended to do in our book on Roman youth, and why we started with observations by a Dutch developmental psychologist on the structure of the youthful brain [*Youth*, p. 1-2]. While we explicitly distance ourselves from a deterministic sociobiological position (which in the end would make historical investigations quite futile), we do believe that one should take into account the almost inherent possibility of impulsive or restless behaviour with young people. To this, Jewell *et alii* might object that it is either a trivial observation, which does not tell us much more on the past we want to study, or that beyond this observation, nothing substantial can be said on what went on in real life. We on the contrary believe that acknowledging the biological basis of being young is a necessary framework to understand both the societal responses (the outward aspect) as the possible psychological answers to it (the inner aspect) on young people.<sup>43</sup> It surely does not exclude the possibility of hinting at daily life. In the end, what matters very much in the ancient sources telling stories about or reflecting upon youth is that events or stories are in fact told, and that the depiction must have had a relevance to the intended audience. In this context, also the notion of ‘agency’ cannot and should not be an empty category devoid of analytic importance (“done by a person”). In ‘(auto)biographical’ texts, individuals give meaning to experiences they had, and thereby also express hope. As such, they indeed construct ‘their’ own meanings of experiences, but they do so within a specific social and cultural context.<sup>44</sup> By our approach, we believe to have done justice to both the universal aspects of being young, and the

<sup>42</sup> GOLDEN, M. (1988) ‘Did the ancients care when their children died?’, *Greece & Rome* 35 (1988): 152-163. See also LAES, Chr. (2001) rev. Konrad Vössing, Schule und Bildung im Nordafrika der Römischen Kaiserzeit, *Gnomon* 73: 673-677, p. 676.

<sup>43</sup> LAES, STRUBBE (2014) 228-232.

<sup>44</sup> See the most valuable remarks by VUOLANTO, V. (2017) ‘Experience, agency, and the children in the past: the case of Roman childhood’, *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Chr. Laes and V. Vuolanto. London and New York: 11-24, esp. p. 15-16 and p. 21.

differences as they were shaped and determined by Roman culture, norms and values -- that is, transgressing the impassable divide between 'us' and 'them' as it is sometimes claimed in the name of critical, reticent scholarship as Jewell's.<sup>45</sup>

#### **4. Further ways for research**

No doubt, further research, not the least the promising approach by Jewell himself, will show "future historians donning their philological cap and tackling this corpus with the rigour of their more literary minded colleagues" [p. 646].

Scholarship on Roman youth will surely be served by approaching 'new' sources, which have not yet been explored systematically before. Here, studying the Greek language material, both the literary and the epigraphical sources, is of great importance -- also the study of iconography is a much underexplored field, as is the study of sources from Classical Greek and Hellenistic Antiquity in general. Well known sources should be approached with new questions and methodology, as the detailed study of age indications in the extensive epigraphical corpus. Archaeologists and social historians apply new methodologies in order to find out about young people's environment or experiences: housing and urban space, clothes, games or toys, religious experiences as studied in cognitive psychology.<sup>46</sup>

In the context of this journal, much can and should be expected from a dialogue with scholars of early Christianity from different fields. Especially canonists can contribute a lot with detailed studies on age categories for different functions and ordinations within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and office holding. For moral theologians, the concept of sin and sexual desire with the coming of age remains an area to be studied diligently. For the study of the human life course, Christian epigraphy is not more or less than

<sup>45</sup> AASGAARD (2017) 325. In this contribution, Aasgaard offers seven 'tools' or criteria to come closer to ancient childhood (326-329). It might be worth the effort to try to apply these to youth too.

<sup>46</sup> See LAES, Chr. and VUOLANTO, V. (2017) 'A new paradigm for the social history of childhood and children in Antiquity', *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, ed. Chr. Laes and V. Vuolanto. London and New York: 1-10.



a goldmine. Numerous literary texts from all genres still await a first analysis for the perspective of youth. The Byzantine legal material is extremely rich as divisions of life span are concerned, and so are late ancient and early medieval hagiographies from both the West and the East (in many different languages). The iconography of Christ (or Saint John) as a beardless youth is still not fully studied. And also the study of monastic environments will prove to be most instructive for the study of youth.<sup>47</sup>

All this will bring us closer to ancient Roman thoughts and concepts, views and practices, yes even to human beings from the past. The confrontation and encounter will be enriching and stimulating. And in the end, profoundly human.

<sup>47</sup> See the article by RIZZI, M. (2012) 'I giovani nel cristianesimo antico tra metafora e norma', *Iuris Antiqui Historia. An International Journal on Ancient Law* 4: 67-75, who offers many useful suggestions. For the Byzantine material, see PRINZING, G. (2009) 'Observations on the legal status of children and the stages of childhood in Byzantium', *Becoming Byzantine. Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou and A.-M. Talbot. Dumbarton Oaks: 15-34, esp. p. 30-34.