THE DARK SIDE OF CHILDHOOD

IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

Edited by

Katariina Mustakallio and Christian Laes

The Dark Side of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

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The Dark Side of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Unwanted, Disabled and Lost

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Introduction

Until recently researchers into childhood and family in Antiquity and the Middle Ages have rarely collaborated, or even compared results on topics of social, cultural and everyday life. This volume tries to answer this challenge and analyses conceptions, ideas and habits connected with children in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In this volume we are looking for *longue durée* attitudes of people, as well as ruptures in habits and customs. As such, we do not try to cover everything, but concentrate especially on the 'dark sides of childhood' which were considered disturbing or dangerous in the pre-modern world.

As social-cultural historians occupied with *histoire des mentalités* the writers of this volume try to enter the mental frameworks of people from the past. This, however, often turns out to be a challenging endeavour, not least because it forces students of history to set aside many of their own assumptions or prejudices. When mentioning 'dark sides of childhood', most people nowadays would include such hot issues as child labour, pedophilia and sexual abuse, maltreatment and violence. Yet people in Antiquity and the Middle Ages did not consider these matters in the way the modern world does. Child labour was never viewed as an issue, since most children were gradually introduced into the adult world, and part of this process was initiation into the labour process.[1] Sexual relations between adults and younger people in Antiquity were never taken for granted. However, those ancient authors who raised objections to the practice did so on account of the social status of the young people involved, and never related their objections to children's psychology. When early Christian authors attacked the ancient practice of pederasty, they first and foremost wanted to distinguish Christian faith from pagan customs, rather than to consider the children's point of view in the matter.[2] In a world where violence was very much part of every-day life, the subject of child-beating was never approached in the pedagogical or psychological way so typical of the twentieth century in the western world.[3]

Cultural anthropology has taught us that, besides dissimilarities, there are indeed similarities between people from different cultures, whether past or present. The very fact that we are all biologically human beings connects us in one way or another. This connection is certainly apparent when looking at childhood. Bringing up a child is a long process. It is no surprise that not all parents or other educators in the past were able or willing to take care of their offspring, and sometimes, even if the parents tried their best, their children died or were taken, according to the popular beliefs, by hungry witches or demons.

This collection of essays is divided into three parts according to their themes. The first part is called *Unwanted*, and deals with instances of parents who in some way or another were not able to bring up their baby and decided to hand it over to other people or to the cruel whims of destiny. The second theme is *Disabled*, which also includes instances that we would label as children's illnesses, since disability was a concept very much unknown to ancient people. The third part, *Nearly Lost*, consists of articles on demons, which were viewed as destructive forces able to destroy children or young people, sometimes by literally sucking their lives away.

In his article *Infant Abandonment and the Christianization of Medieval Europe* Ville Vuolanto focuses on child abandonment in the period when Christianity rose to a dominant position and started to influence people's values and ways of thinking. Vuolanto approaches the subject in two ways, by going back to its research historyand secondly by analysing the problem in a case study. According to Vuolanto, in many cases parents voluntarily left their infants in a place where their survival would be more certain than at home. Abandonment was not necessarily a desperate move, but a part of a family strategy designed to secure its future.

In *The Dynamics of Infant abandonment: Motives, Attitudes and (Unintended) Consequences* Judith Evans Grubbs concentrates on the first three centuries of imperial Rome. On the one hand her aim is to clarify the motives behind the abandonment, and on the other to find out the possible legal consequences of the practice. According to the author, the practice became so acceptable symbolically that impoverished married couples could abandon their child in some circumstances, even when, from a practical viewpoint, they perhaps might have been able to take care of it. All in all, the practice was fairly easy to carry out before the fourth century CE, when there were only a few moral objections and no legal ones. From this time onwards, in order to curtail the prevailing practice, legislation set restrictions on it.

In his article *Disabled Children in Gregory of Tours,* Christian Laes has collected all the instances in which one of the dominant figures of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages in the West, Gregory of Tours (538/9–594), mentioned disabled children. The miracle stories indicate that disabilities were numerous, but we cannot get any systematic information on children's recovery or survival. Parents did not always kill their babies born with impairments, as some have assumed earlier. However, Laes supposes that infanticide of disabled children was a common phenomenon.

Laura Cherubini's article *Hungry Witches and Children in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* emphasises the role of the supernatural creature called *strix* (or *striga* in the popular form), which characterises many of the beliefs concerning the world of childhood. This creature is known from Latin sources and has been described as a type of nocturnal bird who harasses or even kills newborn babies. In her article, Cherubini points out that the concept of hungry witches was connected to the deep-seated fear of losing newborn babies, a consequence of the high rate of infant mortality in the pre-modern world.

In *Sons of Demons? Children´s Impairments and the Belief in Changelings in Medieval Europe (1150–1400),* Jenni Kuuliala studies popular changeling lore in the medieval world. Her main focus is on the medieval texts and the early modern ideas that had an influence on beliefs. The article concentrates on those concepts which presented physically disabled children as changelings. More generally, Kuuliala aims to contribute to the discussion on the role of disabled and abnormal children in medieval society.

Last but not least, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa argues in her paper, *Socialization Gone Astray? Children and Demonic Possession in Later Middle Ages,* that demonic activity was used as an explanation for various problems within family life and parent-child relations. The aim of her article is to scrutinise explanations of when 'something goes wrong' in child rearing. She asks in what kind of situations malign spirits were used as an explanation for undesirable behaviour in children, and how cases of demonic possession inform us about late medieval childhood and the socialisation processes of this era.

Many aspects of these papers point to continuity between late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Childhood was considered a vulnerable period. In the pre-modern world infant mortality was high and many threats surrounded a young child. To protect newborn babies, Romans appealed to Iuno Lucina and powers like Intercidona, Pilumnus and Deverra. During the Middle Ages the main protectors were the Virgin Mary, St Nicholas and other saints. On the one hand, many poorer families had to give their children away, or even abandon them. Abandonment however, did not mean killing a child outright, but leaving it a slight possibility of survival if the place where the child was abandoned was well-known. Abandonment may have been an ultimate way of avoiding a child's death by starvation, but the symbolical acceptance of this social phenomenon during Antiquity had even wider consequences. On the other hand, there is some evidence that parents wanted to take care of their children even if they were disabled or severely impaired.

During the period from birth to the age of puberty a person was considered to be more open to the malevolent influences of spirits. In Ancient Rome especially, newborn babies were watched carefully to prevent witches from taking them and devouring them. During the Middle Ages the same ideas seem to have remained prevalent, but to them were added additional beliefs connected to demons.

Other instances point to discontinuity and change concerning the issue of 'children and youth at risk.'[4] The denunciation of child abandonment seems to be a marker of Christianization, though it is far from certain whether these strictures were always observed in everyday practice. Following the example of the healing stories in the Gospels, Christian authors indeed focused much more on instances of disabled or sick children, but again one can doubt whether this changed the way in which the disabled were treated or approached. Demonic possession was in many ways linked to the lives of medieval children. From the theological perspective, it arouses questions of allegedly innocent children's sins and parents' accountability. In medieval culture spirit possession seems to have become a rather gender specific phenomenon. Especially in the treatises of educated clerics it was interconnected with the female sex, women's roles and feminine spirituality. Women's bodies were considered to be more open and vulnerable, thus more prone to spirit possession.

Five of these articles have been developed from papers presented at the international colloquium *Darker Sides of Childhood. Marginalisation and Socialisation in Classical and Medieval World* in May 2009, and one was presented at the conference *Passages from Antiquity to the Middle Ages IV, Religion, Society and Participation* in August 2009. Both the colloquium and the conference were held at the University of Tampere, Finland. Both meetings were organised by the *Trivium Centre for Classical, Medieval and Renaissance studies* with the research project *Religion and Childhood. Socialisation from the Roman Empire to Christian World*, funded by the Academy of Finland (2009–2012, directed by Dr Katariina Mustakallio), at the University of Tampere, Finland. The *Darker Sides of Childhood* colloquium examined issues of childhood and socialisation from a comparative perspective. The aim of the colloquium, as represented in this volume, was to cross the traditional boundaries of time periods and scholarship, as well as to include different approaches.

In this collection the problem of socialisation of a child is in focus. During the socialisation process, cultural expectations are passed to the next generation, and

social personhood is constructed and negotiated. In this sense, a child is also a cultural product. Cultural assumptions and institutions of society, as well as physical and psychical aspects and the gender of a child, are important when parents and the community decide, "is this our own child, or a changeling".

Katariina Mustakallio & Christian Laes,
Rome, 8.2.2010

Notes

[1] On child labour in Antiquity, with references to comparative research, see Laes 2000; 2006, 133–197; 2008a.

[2] Rousseau 2007 is a thought-provoking volume on the issue of child sexual abuse approached from a comparative perspective. For pederasty in Antiquity, the scholarly literature is vast, but readers with a special interest in comparative research will find a great deal of information in Vattuone 2004; Lear, Cantarella 2008; Laes (2010). Bakke 2005, 140–149 and Horn and Martens 2009, 225–232 deal with the view of the Early Church on pederasty.

[3] On child-beating in Antiquity, with references to other periods, see Laes 2005.

[4] The twentieth century seems to have been marked by an ever-expanding number of pedagogical issues and 'children at risk'. See the surveys by Lohmann, Mayer 2009 and Dekker 2009, both in a special issue of Paedogogica Historica, entitled Children and Youth at Risk. Symptomatically, none of the articles in this very interesting volume deal with the period before the Modern Age.

Part I

Unwanted

1
Infant Abandonment and the Christianization of Medieval Europe

Ville Vuolanto

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to theorize pre-modern infant abandonment. The need for such an aim arises from the situation in which child abandonment[1] is a recurrent theme in majority of the studies concerning any aspect of the ancient or medieval family history, although the basic assumptions and standpoints of the research have seldom been brought to the fore, discussed and defined.

When scrutinizing abandonment and its interpretations, I take two different viewpoints: Firstly, I study the theme via its research history, concentrating on the interplay of child abandonment and the rise of Christianity, as interpreted in earlier research published during the last 30 years. In this the claimed transition in both the ideology and the practices of child abandonment has often been seen as one of the indicators of the 'Christianization' of society. In this part of the study, I pay critical attention to the starting points and hypotheses of previous studies commenting on the claimed impact of Christianity on the practice of abandonment in a period during which Christianity rose to become the dominant factor in defining ideal values and hoped-for behaviour. The actual time period in question depends on what part of Europe is under scrutiny: the present chapter deals with this change in the Mediterranean area during Late Antiquity, in Western Europe during the Early Middle Ages, and in Northern Europe in the period between the tenth and the late fourteenth century CE.

Secondly, I take up a case study in order to show more closely how child abandonment has been approached in research, and to test some of the conclusions of the first part of this chapter. In order that the case study is manageable within a single chapter of a book and also provides enough source material to offer something more than mere guesswork, I have chosen to limit my discussion in this part of the study to the Christianization of medieval Iceland. Iceland offers also an alternative view to the discussion of abandonment, if compared to the Roman context as presented in Judith Evans Grubbs's chapter later in this volume.

The question of the impact of Christianity and the Church on the practice of abandonment has usually been dealt with only in the margins of larger studies. John Boswell's influential but controversial *Kindness of the Strangers* (1988), is one of the very few studies dealing with the question directly and at length. Not surprisingly, nearly all studies concerning the family history of the period in question have had something to say about it. For the present paper, I have gone through some 110 studies, of which

nearly fifty refer to the role of Christianity and the Church in affecting the practice of abandonment. The material which will be analysed in the following discussion includes the most important studies of family history and child abandonment, but it naturally represents only a selection of the total research.

The first part of the paper is a review of studies I have used for my analysis, that is, it presents the material for the chapter and introduces the manifold roles Christianity and the Church have played in the search for the interpretative keys to the supposed changes in the practices of abandonment. After that, the dominant features and differing opinions of the discussion on abandonment are analysed. Special attention is paid here to the relationship between infanticide and abandonment, which seems to be crucial in understanding and interpreting these phenomena in their historical contexts. Another issue highlighted is the importance of the conceptual separation between ideological (or normative) change and social historical change (in practices). As a conclusion to the historiographical part of my chapter, I will put forward a further methodological division for analysing sources on abandonment. After that, I will exemplify my approach by taking up the case of the Christianization of medieval Iceland. At the end, a new frame of reference is proposed for studies dealing with infant abandonment.

Abandonment – the state of research

Starting from the 1970's, abandonment of children has been a subject of constant interest among scholars of the Roman and medieval periods. This is due to a couple of dominant research themes linked with the phenomenon. Firstly, there are the studies linking the abandonment of children to the high childhood mortality and parental attachment during the pre-modern period. The pioneering work which adopted this kind of approach was done by Lloyd DeMause, in turn inspiring others.[2] The theme has been constantly referred to in many studies, especially those that concern Roman demography. The most hotly debated questions here are how many of the abandoned infants would have survived, and whether girls were abandoned more frequently than boys. Answers to these questions would be crucial in studying possible population growth (or stagnation) rates and for estimating the relative importance of different supplies of slaves.[3] Linked to this theme, the issue of abandonment has been dealt with in studies that refer to the practice of oblation and to the rise of foundlings' hospitals during the Middle Ages.[4] The third branch has been the study of Roman law, which has been interested in abandonment as a case-study in the evolution of legislation from Roman republican times through the Roman Empire to the legal codes of the Germanic peoples.[5]

On the whole, both classicists and medievalists agree that abandonment was a widespread and common means of getting rid of surplus members of the family during the Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages before the rise of Christianity. Even if abandonment was perhaps not an everyday phenomenon, it was certainly included in the array of possible choices after giving birth to a new potential family member.[6] There are, naturally, disagreements about detail: was the practice limited to the poor and disabled, or, to turn this question around, did the rich also abandon their healthy new-born, and to what extent was the practice limited to girls? In the more recent studies

these questions have been most often recognized as unanswerable, and as the advent of Christianity has not been considered to have introduced any significant change in these practices, I will not engage in these discussions any further.

The question of female abandonment, however, is linked to the question of the overall numbers involved, which would serve as the basis of any interpretation of change in social historical level. If one is inclined to be liberal in defining abandonment as including all the different phenomena resulting in the separation of a parent and child (like wet-nursing, oblation and other kinds of fostering arrangements), the rate of abandonment may be estimated to be as high as 'twenty to forty percent of urban children – at Rome during the first three centuries of the Christian era'.[7] However, even the most modest recent estimations have claimed that at least some three percent of children of poor mothers may have been abandoned in the Roman world.[8] Scholars of the medieval period have been less eager to make any guesses as to the actual numbers abandoned, and during the last decade even classical scholars have usually only stated that the actual frequencies cannot be determined.[9]

Another trend that began in the 90's has been an eagerness among historians to point out that abandonment of children does not necessarily imply parental indifference.[10] This can be seen as a reference to the previous phase of the study of pre-modern childhood, which concentrated heavily on denying any lack of 'sentiment d'enfance' and stressed the parental 'love' and caring attitude, in response to the studies of the first wave of childhood historians like Philippe Ariès and, later, Lloyd DeMause.[11]

In all, the scholars have been quite unanimous in claiming that no signs of any change in the phenomenon of child abandonment can be discernible before the rise of Christianity as a dominant discourse in Late Antiquity.[12] However, in analysing the changes in society after that, the interpretations became interestingly varied, even if all scholars imply a change on an institutional level: the emperors of Late Antiquity began to restrict abandonment, the Church held it as a sinful practice, and both institutions encouraged people to take care of their foundlings.[13] Christianity is also reputed to have made abandonment more humane: not only did its monasteries and churches offer new, safer alternatives methods by which children could be abandoned,[14] but it also offered a new, virtuous way of abandoning them, donation to asceticism as oblates. This idea was first presented by John Boswell in 1984 (elaborated in his 1988 book), and was accepted by many scholars, at least partly.[15] From the mid 1990's onwards, however, the theory has received much criticism for many reasons: oblation was a recourse available to only a minority of people, usually those from the higher social levels; it concerned children of a different age-group than abandonment proper, and it quickly developed into a public and formal transaction.[16]

On the ideological level another change has often been credited to Christianity: it brought along a new idea, an absolute right to live for the newborn, and thus a higher status for them.[17] However, it has been a matter of much debate how these ideals affected everyday life. At one extreme, some scholars have claimed that Christianity totally or nearly ended the abandonment of children. In 1985 Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Monique Closson bluntly claimed that newborns were not exposed or abandoned in the Middle Ages.[18] Similarly, some scholars in the 1980's and 1990's have argued that the coming of Christianity stopped or at least greatly reduced child abandonment in Scandinavia, leading to the rise in population. This claim, however, has been

convincingly refuted.[19] One of the most influential scholars in the development of this idea is Juha Pentikäinen, who has shown that in the pre-Christian period abandonment was practiced, but abandonment of healthy children was seen as a shameful deed and legally forbidden after the coming of Christianity. Indeed, for him the criminalization of infanticide and abandonment is one of the clearest signs of Christianization of an area. Moreover, Pentikäinen has tried to show that the ancient Finnish oral poetry depicting children 'carried to the bog' can be connected to pre-Christian practices of abandonment, concluding that 'the abandonment of children had a place in the legal system of the Finnic peoples'. His strongest arguments are comparative: he uses the Icelandic sagas, anthropological studies on the Inuit and later Finnish folklore to advance his points.[20]

Quite often scholars have implied that abandonment had not yet stopped in the period they were researching, but because of the influence of Christianity, it would do so in the future. In the 80's and early 90's especially, many scholars seem to have shared the assumption that abandonment should have ceased during the Christian Middle Ages. As this kind of reasoning is typical for studies which only touch on the issue of abandonment in passing, it is quite easy to detect in it a presupposition not critically reflected. Thus, for example, in 1992 Susan Dixon argued that in Late Antiquity a father's right to reject a new baby was still taken for granted, and abandonment of children 'seems to have persisted for some time' and 'gave way only gradually' after it had been forbidden in 374 CE. Similarly, some other ancient historians refer to abandonment as continuing on large scale 'until' the fourth century.[21]

Surprisingly, even many medievalists seem to have shared this idea, even when finding evidence for the practice in their much later material. For example, in 1986 Robert Fossier saw the 'birth of childhood' developing as a result of the abandonment of infants ceasing during the medieval period, despite the fact that there was 'still' abandonment in 1000 CE in Catalonia, and 'even later' in Burgundy. According to Frances and Joseph Gies in 1987, abandonment was accepted and widespread in Antiquity, and early Germanic legislation 'still' allowed the disavowal of infants – after this, abandonment is no longer found in Germanic law-codes.[22] Also Barbara Hanawalt, when writing on infanticide in 1986, seems to have assumed that the practice of abandonment continued in medieval Europe only in Scandinavia, where, according to her, pre-Christian ideas about infant survival persisted, as abandonment continued to be permissible for the poor and for a father of a deformed child 'even after' the region had become Christian. Similarly, in 1989 Christian Krötzl wrote that statutes forbidding abandonment and infanticide are 'still to be found in the provincial laws of Norway and Sweden made even after the coming of Christianity'.[23]

Since the late 90's many of those scholars pondering the question of child abandonment have claimed that even if Christian ideology could not stop the practice, it did nevertheless reduce the number of abandoned children. Odd Magne Bakke's monograph is a good example of this kind of argumentation. As he seeks to show that Christianity had a positive impact on actual children's lives, he chooses two practices to support his argument: pederasty and abandonment. Firstly, he aims to show that elite attitudes concerning abandonment have changed. There are problems inherent in this approach from the start, due to the changes in the genre of the source material. Thus he is forced to compare the earlier 'mentality' (that is, according to him, the more or less shared elite consensus that child abandonment was an inevitable, even if unpleasant, fact

of life) to Christian 'ideology' (normative ideas of the Christian writers as to how good Christians should behave). Secondly, as he himself notes, he cannot prove that the actual number of abandoned babies were lower among Christians. However, he claims that the numbers were smaller, because 'there must be at least some measure of coherence between what they [the Church fathers] said about the Christian life and how people in fact live', and therefore it is reasonable to assume that actual rates of abandonment had dropped.[24] The same kind of argumentation, stressing the effectiveness of the bans on abandonment, informs also the argumentation of other scholars: in Late Antiquity, ethical instruction and the imperial laws 'certainly considerably reduced' the numbers of infant abandonment.[25]

In a number of studies from the earlier phase of childhood studies, written during the 70's, the rate of abandonment was thought to have been quite high also in the medieval period, even if a change from Antiquity is discernible. To take two examples: according to Lloyd DeMause (in his 'classic' account of 1974) child abandonment to death took place on a massive scale in Antiquity; even if the practice continued and was still widespread in the medieval world, there was a considerable change in the 'mode of parent-child relation' from an infanticidal mode to other ways of abandonment. David Herlihy's formulation implies a less dramatic change: even if the killing or abandonment of babies remained common in medieval times, it ceased to be an accepted practice of all social classes (in Antiquity) and became a resort of only the poor and desperate. Some other medievalists have also claimed that abandonment remained common 'among the less privileged classes' in the Middle Ages.[26]

By comparison, those scholars who have compared ancient and medieval abandonment at a general level have most often arrived at the conclusion that the rise of Christianity did not change much. How could it have done, when there were no other reliable means to limit family size? Abandonment was commonly practiced throughout the period.[27] In addition, a number of medievalists in the 90's and the early 2000's, without making any comparisons with Antiquity or any estimates of its actual frequency, viewed abandonment as a reality of the Middle Ages, but not a large-scale phenomenon.[28]

Despite these arguments, John Boswell claims that even if during the prosperous period of the Middle Ages, from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, the numbers of abandoned were at their lowest (except in Scandinavia), when conditions subsequently deteriorated due to overpopulation, economic depression and violence, the rates of abandonment actually increased during the high Middle Ages.[29] These changes were not directly dependent on Christian influence; however it has also been claimed that the supposed widening gulf between norms and reality with the dominance of the Christian ideals brought a culture of shame and the new morality led to the abandonment of illegitimate children on larger scale.[30] Even if this view has not gained support among the other scholars, the idea that the emergence of the foundling hospitals, offering a psychologically easier method of abandonment to parents, actually increased the number of abandoned infants during the later Middle Ages, has been widely accepted.[31]

Abandonment/infanticide, ideologies/practices – relationships self evident?

How should these very different views be interpreted – and are there any possibilities to come to any firmer conclusions on the phenomenon of infant abandonment itself? Naturally, there is very little documentation on abandonment in any period before the establishment of the foundling hospitals. This leaves plenty of space for implicit background assumptions. Some scholars take a more positive stance towards Christianity than others; some stress ideological factors, others stress the continuity of a subsistence economy and everyday realities; and all take part in the discussion on the parents' emotional attachment to their children with arguments implying a certain motivation for the abandonment.

However, there are also more concrete explanations for this variety of views. Much depends on how abandonment is defined and understood. There is an especially wide variation in ideas of the relationship between abandonment and infanticide. Two main ways of conceptualizing this relationship seem to prevail – abandonment seen as an alternative to infanticide, or abandonment as a subcategory of infanticide. This distinction is often, but not always, rather explicitly stated. There is also a further division in understanding the relationship between abandonment and infanticide, as scholars tend to stress either the demographic consequences of abandonment, paying attention to the eventual rates of death or survival of children, or the ethical viewpoint, with an emphasis on the supposed intention behind the decision to abandon a child. This ethical perspective, moreover, can be assessed from the viewpoint of the parents and their everyday life contexts; from the contemporary normative and ideological perspective; or even from that of the modern scholar.

From this standpoint it is noticeable that scholars who have a contemporary normative or modern perspective, or who equate abandonment and infanticide for demographic reasons, have a tendency to see abandonment as a subcategory of infanticide. Furthermore, these are the same scholars who see the clearest change with the advent of Christianity.[32] Demographically abandonment and infanticide are equated also by some scholars who do not stress the advent of Christianity. According to William Harris, for example, abandonment was the commonest way in which infants were 'killed' in Antiquity, and Shulamit Shahar writes that children were 'abandoned to death' in the Middle Ages. In addition, quite a number of other ancient historians assume that abandonment should be seen as a subcategory of infanticide (or as 'indirect infanticide'). In most of these studies, the parents' intention is understood to have been the death of the child: children are left to die in deserted places, or even 'thrown on the street, starved and suffocated'.[33] All in all, there is a common point made in studies of this category: abandonment may have continued to some degree even after the rise of Christianity, but the parents wanted much more eagerly than before to protect their children from dying.

On the other hand, to John Boswell, for example, abandonment is an alternative for infanticide, and Didier Lett holds that parents abandoned children in the hope of offering them a better future, and the Church, in fact, favoured abandonment over infanticide.[34] Some scholars, moreover, have made a distinction between infanticide accomplished by leaving the child to die out of sight, and abandonment as a form of

'circulation of the children', by leaving the child in the hope that someone would find it and take care of it.[35] On the whole, however, most scholars have not spelt out their presuppositions for interpretation, nor reflected on their idea of the relationship between abandonment and infanticide. This has led either to the assimilation of abandonment to infanticide, or to their complete separation – the first highlighting mortality rates, the second concealing them.

The conceptual diversity regarding child abandonment is widened further as a result of the rather loose conceptual definitions used in some influential studies. Unsurprisingly, this kind of usage appears in studies which see the practice continuing at a high level throughout the Roman and medieval eras. For DeMause, exposure is a form of infanticide, whereas 'abandonment' includes sale, pledging, donation, fosterage, apprenticeship and wet-nursing. For Boswell, abandonment includes not only '*expositio*', that is, leaving a child be picked up by strangers, but also *oblatio*, selling, pledging, donating and fostering of the child. The differences between Boswell and those who criticize him both for his excessively high estimation of the percentage of children subject to 'abandonment' and for his over-optimistic assessment of their chances of survival, can, in fact, be seen as resulting from the conceptual differences in defining abandonment itself.[36]

The greatest problem in the studies on abandonment is not, however, that the definition of abandonment changes from one author to another, but that definitions are often lacking altogether. Not only is the relationship between abandonment and infanticide left vague, but also the scholars have seldom defined the level of discourse they have been analysing in order to substantiate their claims of change or the impact of Christianity, or the lack of them. It is actually possible to differentiate at least three such levels for this analysis:[37] Firstly, regarding the elite ideology, what kind of stand is taken towards abandonment in normative and ideological statements, such as secular legislation or ecclesiastical canons? Secondly, regarding attitudes and mentality, what kind of attitudes are presented in literature and 'descriptive' sources (such as letters, historical and religious exempla)? Does anything emerge that could be understood as presenting a common understanding of shared values or a collective ethos, that is, a mentality? What was the 'social stigma' of parents abandoning their children, or the attitudes towards the foundlings? Thirdly, regarding the level of everyday life, how did people actually behave: how many children were abandoned, why were they abandoned, and what became of them? In most studies these levels of interpretation are blurred, and, even more misleadingly, the analysis of one of these levels in one place and time is often compared with an analysis of a different level in another place and time. How can one compare Roman elite attitudes with Christian elite norms? Even a comparison between ecclesiastical writers and the stoic moralists would yield different results. Another problem is that non-Christians did not have the same possibilities to spread their ideas as those available to Christians through preaching. Not only differences in local traditions and cultures confuse the picture, but also the nature of the source material changes from one genre to another. As a result, any comparisons tend to emphasize change *a priori*, despite of the actual circumstances.

It seems that the use of the normative sources to study social practices has, for example, helped to form a view among the scholars according to which a public, socially-sanctioned act decided upon by men in the Roman world became in medieval

times a hidden, socially unacceptable act in the domain of women – what was once a decision of the *paterfamilias* became the murder of a child by a mad or ignorant woman. Thus most of the medievalists studying the Christian period depict abandonment as a resort of mothers, whereas scholars referring to pre-Christian times are virtually unanimous in claiming that the individuals in charge of the actual act of abandonment were fathers, this being a result of certain legal rights they possessed in family and society. In Antiquity this idea is derived from *patria potestas*, interpreted as an absolute right for a father to decide if a new-born child would be included as a family member or not. For the later periods, the prominence of the father is explained by similar rights granted by the Germanic, or early Scandinavian, legal traditions.[38] However, one has to ask two questions: in Antiquity, were the infants actually abandoned by their fathers? The parental power of the Roman fathers was, after all, the normative presupposition held by the Roman elite authors – but how many of the ancient fathers actually had, or knew they had, the Roman *patria potestas*? Moreover, the act of abandonment could not happen without some participation (or at least knowledge) by the midwives and/or mothers, and the emphasis on their role rather than that of fathers may be a particularity of medieval writers, though the practice itself may not necessarily have changed much.[39] Even more importantly, do we have any indication that Christianity affected family dynamics and shifted the balance of authority in families in such a radical way? In fact, recent studies imply that the position of husbands vis-à-vis their spouses was ideologically only strengthened by the advent of Christianity, a change that began as early as the fifth century.[40] It seems, therefore, that the supposed change in gendered roles in the act of abandonment should be seriously questioned at the very least.

In sum, there are basically three different ways of understanding abandonment on a social historical level: Firstly, abandonment as 'giving away' one's child to other people. On these occasions the parents are not anonymous to the new foster parents. This can be seen as a way of 'circulation' of children, and it may have taken the form of selling of the newborn, adoption, and different kinds of fostering arrangements. Secondly, abandonment can be considered as 'leaving' one's child for others to find. On these occasions, the parents usually remained anonymous, but the assumed intention or hope of the parents is that the child survives: the child is left in a place frequently visited by other community members, perhaps near a well, a refuse heap or the entrances to a churches, or in a foundling hospital. Thirdly, abandonment as 'carrying out' one's child to some deserted place. The assumed intention of the parents (usually remaining anonymous) is that the child dies, or at least disappears from their lives. This kind of abandonment would indeed be understood as psychologically the easiest way of killing a child, and as such, a subcategory of infanticide, even if, perhaps, there is still a need to distinguish (from the parents' point of view) this kind of family planning from the physical killing of the child by the hands of one or both parents, which can be conceptualised as 'child murder'.

This division, based partly on the intention of the parents, can only be hypothetical at best in any single case, since we are not generally in a favourable situation to know people's intentions, especially not those of people in the past. However, in general it is reasonable to assume that all these three modes have existed side by side, and that the relative frequency of occurrence of these different modes would have made a substantial difference to the individual children involved (and even to demography). For example,

some actual cases mentioned in the late Roman legislation, which concern the attempts of parents to reclaim (without the identity of the child coming into question at all) infants that they had earlier abandoned, strongly point to the existence of abandonment in 'giving away'-mode.[41] On the other hand, references such as that of Seneca the Elder in his *Controversiae*, suggest that a difference was made between the two last mentioned modes: 'Some right from birth are damaged in some part of their bodies, weak and hopeless. Their parents throw them out rather than expose them'.[42] Therefore those scholars who are willing to link demographic features to the rates of abandonment, or who try to make sense of the possible influence of Christianity, should differentiate clearly which of the above mentioned modes of abandonment they actually mean when referring to the phenomenon.

A case study: Child abandonment and the arrival of Christianity in Iceland

In the following part of the paper, I will try to practice what I have preached, that is, to scrutinise the possible effect of the coming of Christianity on the practice of infant abandonment in Iceland. I will base my analysis on the conceptual framework depicted above, that is, I will keep the different levels of discourse (ideologies, mentalities, practices) conceptually separated, and try not to make any *a priori* assumptions about the relationship between abandonment and infanticide.

The Christianisation process in Northern Europe has most often been interpreted in a similar way to that of Late Antiquity, as a process of transmission of a new idea about the absolute right of newborn children to live. Changing attitudes towards child abandonment have been seen as the clearest signs of this change. This line of thought has been most prominently advocated by Juha Pentikäinen, Birgit and Peter Sawyer, Jenny Jochens, and, in part, Carol Clover. It is to be noted that among these scholars, abandonment of children has been seen self-evidently as a subcategory of infanticide.[43]

This dominant viewpoint has been challenged only by a few individual scholars, most visibly by John Boswell. He has claimed that in practice the coming of Christianity did not change anything in the North, child abandonment continued as before, and for the most part the abandoned children survived. According to him, there is no way of penetrating into pre-Christian society, but the surviving sources (laws, sagas, other literary texts) depict their time and place of composition, that is, a society that was already Christianised. His interpretation is, therefore, almost directly opposed to the view of the majority.[44] All agree, however, that child abandonment was an 'accepted convention in the pre-Christian Scandinavian cultural sphere'.[45]

In order to assess the plausibility of these differing interpretations, it is necessary to turn to the sources. We have two different kinds of material referring to the practice of child abandonment, normative-historical and literary. The first of these is represented in *Íslendingabók*, a short institutional history of Iceland written most probably some time between 1122 and 1133 by the Icelandic scholar Ari Þorgilsson Fróði. The text claims that when the decision to adopt Christianity was made, the old law concerning the *barna útburðr* – meaning literally the bearing the children out – and eating of horse

meat would remain in force, that is, they were still allowed; although some years later these concessions too were abolished.[46] After this, abandonment as such is not referred to in connection with Icelandic legislature during the Middle Ages. However, in the mid thirteenth century at the latest, a statute was appended to the preamble of the first written law in Iceland, the *Grágás*, that every child born should be baptized 'regardless of how deformed it may be', and therefore not abandoned or killed.[47]

Secondly, there are the sagas of Icelanders, the earliest of which are dated between 1230 and 1290, but depicting mostly events of the tenth and eleventh centuries. One of the crucial points in studying child abandonment in medieval Iceland has been how to assess the value of the references to the practice of 'the bearing the children out' in these texts. Quite surprisingly, scholars supporting the view that Christianity caused a clear reduction in the prevalence of this practice seem to base this view on information derived from these sagas – as if they, as literate texts having certain prejudices towards the pre-Christian times, could give accurate information on the time period before the Christian influence. Lately, this standpoint, rightly in my opinion, has been called into question by Chris Callow.[48]

That sagas independently developed these historical motifs can be seen, for example, in the subsequent references to the story concerning the adoption of Christianity by the Icelanders: in *Njall's saga* (late thirteenth century) it is claimed that the coming of Christianity required to stop *barna útburðr*[49] and the eating of horse meat. In other words, it stresses the importance of Christianity in making the immediate change.[50] On the other hand, in a somewhat later saga it was claimed that the old law, which accepted the bearing the children out and the eating of horsemeat, remained in force, adding an explanation that this happened after a protest by those who pointed out that without allowing these, children could not be brought up by poor and rich alike.[51]

The sagas indeed refer to many cases of abandoned children.[52] In those texts in which the authors have added explanations about the (claimed) pre-Christian customs, it is pointed out that this 'throwing out children' by poor parents was in those days allowed, but socially undesirable, even disapproved of.[53] This has often been interpreted as a moralizing comment in the later saga literature towards the different 'pagan' values and conventional practices. However, as Lotta Mejsholm has recently questioned, if that were the intention of the writers, why did the texts also stress that the practice was already disapproved of in that era? Rather, it seems that the writers wanted to point out that even if those were pagan times, the practice had already a certain moral undertone (as far as they knew). In those stories in which one of the main motives of the episode referred to was to depict antagonism between non-Christian and Christian values, the practice of child abandonment played a different role in argumentation: the bad pagans wanted to abandon their newborn (and kill their elderly people), but the good Christians were depicted as opposing such plans. It is clear that these kinds of stories cannot be used to argue for an actual change in mentality, not to mention practices, even if they form a part of a picture of a morally superior Christian faith.[54] Moreover, what is interesting (and against what is generally claimed in research), when considering the cases in sagas mentioning abandonment, is that there is no indication that girls were more likely to be abandoned than boys.[55]

It is still necessary to return to the definition of the *barna útburðr*. Does this 'bearing the children out' really have the same semantic field as the word 'abandonment' or

the Latin *expositio*?[56] In the narrative sagas the bearing the children out was performed usually by carrying the newborn to a place outside the inhabited area. It seems that there were rituals connected to this practice, the sagas often referring to the child as being left on its own between two big stones, with a piece of lard in its mouth. All this presumably happened before the child had been breastfed or dowsed with water (and given a name).[57] Quite plausibly, Lotta Mejsholm has proposed that these practices stem from the need of the parents both to highlight the newborn child's liminal position as one who had not yet entered society and to distance themselves from the fate of the child, which in most cases was death.[58] This also suggests that in the case of this Icelandic practice, the parents realised that the probable fate of the children was death. Indeed, when the children are depicted in the sagas as being 'carried out', there is an underlying assumption that the child is expected to perish, even if, for the sake of the plot, the children in the stories were depicted as surviving the practice.[59]

Because there are no Icelandic laws (nor any other Scandinavian laws) after the thirteenth century mentioning the 'bearing the children out ', and because in the sources infanticide is clearly designated by different expressions (like *utslato barns; morð*), some scholars have proposed that after a short interval, the rise of Christianity as the new dominant value system eliminated the old practices of child abandonment.[60] I would propose, however, that the Icelandic *barna útburðr* should not be directly equated with either 'abandonment' or 'infanticide'. There seems to have existed a further category for rejecting children, functioning as an alternative to infanticide but thought almost inevitably to lead to the child's death. This was, most probably, psychologically easier for the parents than the outright killing of the newborn. The existence of such an intervening category should be taken into account when trying to track changes in 'mentalities' or in demographic conditions. This also fits neatly into the category of 'carrying out' of the children, coined in the previous part of the present chapter as the third way of understanding child abandonment. Thus, for the later Scandinavian legislation, I would propose that the old conceptual framework was perhaps supplanted by a new one, in which *barna útburðr* was redefined as infanticide, and that the legislation was not interested in regulating the abandonment in 'giving away' mode at all.[61]

Concerning the possible impact of Christianity, the forming of the 'new' category does not change the situation much.[62] As I have shown, how well the post-Christianized sources can be employed to understand pre-Christian mentalities, not to mention pre-Christian practices, remains an open question, or rather, very much dependent upon individual scholars' presuppositions. Even if in some other respects I do not follow John Boswell's reasoning, I agree with him in his scepticism about the view that Christianity brought with it a social change enhancing the well-being of individual newborn children, especially if they were born deformed,[63] or in poor and overcrowded families.

Conclusions

Among the scholars of the 70's and 80's, there were two main lines of interpretation: some claiming that abandonment was extremely common in Antiquity and common in the Middle Ages, others arguing that it was quite common in Antiquity but very rare in the Middle Ages. All had the tendency to regard abandonment as a subcategory

of infanticide, and to assume that Christianity undoubtedly made a difference. John Boswell initiated the second phase of studies in 1988, in which many phenomena, but not infanticide, were classified as 'abandonment'; according to this school of thought, it remained very common and Christianity made little or no difference to that. In the third phase, according to a school of thought which has been dominant since the late 90's, abandonment was common and widespread in Antiquity and relatively common in Middle Ages; it is to be separated from infanticide, at least when looked at from the perspective of the parents; but the role of Christianity is difficult to assess.[64] There seems to be a consensus that after the rise of Christianity parents wanted much more eagerly than before to protect their children from dying. Thus, Christianity would have had a deep impact on the practice of infanticide, but the extent of its impact on the practice of abandonment remains an open question, especially as the relationship between abandonment and infanticide has been rarely defined.

Another discernible change is that prior to the 90's child abandonment was one of the most central elements in the histories of pre-modern childhood, especially among ancient historians. After this, not only has increasing care been taken in speculating on the death rates or frequencies, but the amount of ink expended on the theme has diminished considerably. Taking as examples the few overviews on the history of childhood, Beryl Rawson has three pages and Christian Laes a few sentences, but Jean-Pierre Néraudau had eleven; Nicholas Orme has a half page, while Shulamit Shahar had a five and a half page chapter plus some scattered remarks.[65] It is tempting to propose that this reflects a calming down of the discussion about the emotional attachment of pre-modern parents towards their children.[66] As less need is felt to either prove or disprove indifference on the part of the parents to the practice of abandonment, scholars have been free to explore other aspects of childhood in the past.

However, one problem has persisted: most of the scholars have not spelt out at all, or only at a superficial level, what they mean by 'child abandonment' or 'exposure'. Moreover, only a few scholars have made the distinction between infanticide accomplished by leaving the child somewhere out of sight (to die), and abandonment as a form of 'circulation of the children', leaving the child with the intention of somebody finding or even adopting it. When criticizing the views of other scholars, even less attention has been paid to the definitions of those with opposing views. The result has been a conceptual mess, especially when combined with the a priori idea shared by a number of scholars that the advent of Christianity at the very least *ought* to have decreased the number of abandoned newborn. Moreover, the sources depicting ideologies and norms, attitudes and mentalities, or practices and behaviour, have been compared with each other as if depicting phenomena on the same level. Scholars willing to play down the impact of Christianity and change in general have emphasised the changes in source material, local traditions and regional variety, whereas scholars willing to emphasise change and attribute it to Christianity have played down the importance of such variations.

As a conclusion, I would propose a new, or rather, a more nuanced, definition of the phenomenon in question. According to this, 'abandonment of children' would denote the voluntary leaving of newborn by their parents in some place with arrangements to enable them to survive for a time, with the possibility that they are found and taken by others. However, this renouncing of the child is made in such a way that if the child

survives, it is possible for others to bring up the child in question in such a manner that there no longer are any direct links between the biological parents and their child.

Firstly, this definition limits the phenomenon to newborn infants, that is, children which have not yet been socially integrated in their family or kin networks.[67] Secondly, the definition requires that the social links between the biological and social parents are broken, that is, even if the child may know who the biological parents were, there are no formal contracts or mutual agreements between the 'new' and the 'old' parents.[68] In other words, giving children to a wet-nurse, selling one's children, giving them away to relatives to be fostered, giving them up to adoption, or to the monasteries (as oblates), or making apprenticeship contracts for them, for example, are regarded as different phenomena, even if, taken together, all these form a broad category of 'circulating the children'.

Thirdly and most importantly, even if this definition leaves open the eventual survival of the child, it distinguishes between abandonment of children as 'neighbourhood phenomenon' (as occurred in the late Roman world),[69] and practices which seems to aim at the death of the child (as in Medieval Iceland). Even this latter phenomenon could be divided into two: infanticide proper, the outright killing of the child, and the 'bearing out' or 'throwing away' of the child, which could have been psychologically easier for the parents in a situation in which the upbringing of the child was considered impossible. In any case, demographically, socially and even psychologically, there is quite a difference between these different modes of child abandonment. To use the same concept without differentiating according to each of these contexts and all above mentioned phenomena, is bound to be confusing and lead to hasty conclusions.

Acknowledgement

I want to especially thank Christian Laes for his many valuable comments on this chapter.

Notes

[1] I use in this chapter the concept 'abandonment of children' as depicting the phenomenon in question rather than 'exposure (or 'exposition') of children'. It seems that 'abandonment' refers more explicitly to the activity of the parents in giving up or dispensing with their offspring, whereas 'exposure' has a wider spectrum of meanings with stress on the child's (passive) exposure to different circumstances and elements (*cf.* the studies below). Moreover, by this wording it is possible to evade the *a priori* assumption that the Latin *expositio* self-evidently corresponds to the English 'exposure' or French 'exposition'.

[2] DeMause 1974, with *e.g.* Atlas 2000 as an example of the studies inspired by DeMause and the research tradition grouped around *The Journal of Psychohistory* and *The Institute for Psychohistory*. See their very informative web site at *http://www.psychohistory.com*.

[3] *E.g.* Evans Grubbs in this volume, page 22; McKeown 2007, 124–140; Harris 1999, esp. 73–74; Frier 1999, 98; Salmon 1999, 80–88; Scheidel 1997, esp. 164–167; Parkin 1992, 68, 95–102, 128; Harris 1994; Clover 1988; Oldenziel 1987; Harris 1982; Eyben 1980/1981; Engels 1980. See also Dasen 2001, 11–12 and Corvisier 2001, 117 on the previous research.

[4] Nathan 2009, 277–278; Miller 2003; Bolton 1994; Shahar 1990, 123–131, 199–200; Boswell 1984; Mollat 1986 (1978), 146–151, 288–289; Herlihy 1995 (1978), 232–234.

[5] Evans Grubbs in this volume; 2010 and 1995, 270–271, 325, 338; Tate 2008/2009; Memmer 1991; Fayer 1994; Fossati Vanzetti 1983.

[6] Laes 2008 b, 98; Caldwell 2004, 3; Rawson 2003, 116–119; Miller 2003, 142–148; Corbier 2001, 58–60; Arjava 1996, 81, 161; Clark 1994, 5, 10; Clark 1993, 48–49; Harris 1994, esp. 1, 6–11; Dixon 1992, 40–41, 122; Wiedemann 1989, 28, 36–38; Boswell 1988 *passim*; Rousselle 1996 (1986), 305; Thomas 1996 (1986), 231; Wrightson 1982, 3–4; Nathan 2000, 28; Salmon 1999, 80–86; Frier 1999, 98; Evans Grubbs 1995, 59; Hanawalt 1986, 101, 172; Néraudau 1984, 193, 202; Eyben 1980/1981; Herlihy 1995 (1978), 220; Lyman 1974, 83–84.

[7] Boswell 1988, 132–137.

[8] Scheidel 1997, 159 and 164–167 with note 42 – while criticizing the view of Harris (1994, 3, 17–18), whose numbers would lead to the rate of some 8–10 per cent of the neonates being abandoned. See also Harris 1999, 73–74 for a response to Scheidel and a restatement of his points with further indication as to the commonness of abandonment.

[9] Corbier 2001, 65–66; Frier 1999, 98; Clark 1993, 49; Dasen 2001, 11–12, Golden 1997, 178; Parkin 1992, 95. For the medievalists, see, however, Lett 1997, 161.

[10] Rawson 2003, 117; Dixon 1992, 122; Saller 1994 (1997), 7; Golden 1997, 177–178; Dasen 2001, 11–12; Adams 2005, 265 with 289; Jost 2005, 308. See also Garnsey 1991, 50–51.

[11] On ancient historians and changes in the study of childhood, see Harlow, Laurence and Vuolanto 2007.

[12] See, however, Nathan 2000, 24. He claims that in the early Roman world and among the poor, exposure was fairly common and meant a child's death, but 'later writers' used the concept as 'a euphemism for a child to be taken anonymously by another'.

[13] See *e.g.* Evans Grubbs in this volume, page; Tate 2008/2009, esp. 134–138; Bakke 2005, 114–139; Corbier 2001, 68–72; Nathan 2000, 136; Harris 1994, 19–22. As an extreme opinion, Jones 1999 sees even the law of Constantine in 313, confirming the right of selling infants, as an action motivated by a Christian piety and directed towards diminishing the need for abandonment for parents. On caveats on this kind of interpretation, see Vuolanto 2003, 182–185.

[14] Miller 2003, esp. 152–161; Boswell 1988, esp. 178–179; Jones 1999, 373.

[15] Boswell 1984 and Boswell 1988, esp. 228–255, with Nathan 2009, 278; Golden 2004, 151; Miller 2003, 153–154, 161, 289; Arjava 1996, 166; Clark 1994, 26; Shahar 1990, 199–200.

[16] Nelson 1994, 107; De Jong 1996, esp. 5; Guerreau-Jalabert 2000, 273; Corbier 2001, 66–67.

[17] Koskenniemi 2009, 140; Laes 2008 b, 99; Bakke 2005, esp. 149–151; Corbier 2001, 57–58, 72; Corbier 1999, 1263–4. See also Salmon 1999, 85–88; Bolton 1994, 166; Fossier 1996 (1986), 416; Dixon 1992, 122; Wrightson 1982, 3–4; Lyman 1974, 90; See also Youngs 2006, 58 (according to Youngs, this would have affected the attitudes towards infanticide, rather than the actual practice of abandonment, which continued as earlier). *Cf.* Vuolanto 2003, 200–201 who claims that child abandonment was morally condemned by both non-Christian and Christian elites during the Roman Empire.

[18] Alexandre-Bidon and Closson 1985, 73.

[19] The idea was presented by Sawyer 1987, 84 (giving Boswell 1984 as his reference, but Boswell does not claim there were any demographic consequences connected with the coming of Christianity), followed in Finland by Purhonen 1999, 152–155 and Salo 1997, 29–30; For criticism see Pihlman 2002–2003.

[20] Pentikäinen 1968, 63–76; and Pentikäinen 1990, esp. 82–83 (quote, on Finnish folklore), 84–88 (the Inuit). It should be noted, that there are no actual traces left of this claimed legal system of the Finnic people.

[21] Dixon 1992, 47, 122; Néraudau 1984, 202; Garnsey and Saller 1987, 136. See also Arjava 1996, 166.

[22] Fossier 1996 (1986), 416–417; Gies and Gies 1987, 27, 40, 60. See also Lyman 1974, 90, for a case of abandonment 'as late as 787'.

[23] Hanawalt 1986, 101, 172. Later Hanawalt has proposed that even if infants were abandoned also during the Middle Ages, the practice was not widespread (Hanawalt 2002, 453, see also 452: 'child abandonment is not apparent in England'); Krötzl 1989, 28 (while pointing out that Christian miracle stories from Scandinavia do not refer to infanticide or abandonment). Other changes, not directly depended on the rise of Christianity, are also discernible: Boswell sees the rates of abandonment as being at their lowest between the 11th century and circa 1200 CE, after which abandonment became more and more common – and dangerous for the children, because of the foundling hospitals.

[24] Bakke 2005, 110–151, with the quote from page 150. See also page 126.

[25] Quote from Koskenniemi 2009, 159 (see also 152, 144–145). See also Miller 2003, 174, according to whom Christianity brought a shift which decreased the numbers of children abandoned to the mercy of the elements, even if the practice as such continued as before (with children left to monasteries and other institutions).

Keith Wrightson argued that it is unlikely that the systematic exposure of legitimate children long survived the pressure of Christianity; abandonment was only sometimes resorted to in times of short-term crisis (Wrightson 1982, 4, 15).

[26] DeMause 1974, 51–53; Herlihy 1995 (1978), 225–226; Adams 2005, 265 (quote); Mollat 1986 (1978), esp. 28.

[27] This group consists of five of the six 'generalists' in my material. By that I mean that their period of interest covers both 'pagan' Antiquity and the 'Christian' early Middle Ages, that is, Miller 2003, esp. 142 and 152 (abandonment as such continued, but abandonment in 'ancient style', 'along highways' (*ibid*. 161 and 174) diminished); Cunningham 1995, 28, 40; Clark 1994, 10, 27 and Clark 1993, 49; Boswell 1988, esp. 177 and 428; Lyman 1974, 83–84, 90. The sixth generalist is Riddle 1992, 11–14, who, as part of his aim to show the effectiveness of contraception, plays down the number of children subjected to 'exposure' (which for him stand for infanticide) in both ancient and medieval contexts. Also Corbier 1999, 1273, Saller 1994 (1997), 232 and Harris 1994, 1 and 22 claim that the coming of Christianity could not stop people from abandoning their children.

[28] Youngs 2006, 56–57; Orme 2001, 96; Farmer 2002, 78; Finucane 2000, 49–50; Lett 1997, esp. 278; Alexandre-Bidon and Lett 1997, esp. 36 and 185; Bolton 1994; Shahar 1990, esp. 7, 122–125. See also Arnold 1991 and Jost 2005, 308.

[29] Boswell 1988, 270–279, 296, 397 (for 11th and 12th centuries.) and esp. 322, 397–427. See also Farmer 2002, 78 and Fossier 1996 (1986), 417.

[30] Wrightson 1982, 5, 8, 15; Garnsey 1991, 50, note 4; Boswell 1988, 430.

[31] Miller 2003, 8–9; Alexandre-Bidon and Lett 1997, 186; Hunecke 1991; Shahar 1990, 125; Boswell 1988, 418, 430. See also Scheidel 1997, 165, note 37.

[32] Thus abandonment is equated to or likened to infanticide *e.g.* in Atlas 2000; Purhonen 1999, 153, 155; Riddle 1992, 11–14; Clover 1988, 149–159, 181–182 (change due to Christianity); Hanawalt 1986, 101; 1993, 44; 2002, 452–453; Benedictow 1985, 21; Wrightson 1982, esp. 4–5, 15 (however, he proposes that "abandonment must be distinguished to some degree from infanticide" on page 13); Herlihy 1995 (1978), 220, 225–226; DeMause 1974, 28–29; See also below, note 43, with studies on abandonment in medieval Scandinavia. The idea seems also to be present at least in Arjava 1996, 81, 166; Gies and Gies 1987, 27, 40, 60–61, 204; Alexandre-Bidon and Closson 1985, 73; Bolton 1994, 158–162.

[33] Quote: Thomas 1996 (1986), 231; See further *e.g.* McKeown 2007, 124–125 ('children left to die'); Hirt 2004, 290; Laubenheimer 2004, 296; Corvisier 2001, 117; Wiedemann 1989, 36–39; Rousselle 1996 (1986), 305, 308; Néraudau 1984, 197; Shahar 1983, 118 (not in Shahar 1990, though); Flandrin 1981; Arnold 1980; Engels 1980; Brunt 1971, 148. Salmon 1999, 82 and 85, sees abandonment as filling the place of abortion in the ancient world. Finucane 1997, 49 claims that 'some contemporaries may have viewed [abandonment] as an alternative to infanticide', his wording implying that he himself does not fully agree with this view. See also Nathan 2000, 24 and Garnsey and Saller 1987, 136.

[34] Boswell 1984, 12–14 and 1988; Lett 1997, 278. Difference is implied also in Sandidge 2005, 292; Caldwell 2004, 8; Harlow and Laurence 2002, 39; Miller 2003, esp. 161 and 174; Frier 1999, 98; Clark 1994, 48; Harris 1994, esp. 8–11; Parkin 1992, 95. See also Shahar 1990, 128, compared with the pages 122–126.

[35] Dixon 2000, 222–223; Lett 1997, 277, 286; Harris 1994, 9. See also Evans Grubbs in this volume, 23 and Garnsey 1991, 4, n. 4; It is of interest that Suzanne Lallemand (1993) does not mention abandonment as a possible method for 'childhood mobility' in her study on circulation of children.

[36] DeMause 1974, 32–35; Boswell 1984, 12; Boswell 1988, 24–26, 43–44.

[37] The following scheme resembles the one presented by M. Vovelle in 1982: according to him, a total description of a socio-cultural phenomenon would require analysis on three levels: the statistical basis and patterns of behaviour; popular morality and shared attitudes; and lastly, ideologies.

[38] *E.g.* Adams 2005, 267; Orme 2001, 96; Corbier 2001, 53–59, 71; Nathan 2000, 24; Clark 1994, 5, 10; Bolton 1994, 158–161; Dixon 1992, 40–41, 47; Wiedemann 1989, 28; Clover 1988, 154; Thomas 1996 (1986), 231; Hanawalt 1986, 101, 172; Néraudau 1984, 194–196; Herlihy 1995 (1978), 220; Pentikäinen 1968, 76–86.

[39] See also Harlow and Laurence 2002, 39 on the caveats in stressing the male agency in Roman contexts. Lotta Mejsholm (2009, 79–80) commenting on the roles of mothers and fathers in abandonment in the Icelandic sagas convincingly demonstrates that the person(s) named as those responsible for the abandonment depend directly on the inner logic and requirements of the story to be told, and the *topoi* involved, rather than on any actual change due to Christianization (I thank Marko Lamberg for pointing out Mejsholm's work for me).

For maternal decision making in the case of abandonment in Antiquity and Late Antiquity, see also Evans Grubbs in this volume, 23–24 and Laes in this volume, 45.

[40] Cooper 2007, her argument summarized on pages x–xiv.

[41] See Evans Grubbs in this volume, 22 for abandonment as a 'neigbourhood phenomenon'.

[42] Sen. Contr. 10.4.16: 'multos patres exponere solitos inutiles partus. nascuntur, inquit, quidam statim aliqua corporis parte mulcati, infirmi et in nullam spem idonei, quos parentes sui proiciunt magis quam exponent'. Even if the 'throwing away' here serves a rhetorical purpose (and is to be taken with a grain of salt as a statement referring to social reality he claims to have observed), his statement makes an important conceptual difference clear, a difference which seems to have been self evident to his audience.

[43] Jochens 1995, 85–93; Sawyer and Sawyer 1993; Sawyer 1992, 70–72; Pentikäinen 1990; Pentikäinen 1968, 63–93. Clover 1988, esp. 181–182 claims that there was change in the behaviour of the rich, but not of the poor. See also Mejsholm 2009, 71 (who defines infanticide as an upper category for all kinds of practices leading to the death of newborn) and 72 (on the advent of Christianity causing a clear shift in the norm system); Hanawalt 1986, 101, 172 cited already above, and Benedictow 1985, 21–25.

[44] Boswell 1988, esp. 288–295, 283–389. See now also Callow 2007, 47.

[45] Mejsholm 2009, 90: 'Det råder inte någon tvekan om att utsättning av barn var ett accepterat bruk I det förkristna skandinaviska kulturområdet'.

[46] *Íslendingabók* 1.7.17: 'Þá vas þat mælt í lögom, at allir menn scylþi cristnir vesa oc scím taca, þeir es áþr voro óscírþir á landi her; en of barna útburþ scylþo stanþa en forno lög, oc of hrossakjöts át'.

[47] *Grágás* 1a, 3; for the dating problems concerning the *Grágás*, see Norseng 1991, esp. 142.

[48] Callow 2007, 47. See already Boswell 1988, 383–384. Further, on the complex relationship between the legal sources, the sagas, and past 'reality' see Norseng 1991, 162.

[49] For the sake of convenience, in the following I will use the word 'abandonment' for this practice, even if, as I will show, this term is at least partly misleading.

[50] *Njáls saga*, ch. 105: '"Það er upphaf laga vorra", sagði hann, "að menn skulu allir vera kristnir hér á landi og trúa á einn guð, föður og son og anda helgan, en láta af allri skurðgoðavillu, bera eigi út börn og eta eigi hrossakjöt. Skal fjörbaugssök á vera ef víst verður en ef leynilega er með farið þá skal vera vítislaust."'

[51] *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta ch. 2, 196–197* (early fourteenth century). See also Jochens 1995, 208, n.117.

[52] The relevant passages are most usefully collected and analysed in Clover 1988, 151–159.

[53] See *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* ch. 3 and *Þáttr Þorsteins Uxafóts* 4. For other examples with moral disapproval in the case of (rich) father wanting to abandon his child, see Boswell 1988, 388 and Mejsholm 2009, 82–83.

[54] See esp. *Reykdæla saga ok Viga-Skútu* ch 7, and Mejsholm 2009, 81, agains esp. Clover 1988, 153.

[55] Mejsholm 2009, 72–79, against *e.g.* Jochens 1995, 85–86; Sawyer 1992, 40, 70–71 and Clover 1988. In this context the case referred to in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* ch. 3 is given as the strongest argument: Torstein orders his wife to abandon the yet unborn child if it happens to be a girl. However, the story has nothing to do with the general attitudes towards girls (or infanticide of girls), as the reason for this is the dream Torstein had had, in which a girl would cause the deaths of two suitors. Thus, to avoid this, any newborn girl should perish before bringing disaster on the household (for this, and a case in *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja* ch. 8–9, see Mejsholm 2009, 78).

[56] Especially Boswell (1988, 43 and 288–289) insists that *útburðr* should be translated as abandonment, not, for example, infanticide. As an example (289, note 53), he cites *Harðar saga og Hólmverja*, ch. 8, in which a man leaves a newborn child in a such a manner that it would be easily found, instead of killing it as he was instructed by the boy's uncle – Boswell does not notice, however, that it was the uncle, willing the death of the child, who had wished that the child be 'carried out' ('Þá gerði Torfi sig svo reiðan að hann vildi láta barnið út berá). For the actual act of abandonment of the newborn by the foster child of the uncle, willing the child to survive, the expression was no longer used.

[57] In Iceland, name giving was combined with the sprinkling of the child with water even before the adoption of Christianity, especially among the upper classes; see *e.g.* Jochens 1995, 82.

[58] Mejsholm 2009, esp. 86–91. See also Clover 1988, 153–155.

[59] Thus the argument of John Boswell, that the survival of the children in these romanticized tales refers to the greater probability of survival of these children in Scandinavia than often proposed before, is, without any further supporting evidence, without any foundation. See also Clover 1988, 155.

[60] *E.g.* Jochens 1995, 86–93; Clover 1988, 182 (for the poor); Pentikäinen 1990, esp. 75. See also Purhonen 1999, 155 for the same argument transferred to Finland.

[61] See also Mejsholm 2009, 101.
[62] Except in some situations: this kind of reasoning, for example, completely undermines the idea that children carried to the bog can be linked to the polemics against abandonment of children in early Christianity.
[63] On abandonment of deformed children in Antiquity and early Middle Ages, see Laes 2008 b, 92–99.
[64] *Cf.* also the critique and review of the reasons for the disagreement on the study of child abandonment in the Classical and Hellenistic Greece in Golden 1997, 177–179.
[65] Laes 2006, 25 and 57; Rawson 2003, 116–119; Néraudau 1984, 192–202; Orme 2001, 96; Shahar 1990, 7, 122–126, 127–128, 131, 137. See also Huebner and Ratzan 2009, 47, 107, 210–212; 277–278 – a book dealing with fatherless children in Antiquity and referring to child abandonment only in a few pages, and Classen 2005, 52, 265; 291–292, 308 – a book in search of a paradigm shift in studying medieval and renaissance childhood, which refers to child abandonment four times, but each time only in passing.
[66] See Harlow, Laurence and Vuolanto 2007.
[67] See also Laes in this volume, 53.
[68] It is another question, not relevant here, how the contemporary legislation would have conceptualized or tried to regulate the relationship. On this, see esp. Evans Grubbs 2010.
[69] See Evans Grubbs in this volume, esp. 23, with Evans Grubbs 2010.

2

The Dynamics of Infant Abandonment: Motives, Attitudes and (Unintended) Consequences

Judith Evans Grubbs

Introduction

Every age has its way of getting rid of unwanted children. Today debate rages around the morality of abortion and post-coital contraception (the so-called "morning-after pill"). But until the twentieth century, when medical and social developments made reliable contraceptives widely available for the first time in history and introduced safe and legal abortion procedures, the most usual method of limiting one's family or avoiding the shame of illegitimacy was abandonment. In the Roman period, this was known as *expositio* (literally, "putting out"), or exposure. This paper takes a fresh look at the phenomenon of infant abandonment in the first three centuries of the Roman imperial period, by focusing on the motives behind the practice and the legal consequences that followed. In addition to the ancient evidence for abandonment from legal, literary and documentary sources, I draw on studies of abandonment in early modern and nineteenth-century Europe. There are, of course, significant differences between the Roman Empire and early modern societies. But the use of comparative evidence can be fruitful when analyzing a widespread social phenomenon, like infant abandonment, that has been found in many societies around the world over several millenia. Pierre Brulé has used anthropological studies of infanticide among North American Eskimos to shed light on motivations and causes of infanticide in ancient Greece, and although he is talking about actual child-killing rather than abandonment and focuses on classical and hellenistic Greece rather than imperial Rome, his findings are suggestive for an understanding of abandonment in antiquity also.[1] In this study, the evidence for abandonment in more recent times when foundling homes were established to deal with an increasing number of abandoned children and careful records were kept of admissions, not only sheds light on infant exposure in antiquity but also suggests how the very existence of an outlet for unwanted newborns could promote the practice of abandonment by those who otherwise would not have resorted to it.

Exposure in the Roman world: evidence and motivations

It is essential to distinguish clearly between infant exposure and infanticide. Older scholarship in particular often conflates the two terms, and even today there is a

tendency to consider exposure as simply the most common form of infanticide. This was challenged in 1988 by John Boswell in his ground-breaking book *The Kindness of Strangers*, in which he argued that abandonment of infants was not equivalent to murder and that there was considerable evidence for the survival of abandoned children.[2] Although his assessment of the consequences of exposure was much too optimistic and he did not always properly understand the legal sources, I agree with his central thesis that those who abandoned their children did not see themselves as killers. Perhaps in some cases rejection of a child took the form of actual killing, for instance if a baby was born with obvious physical disabilities; however, recently scholars have also challenged the assumption that deformed babies were killed. Moreover, some disabiliies would not have become evident until the child was several months old, perhaps even more than a year, by which time parents would be unwilling to get rid of it.[3] Children whose parents really did not want them to survive were likely to be drowned or smothered rather than exposed.[4] Ancient Romans did not consider abandonment equivalent to infanticide, although they were aware that death might be the result. Rather, they saw exposure as an *alternative* to outright killing of the child, and believed that it gave the child at least a chance of life, for it was always possible that an infant left in a public place (as many were) would be picked up by someone else and thus might survive.[5] To us this may seem disingenuous, since surely the majority of newborns who were exposed did die. However, we should remember that in antiquity almost a third of *all* infants born, whether or not they were accepted into the family, still died within the first year of life. And as we will see, the rescue of abandoned newborns did occur often enough to perpetuate the hope of their survival.

Infant exposure was not illegal in classical Roman law, and no official attempt was made to restrict the practice until the fourth century AD (see below). The decision whether to rear or expose a newborn was one of the prerogatives of the *paterfamilias*, and has been seen as an expression of the *ius vitae ac necis*, the father's "right of life and death" over his children.[6] This does not mean he made the decision alone, however. The Greek doctor Soranus, who lived in Rome in the early second century and wrote a handbook on gynecology (which covered not only conception and pregnancy, but also the care of the newborn afterwards), says that it was the midwife's job to inspect the newborn and lists criteria for determining whether the child was worth rearing.[7] The midwife could then advise the *paterfamilias* on the viability of the child. The role the mother played in the decision would depend on the particular family dynamic. For many mothers, it must have been heart-wrenching to throw out a child; for others, especially those with several children already, it may have been a relief.

When the *paterfamilias* decided not to accept the child as his own, the midwife might be the one who disposed of it. There must have been places known to be "drop-off points" for unwanted newborns; in Egypt, these were the "dung-heaps," that is, garbage dumps (see below). It has been suggested that the *lactaria colonnia*, the "nursing column" in Rome, was such a location, but it is more likely that it was the place where Romans would go to find a wet-nurse to hire.[8] (It could have served both purposes, of course.) As I have argued elsewhere, exposure was largely a neighborhood phenomenon: those abandoning a newborn did not generally go very far to do so and others in the vicinity might even know whose child it was that had been left. This meant that if the child survived and was picked up, later recovery was possible.[9]

Scholars often assume that girl infants were much more likely to be exposed than boys; as in many other societies, in the Greco-Roman world, males were generally preferred over females.[10] However, the only documentary evidence (as opposed to fictional literary sources) for this appears in the papyri of Roman Egypt. There is one letter from early Roman Egypt, in which a husband tells his wife that if a baby is born while he is away, she should rear it if it's a boy and "throw it out" if it's a girl.[11] Scholars often cite this as evidence for a widespread preference for boys and practice of exposing female newborns, but in fact it reflects only one individual case in one particular time and place. More suggestive of a general tendency to expose girls rather than boys is the sex imbalance found in the census documents from Egypt, the only area of the Roman world where significant quantifiable demographic evidence survives. In the census returns, sons greatly outnumber daughters in families of *metropoleis* (urban areas, mostly Greek in population), whereas more girl children appear in returns from the villages. In particular, in the villages female slaves outnumber male slaves by a six-to-one ratio. Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier, who have studied the census returns, suggest that villagers were rescuing female infants who had been abandoned by inhabitants of the metropoleis and were raising them back in the villages, often as slaves. If they survived their earliest years, these girls could be sold, possibly ending up in the same cities where they had been born.[12] This is a plausible explanation for the imbalance in the sex ratio in the villages and metropoleis, and it also reveals an important dynamic of infant abandonment: exposed babies did not always die, but could be "recycled" into other households, often to be reared as slaves. This did not happen only to female *expositae*, however; nursing contracts from Roman Egypt show that boys were also being exposed, picked up, and raised as slaves.[13]

Any tendency to expose girls over boys no doubt varied according to regional mores and to the family strategies (and feelings) of individuals. Also relevant would be the child's birth order in the family. In other societies where abandonment or infanticide has been practiced, the oldest child would be the most likely to be kept, even if a girl; third or fourth born children were more likely to be exposed, particularly if the older children were boys.[14] The same dynamic occurs in a "law" attributed to the legendary Roman king Romulus (an *expositus* himself), who supposedly said that Romans were to rear all healthy male babies, and at least the first-born female, and not to kill any children younger than three years unless they were lame or "monstrous" (that is, noticeably disabled); even then a father needed to have the approval of five witnesses. There is no historical evidence for such a law (or, indeed, for Romulus), but the tradition may reflect popular attitudes in republican Rome.[15]

However, we should not assume that the decision to expose was always that of the *paterfamilias* – if indeed there was a *paterfamilias.* Probably, as in other periods of history, illegitimate children would be likely to be abandoned at birth. Legally, they had no *paterfamilias*. In that case the decision to expose would be made by the mother (or her *paterfamilias*), neither of whom had legal power over the child. Likewise, a slavewoman might decide to abandon her baby without telling her master, who was the one with legal power. It was possible that a man might not even know of the birth of his child or the child of one of his slaves. In 224, the emperor Alexander Severus received a petition from a man named Claudius, who claimed that the offspring of his slavewoman had been exposed without his knowledge and brought up by someone else. Claudius

wanted him back. The emperor's response, which has been preserved in the Code of Justinian,[16] was that Claudius could reclaim the child, who was by law his slave, but that he should also reimburse the person who had rescued the child for any expenses incurred by its rearing.[17]

Most people who resorted to exposure in Antiquity were acting in response to desperate endemic poverty, or a food crisis, or the death of one or both of the parents, or were unmarried mothers wishing to rid themselves of an illegitimate child. Divorce or widowhood might also be the occasion for abandonment, when a woman who was pregnant or had recently given birth did not have the means to support her child.[18] A papyrus from Egypt at the end of the first century BC records the agreement between a widow and her mother-in-law, in which the pregnant widow relinquished all claims on her husband's family and in exchange, received her mother-in-law's permission to expose the baby and remarry.[19] In such cases, again, there was no *paterfamilias* to make the decision.

But even financially well-off parents in intact marriages might decide to expose a child. The Roman practice of partible inheritance, by which all legitimate children (male and female) inherited, discouraged large families among the propertied classes, despite imperial attempts to encourage child-rearing.[20] Moralists criticized wealthy parents who allegedly limited the number of children they reared in order not to fragment their estate. Musonius Rufus, a Stoic philosopher of the first century AD, condemned those who ". . . in spite of prosperity and even riches are so inhuman as not to rear later-born offspring in order that those born earlier may inherit greater wealth."[21] Musonius's remark suggests that children born later were more likely to be exposed than first or second-born children, as has been the tendency in other societies where abandonment or infanticide is practiced. Interestingly, Musonius does not say that families were more likely to expose daughters than sons; on the contrary, one of his arguments against exposure is that it deprives those children who are brought up of *brothers* who have been abandoned. Had exposure of female children been much more frequent among upper-class Romans than the exposure of boys, one would expect Musonius, a proto-feminist who elsewhere promoted the education of women and decried the double standard for sexual behavior, to mention it.[22]

The father's ability to determine the future of his offspring did not stop at the decision whether or not to rear it. Under classical Roman law, a *paterfamilias* who decided to expose his child (or the child of his slavewoman), or whose child was exposed without his knowledge, still retained legal power over that child even if it was rescued and brought up by someone else. So powerful a concept was Roman *patria potestas* that a father could legally reclaim a child he had abandoned years earlier, and assuming his claim was proven, his *potestas* over the child remained valid.[23] Several cases known from the legal sources demonstrate this.

The Roman jurist (legal expert) Cervidius Scaevola, writing in the Antonine period, discusses a particularly interesting case. A man had divorced his wife and remarried. His first wife had been pregnant at the time of divorce but had not told her husband and when the child was born, she exposed him. The boy was picked up by someone else and raised as free and was even given the name of his father. This means that the rescuer, whoever he or she was, knew the child's identity. When the father died, his will made no mention of a child he did not know he had. The rescuer then produced

the boy, who was acknowledged as his father's legitimate son by the boy's mother and paternal grandmother. The will was broken, and the boy inherited his father's estate. By law, the father had held paternal power over his son even though he did not know of his existence, and therefore the boy, like all legitimate children, had automatic inheritance rights from his father. [24]

Another case is known from a rescript of Diocletian and Maximian responding to a petition from a man named Rhodon. Rhodon had picked up an abandoned girl baby and reared her, and wanted to marry her to his own son. But the girl's father had reappeared and apparently was threatening to refuse his consent to his daughter's marriage. Despite having abandoned his daughter at least a dozen years earlier (the minimum age for girls' marriage under Roman law was twelve), the father still had legal power over her, and all children, male and female, needed the consent of their *paterfamilias* in order to make a valid marriage. Diocletian and Maximian replied that it was "fitting" that the father give his consent, but if he refused, he should pay Rhodon for the costs of rearing the girl.[25] In other words, the emperors upheld the right of the *paterfamilias* even when he had behaved in a very unpaternal way. We are not told how the girl's father knew of her survival as a member of Rhodon's household.

These children, rescued by others and later reclaimed by their parents, were fortunate indeed, not only because they survived but because they were raised as free. In most cases, the fate of an abandoned infant who was rescued would be enslavement. The rescuer would have to make a small investment in nurturing the newborn until he or she was old enough to be sold or be put to work, and (as with any baby) there was a risk that the child would die before the investment paid off. Feeding an infant required a lactating woman who could breast-feed the child, and would probably necessitate hiring a wet-nurse. Nursing contracts from Roman Egypt show that slave nurslings were often exposed infants, called *anairetoi* ("picked-up ones") and sometimes explicitly said to have been taken off the dung-heap.[26] In some cases expense could be saved if there was a woman in the household who could nurse the child. In a papyrus from the mid-fourth century AD recording the sale of an slave girl described as having been "picked up off the ground" by a husband and wife, the wife says that she had fed the girl with her own milk.[27] The woman must have recently had a baby who either died or had been weaned by the time the couple took in the abandoned girl, or perhaps she nursed the two babies at the same time. In elite households in Rome with a large slave *familia*, there might be a slavewoman who had recently given birth who could serve as wet-nurse to a foundling as well, which would cost the owner nothing.[28]

However, the practice of wet-nursing in itself may have encouraged abandonment of the nurse's own child, as happened in early modern Florence, when nurses hired by Florentine families either had to hand over their own children to other wet-nurses or abandon them to a foundling hospital. In Florence, the need for a nurse for the baby of a wife or daughter could lead wealthy slaveowners to countenance, perhaps even to encourage, the death or abandonment of their slavewomen's babies in order to free up the mothers to be nurses.[29] Roman slaveowners may have done the same thing. Nursing contracts from Roman Egypt regularly include a clause stipulating that the wet-nurse may not get pregnant or nurse another child while under contract, because it was thought that this would dry up the nurse's milk supply and endanger the nursling.[30] The contracts for the nursing of *anairetoi* (exposed babies picked up for use as slaves,

see above) further specify that if the nursling died before the nurse's contract was up, the nurse was to find another slave baby to replace the one who died.[31] Presumably this would be from the dung-heap.

Most exposed children who were picked up to be used as slaves would lead their lives in servitude with no one to reclaim them. But some were more lucky. Because an exposed infant retained the legal status he or she had held at birth, a freeborn child who had been exposed, even if reared as a slave, was legally still free and could be restored to free status. This was done by bringing a legal action for freedom, called a *causa liberalis*. The case would be heard by the praetor, if the claimant was in Rome; or by the provinical governor, if outside of Italy. However, those held in slavery could not bring an action for freedom themselves, so someone else would have to bring it on their behalf.[32] This might be the child's father, who could then reassert *patria potestas*. But some women were also allowed to bring an action for freedom to reclaim an enslaved child – mothers and other female relatives like sisters.[33] This suggests that parents and other family members might keep track of what happened to an abandoned baby and know who had picked it up.[34] They would then reclaim the child from slavery later, perhaps after the child was past infancy or after a family crisis had passed.

We hear of one such case from the Roman writer Suetonius, in his biographies of famous grammarians. The grammarian Melissus had been born free, but had been exposed by his mother after a quarrel with her husband.[35] He had been rescued, raised as a slave, and given as a gift to Maecenas, the cultivated and powerful friend of the emperor Augustus. Melissus' mother somehow learned of his whereabouts (or knew them all along) and tried to bring a claim for his freedom. But Melissus refused, preferring to remain with his illustrious master, who soon freed him.[36] Interestingly, Roman jurists discussed the possibility that enslaved persons might not want a claim for freedom brought on their behalf, perhaps because they wanted to bring some "insult" to to their family.[37] Melissus apparently had no wish to return to a mother who had abandoned him years before.

The same principle of inviolability of freeborn status was applied to non-Roman citizens (peregrines) in the provinces as well. Pliny the Younger, when he was governor of the province of Bithynia-Pontus (110–112 AD), consulted the emperor Trajan about cases of enslaved foundlings (called in Greek *threptoi*)[38] who were being reclaimed as free, probably by their parents. The legal issue Pliny had to decide was whether those who reclaimed the *threptoi* had to reimburse the rescuers for the costs of raising (called *alimenta*), despite the fact that the rescuers had used the children as slaves. In searching for guidance on how to handle such claims, Pliny had found rulings for the province of Achaia (Greece) and for the Lacedaimonians (who held the status of a free city in Achaia), including an edict of emperor Augustus and letters from emperors Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. But he had been unable to find any precedent relating to his own province.[39] In his response to Pliny, Trajan stressed that in such cases, an attempt to reclaim the child's freedom (that is, by means of a *causa liberalis*) should not be denied to the claimants nor should liberty be made dependent on repayment of *alimenta*. However, Pliny's own letter shows that policies in the provinces varied, and contemporary rhetorical works cite as a "law" the condition that someone who acknowledged an exposed child as his own should reclaim the child after payment of *alimenta*.[40] Moreover, imperial rescripts from the third century found in the Code of

Justinian, which rule that those reclaiming an exposed child do need to pay the rescuers for the cost of rearing, suggest that legal policy regarding the need to repay maintenance (*alimenta*) fluctutated during the imperial period.[41] Clearly such cases were causing legal problems in several provinces, especially in the Greek east, and Pliny was not the only governor who had to adjudicate claims for freedom on behalf of those who had been abandoned at birth. And Pliny's willingness to judge cases of freedom for foundlings who had been raised as slaves apparently resulted in more cases being brought to his attention: in a later letter to Trajan, he said that he was judging claims "on recognizing children and restoring birth status." [42] These were probably also abandoned children whose parents were trying to reclaim them.

We hear about cases where abandoned children were recovered because their legal status created problems which lawyers, governors, and emperors had to resolve. Such cases were no doubt rare compared to the far greater number who were never reclaimed and fell into permanent slavery, not to mention those who did not survive at all. But the very fact that such cases were brought, in most cases by the children's relatives, would have drawn attention to the possibility that foundlings could one day be reclaimed by their parents. Scaevola's case of the freeborn boy who ended up inheriting from his deceased father must have caused a sensation in Rome at the time. The impression such "happy ending" cases gave would have reinforced the belief that abandonment was not, after all, tantamount to death.

This belief gained further support from Greek and Latin literature, where dramatic recognitions of abandoned relatives in tragedies, comedies and novels further reinforced the idea that even a child exposed at birth might eventually reunite with family.[43] Rome itself was supposed to have been founded by an *expositus*, Romulus, who, according to legend, had been abandoned along with his brother Remus and then saved by a wolf with strong maternal instincts (or a shepherd whose wife was called "Wolf" because of her sexual promiscuity). Eventually, as adult youths, Romulus and Remus were recognized and claimed their true birthright as heirs to their father's kingdom.[44] The rescue of exposed infants and their later reclamation as freeborn children was a highly popular theme in the rhetorical schools, where aspiring orators would debate the claims of parents who had abandoned their child but wanted him back against the competing claims of rescuers who had spent their own resources to bring up an unwanted child and wished to keep it as a slave or as their own child.[45] Although these rhetorical cases were fictional, they would only have furthered the belief that abandoned children could survive and even return to their natal family. In addition, they shaped the ideals and expectations of future lawyers and imperial administrators, who would be familiar with the themes and arguments of these declamations from their own rhetorical training.[46] Legal and literary attention to noteworthy cases where exposed infants were rescued gave the impression that the exceptional cases, where abandoned children returned to their family, were the norm – and so gave hope to desperate parents who believed they could not, at that particular point in time, bring up their child. Moreover, two pre-eminent Roman legal principles – that a freeborn person maintained free status despite enslavement and that paternal power endured even when the *paterfamilias* abandoned his child – encouraged parents who felt they could not rear a child to expose it, because they believed that such an act was not irrevocable.

No official challenge to these practices occurred until the fourth century, when late Roman emperors imposed restrictions on infant abandonment.[47] In 331, a law of Constantine abolished the right of a father or slaveowner who had exposed a child to reclaim it at a later date. Constantine also explicitly allowed rescuers to rear an abandoned newborn as their own child or as a slave. This not only deprived a *paterfamilias* of his ancient right to retain *potestas* over those he had previously rejected, but also undid the classical legal principle of the inviolability of freeborn status. The law's purpose was to remove anxiety on the part of rescuers that they might later have to give up a child they had raised – a real possibility, as we see from the cases where that very thing happened.[48] In other laws also, Constantine evinced a concern for the survival of newborn infants and young children. He ordered imperial officials to provide aid to needy families in north Africa and Italy whose children were at risk of being killed or sold into slavery, and in legislation of 329 he even legalized the sale of newborns (*sanguinolenti*) by impoverished parents.[49] Constantine's policy depriving exposers of legal power to reclaim the child they had abandoned was reiterated in 374 by the emperor Valentinian I, who also explicitly banned infanticide.[50] In the early fifth century, a law of the western emperor Honorius deprived slavemasters of the right to reclaim a child they had exposed, and also said that those who picked up such a child needed to get the signature of a bishop as soon as possible.[51]

By that time (and perhaps long before), the Christian church was playing a role in the rescue and redistribution of abandoned infants. This role is clarified by the ruling of a church council held at Vaison in Gaul in 442. According to the clerics who met at Vaison, as soon as a foundling was discovered, the fact was to be publicly announced from the church altar. The person who abandoned the child then had ten days to reclaim it, which allowed remorseful parents or masters to change their mind; if no one came forth to do so, the child belonged to the rescuer. Anyone who tried to take back the child after that time was to be "struck with ecclesiastical punishment as a homicide."[52] The clerics at Vaison made this policy, which they said was in accordance with imperial legislation, in response to complaints arising "from all" that abandoned infants were not being rescued because potential rescuers feared that the abandoners would make false accusations (apparently for theft) against them. The procedure outlined by the council continued in Gaul after the end of Roman rule, and early medieval formularies from Anjou and Tours even provide a "form letter" to be used in securing the rescuer's claim to an abandoned child.[53]

Imperial legislation on infant abandonment continued in the sixth century East. A law of Justinian in 529 declared that all *expositi,* whether they had been born free or to a slave mother, were to be considered freeborn and have full capacity to inherit. Justinian not only forbade those who had abandoned a newborn to reclaim it, but also denied rescuers the right to enslave any children they had picked up. This repealed Constantine's law of two centuries earlier, which had allowed those who rescued an *expositus* the right to bring it up as their own child or as a slave. Justinian enjoined not only imperial officials but also Christian bishops to help in enforcing this law. [54] Twelve years later, however, the emperor learned that in Thessalonika, people who had been left as infants at the church were being reclaimed as slaves years later by those who had abandoned them. Shocked that slaveowners would have the audacity to leave newborns to die and then try to recover them after someone else had raised them, he declared

that anyone who brought such a claim deserved to suffer the same death as he would have inflicted on the infant. Officials who ignored the law or allowed it to be evaded (because they were bribed) were to be fined five pounds of gold.[55]

The legal and ecclesiastical rulings discussed here show that by the early fifth century, if not before, the Christian church had become involved in the rescue of abandoned infants. Christians had always opposed infant exposure; denunciations of parents who leave their helpless newborns to die are a staple of early Christian apologetics, and reach their height in the impassioned rhetoric of the early fourth century writer Lactantius.[56] I have argued elsewhere that Constantine's legislation on exposure was prompted in part by Christian concerns, probably mediated through Lactantius, who was tutor to Constantine's son Crispus and dedicated his *Divine Institutes* to Constantine.[57] The law of Honorius, which refers to the need for a bishop's signature, is even more clearly influenced by contemporary Christian concerns.[58] At the same time, charitable Christians were trying to alleviate the plight of abandoned infants. Some dedicated virgins took in abandoned children and bring them up under their care.[59] Justinian's law of 541 suggests that churches had become a new place to leave foundlings, presumably with better prospects for the children than a dung-heap. Although John Boswell's depiction of the medieval practice of oblation of children to the service of the church as a new form of abandonment certainly exaggerates the similarity, both exposure and oblation provided outlets for unwanted infants.[60] It may be that the combination of both legal and ecclesiastical sanctions against abandonment, along with the appearance of more humane alternatives, somewhat checked the practice. The decline in urban populations, at least in the west, may have also led to a decrease. But of course infant abandonment did not cease entirely.[61]

Early modern comparanda: European foundling homes

Let us now leave the ancient world and move forward a millenium, to Europe in the early modern and modern eras. At that time a rise in the numbers of abandoned infants, along with a greater concern for the welfare of children, led authorities to a solution that ended up making the problem worse.

In the fifteenth century, foundling homes were established in large Italian cities to deal with the increasing number of abandoned children. There were precedents for such homes in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the late Roman East, the *Orphanotropheion*, whose foundation may go back to the fourth century and certainly predates the reign of the emperor Leo (457–474), may have taken in abandoned newborns as well as older orphans, and *brephotropheia*, orphanages especially intended for the care of newborn infants, were established in Constantinople and the provinces by the reign of Justinian (527–565). However, the *brephotropheia* disappear from the records after the sixth century.[62] In 1204, Pope Innocent III founded the hospital of Santo Spirito in Rome to take care of the poor and destitute, including abandoned babies. The Pope's inspiration for this hospital was said to arise from his distress at the large number of drowned infants recovered from the Tiber river, where their parents (probably usually unwed mothers) had thrown them. By the mid–fifteenth century, if not earlier, Santo Spirito was equipped with a "baby box," a device whereby the infants

could be deposited safely and anonymously so as not to bring shame upon the parents who left them.[63]

The real heyday of foundling homes, however, ran from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. In Florence, the hospital of Santa Maria degli Innocenti was founded in 1445, and Milan's foundling home began about the same time.[64] By the eighteenth century the practice had spread to other European countries, including Russia, where Catherine the Great, as part of her adoption of western enlightenment ideas to Russia, developed an elaborate (and unworkable) scheme to take in abandoned children, raise them in large foundling institutions, and reintegrate them into society.[65]

But the accessibility of these homes, particularly those with anonymous admissions (such as the *rota*, the revolving wheel, in Italy), eventually created what more than one scholar of infant abandonment has called "unintended consequences."[66] The homes were originally intended for illegitimate babies who would otherwise have been exposed or killed at birth. But in some large cities, particularly Florence and Milan, financially hard-pressed married couples who previously would not have resorted to abandonment began to use them to place their legitimate children temporarily (or so they hoped) in order that the infants could be nursed regularly while their mothers worked and kept alive until the family could afford to care for them.[67] In fact, the chances of survival in a foundling home were really no better than the chances of an exposed infant in antiquity.[68] The vast majority of the children placed in the homes died from malnutrition and disease, to the shock and disappointment of the authorities who had promoted them.

Those who did manage to survive, however, very often were reclaimed by their families. In renaissance Florence, six percent of children left in Santa Maria degli Innocenti returned to their natal home; more would have had the mortality rate in the hospital not been at least fifty percent. Sometimes even when parents could not reclaim their children, they still "monitored carefully the progress of their abandoned children, as well as providing dowries for their abandoned daughters."[69] In Milan in the nineteenth century, 84% of the children admitted to the foundling hospital were legitimate. According to Volker Hunecke, "virtually everybody could abandon and later recognize and reclaim the child without any danger of punishment; if a child was still alive that child was then returned to the parents." In 1842, over 58% of the children left in the turning cradle (*torno*) in Milan were later reclaimed. [70] In other words, the availability of a place where young infants could be abandoned and – supposedly – receive sustenance not only led to an increase in abandonment but also provided (often false) reassurance to parents that their child would survive and be cared for, and could one day be recovered.

These foundling homes eventually disappeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, precisely because most children left in the homes were actually legitimate and the homes were unable to cope with the huge numbers of entrants. Today the rate of infant abandonment in the developed world is far, far less than it was 150 years ago, thanks to modern contraceptive techniques. But the problem has not entirely disappeared, even in the United States – although, it should be stressed, the number of newborns who are abandoned or killed by their parents today is very small compared with the thousands of infants abandoned every year in some nineteenth-century cities, including New York City.[71] Very recently a case occurred in St Louis, Missouri (where

I lived). A man who was mowing his lawn discovered a newborn, still alive, in a trash bin. The baby, a male, was taken to a hospital and survived; numerous people later offered to adopt him.[72]

Even one incident, if it is tragic or horrifying enough, can incite lawmakers to act. (We should remember this when studying ancient legislation also.) All the states in the United States have now passed so-called "safe haven" laws, which designate certain places, such as hospitals or police stations, for parents to leave unwanted infants without fear of criminal charges for murder or abandonment. Proponents of these measures point to the lives potentially saved, and there is no doubt that such legislation is humane and well-intentioned. But a recent analysis of "safe haven" laws has concluded that they, too, have "unintended consequences." Some parents who would otherwise have kept their babies are instead taking advantage of the law, and many do not use the designated locations but continue to leave vulnerable newborns in dumpsters or other very dangerous places.[73] The most extreme case is Nebraska, one of the last states to pass a "safe haven" law in 2008. Originally, the law allowed parents (or other persons responsible for a child) to abandon a child up to seventeen years of age, whereas other states usually set the age somewhere between three days and one year. This led to harried parents dropping off their teenagers at safe-haven spots in Nebraska – clearly not what the law intended. In fact, people came from out-of-state, as far away as Georgia, to leave children whom they found too difficult to raise. In a two-month period, thirty-five children were dropped off at hospitals in Nebraska, twenty-nine of them over the age of ten. None were infants. To deal with this unintended consequence of a well-meaning law, the state legislature met again in emergency session and revised the law so that only children less than thirty days old could be abandoned.[74]

Meanwhile, western European countries have begun to revive the "baby boxes" and wheels of the early modern period, motivated by an increase in abandonment by immigrants from regions whose strong notions of honor and shame stigmatize and put at risk the mothers of illegitimate children. In Hamburg, Germany, a day care center has set up a "chute" into which unwanted babies can be dropped anonymously. "When placed into the chute, a baby will fall into a warm bed and be placed in the program's care." Mothers are allowed two months in which to change their mind and retrieve their babies.[75] In Italy also, the wheel has truly come full circle: in 2007, a modern version of the *rota* was reinstituted where desperate parents can deposit their babies in secret. At a Rome hospital, babies can be left anonymously in "a small structure equipped with a heated cradle and life-saving instruments, including a respirator. . . the moment the child is abandoned an alarm goes off in the hospital's emergency room, ensuring that the baby receives immediate first aid from a team of specialists." [76] Certainly these babies have a far better chance of survival than those in the foundling homes of two hundred years ago. And in India, the Cradle Baby Centre was set up in 2002 "to safeguard the girl child and stop the alarming levels of female infanticide." Almost all of the infants who have been brought to the Centre are girls. Interestingly, just as in the past, sometimes those who consigned their children to foundling homes later reclaimed them, and now some parents in India are having second thoughts and retrieving their daughters.[77]

The paradox of infant abandonment

What these early modern and modern cases show is that the belief that abandonment is an allowable, supposedly non-fatal outlet for unwanted babies can encourage even married couples above the poverty line to limit their families in this way – and sometimes to try to rclaim the children later. This sad paradox, that a mechanism devised to help abandoned infants and prevent their dying actually increased the social ill it was intended to combat, also operated, *mutatis mutandis*, in the Roman world. People in antiquity who exposed newborn infants did not think they were consigning their children to death (although they usually were); they hoped the child would be picked up and would survive, and many times they actually intended (or told themselves that they intended) to reclaim the child some day. Most exposed newborns died before they were rescued and most of those who were rescued were enslaved and never reclaimed, just as children in foundling hospitals usually died of starvation and neglect, despite a complex wet-nursing system. But parents *believed* they would survive and so justified to themselves the abandonment – and also avoided having to witness the child's death themselves, either by murder or slowly from neglect and starvation. And many infants *were* picked up, some of them were even brought up as free by their rescuers, and some were reclaimed, as the case cited by Scaevola and the response of the emperors to Rhodon show.[78] The survival of these fortunate few was enough to make parents think that their child, too, might be rescued and maybe, someday, would re-enter their family. And that belief, unrealistic though it usually was, in the end led many parents who might otherwise have reared the child to resort to exposure. On the other hand, it also meant that truly desperate parents chose exposure rather than outright infanticide.

There were no legal and few moral objections to exposure until the fourth century CE. Those moralists who did object to exposure were either philosophers (most notably the Stoic Musonius Rufus and the Jewish philosopher Philo) or Christians, and they objected not because they saw exposure as equivalent to murder but because they believed that the motivation to expose stemmed from illicit sexual relations or sexual incontinence within marriage. Indeed, Christian critics of exposure admitted that many children were picked up; it was the fate of these survivors that horrified them, since *expositi* were (they claimed) destined for prostitution or enslavement.[79] Moreover, "success stories" of reclaimed children or enslaved foundlings who had achieved freedom and fame gave the impression that exposure might even lead to a happy ending. A parallel might be found in the Roman practice of manumission. As scholars have shown, the real chances of attaining freedom for an individual slave were actually quite small. But enough slaves were freed, and enough former slaves were successful in society and established their children as freeborn Roman citizens, to make enslavement acceptable even to the slaves themselves.[80] Thus the institution of slavery was perpetuated with surprisingly little resistance from the enslaved and with virtually no objections from philosophers or moralists.

Similarly, the possibility, however slight, that an abandoned child could survive and one day be reclaimed served not only to perpetuate the practice of infant exposure but made it tolerable and even acceptable in a society with no other really viable means of birth control. Late Roman legislation penalizing infant abandonment was motivated by a desire to stop the practice and to encourage others to pick up infants who had been

abandoned. Whether these laws succeeded is another matter, but they do mark a change in the legal attitude to exposure, and at least show an awareness of the unintended consequences.

Notes

[1] Brulé 1992.
[2] Boswell 1988. My own work on abandonment owes a large debt to Boswell's book. Other important studies on exposure include Harris 1994; Corbier 1999 and 2001; and for the Greek period, Patterson 1985. For a survey of the state of the question and thorough bibliography, see Vuolanto in this volume.
[3] Laes 2008 b, 92–9. See also Edwards 1996 and Scott 2001 on children with disabilities.
[4] See Eyben 1980/81 for a thorough survey of the ancient evidence for infanticide, abandonment and abortion. Note that there were also slower, more ambiguous ways of killing a small child, such as neglect or food deprivation.
[5] Patterson 1985, 104–7; Boswell 1988, 41–5; Corbier 2001, 66–71.
[6] According to Harris 1986, 93–5. However, Shaw 2001 sees the *ius vitae ac necis* as more of a cultural "myth" than a legal reality, at least in the imperial period.
[7] Soranus, *Gynecology* II.vi.10, in Temkin 1956, 79–80. See Dasen 2009, 200–2.
[8] See Corbier 1999, 1270–71; Corbier 2001, 62–3.
[9] Evans Grubbs 2010 and see further below.
[10] See, for instance, Brulé 1992 (summarizing earlier debate on the question).
[11] P.Oxy. iv.744, from the beginning of the 1st *c.* AD. West 1998 suggests that the baby in question was not that of the man's wife, but of another woman, perhaps a servant.
[12] Bagnall and Frier 1994, 151–3 and 158–59; see also Bagnall 1997, 121–38.
[13] In the nursing contracts edited by Masciadri and Montevecchi, of the twelve nurslings who are explicitly said to be *anairetoi* ("picked up" = *expositi*), six are girls, four are boys, and the sex of two cannot be determined. See further below on nursing contracts.
[14] For anthropological parallels, see Brulé 1992, 82. *Cf.* Musonius Rufus, cited below.
[15] The "law of Romulus" is cited by the Augustan writer Dionysius of Halicarnassus (a Greek), in his Roman *Antiquities* 2.15. See Harris 1994, 5. Here Dionysius (and allegedly Romulus) must be distinguishing between exposure (not rearing) and infanticide (actual killing).
[16] The Code of Justinian, (here abbreviated as Cod. Just.) preserves the rulings of emperors from Hadrian (reigned 117–138) to Justinian himself, up to its publication in 534. The laws of emperors from Hadrian to Diocletian (reign 284–305) were in the form of rescripts, responses to petitions, mostly from private citizens like Claudius. They therefore refer to actual situations, not legal hypotheticals.
[17] Cod. Just. 8.51.1. For a freeborn child exposed without the father's knowledge, see below on Digest 40.4.29. On repayment of expenses in rearing, see at n. 39–41 below.
[18] Divorce: Dig. 40.4.29 (Scaevola); Suetonius, *de Grammaticis* 21. See at n. 24 below.
[19] BGU IV.1104 (Alexandria, 8 BC). In early modern Florence, young widows were under great pressure to remarry, and this could lead them to abandon their young children by their first husband: see Gavitt 1994, 66–7; 78.
[20] Interestingly, although Augustus made laws to promote marriage and child-rearing, he did not prohibit infant exposure, nor did any emperor until late antiquity.
[21] Musonius Rufus XV ("Should every child that is born be raised?"), trans. Lutz 1947, 99–101. Other societies: see above at n. 14–15.
[22] See Musonius Rufus IV (Lutz 1947, 42–49) on education of daughters, and XII (Lutz 1947, 84–89) against the double standard.
[23] Volterra 1939.
[24] This case is found in Justinian's Digest, at Dig. 40.4.29. Scaevola had been asked to give an opinion in the case – not about the boy's right to inherit, but about the status of the slaves who had been freed under the man's now invalidated will. (Their manumission was invalidated, and unless they had lived in freedom for 5 years or more, they became the boy's property). See further Evans Grubbs 2010 on this and the following case.

[25] Cod. Just. 5.4.16 (dated 292–305 AD.).
[26] Masciadri and Montevecchi 1984 show that in the 31 nursing-related texts where the nursling's status can be determined, 23 are slaves and in 12 cases the slave babies have been picked up from the dung-heap. See further at note 13 above.
[27] Bagnall 1997.
[28] For wet-nurses at Rome, see Bradley 1986.
[29] Trexler 1994a, 207; Klapisch-Zuber 1985, 140–42; Gavitt 1994, 80–82.
[30] They may have been correct, to judge from the case of the hired wet-nurse Saraeus, who had continued to draw wages even after her nursling died, and was evidently trying to pass her own infant off as the nursling. (This strategy backfired when the man who hired her came to her house and took her child.) See P.Oxy. i.37 (49 AD) = no. 19 in Masciadri and Montevecchi 1984. *Cf.* Gavitt 1994, 82 for a similar case in Florence.
[31] See Tawfik 1997 on the restrictions on hired wet-nurses in the papyri.
[32] On *causa liberalis* actions, see Buckland 1908, 652–675.
[33] See Digest 40.12.3.2, from a commentary of the jurist Ulpian.
[34] I discuss this further in Evans Grubbs 2010.
[35] As in the case described by Scaevola in Digest 40.4.29; see above.
[36] Suetonius, *de grammaticis* 21. Melissus is one of two *grammatici* (virtually all of whom were slaves or freedmen) Suetonius mentions who were *expositi*; the other is Antonius Gnipho (*de gram.* 7). See Kaster 1995 for texts and commentary.
[37] Digest 40.12.1 (Ulpian).
[38] See Cameron 1939; Nani 1943–44. Not all *threptoi* were abandoned newborns, but many were, including those whose cases Pliny judged.
[39] Pliny, Epistle 10.65; Trajan's reply is Ep. 10.66. On these letters, see Sherwin-White 1966, 650–5 and Williams 1990, 117–18.
[40] For rhetorical sources, see Seneca, *Controversiae* 9.3 and Quintilian, *Institutes* 7.1.14, and also at n. 45 below.
[41] *Cf.* Cod. Just. 8.51.1 (at n. 17 above) and Cod. Just. 5.4.16 (n. 25).
[42] Pliny, Ep. 72–73. See Sherwin-White 1966, 659–60 and Williams 1990, 122–23.
[43] *E.g.*, the double recognition scenes of Daphnis and Chloe by their respective fathers – and note the self-serving excuses the fathers give to explain their decision to expose.
[44] Livy *ab urbe condita* I.4–6.
[45] *E.g.* Seneca, *Contr.* 9.3; Quintilian, *Institutes* 7.1.14 (and *cf.* Inst. 9.2.89); Pseudo-Quintilian, *Decl.* 278; Sulpicius Victor, *Inst. oratoriae*. See Boswell 1988, 60–2 and 124–5; Volterra 1939, 454–5; and on the question of authenticity of the "laws" on *expositi* found in the rhetorical sources, Fossati Vanzetti 1983, 184–7.
[46] See Kaster 2001. Pliny was no doubt familiar with these rhetorical exercises.
[47] On these laws, see Volterra 1939; Fossati Vanzetti 1983; Tate 2008; and Evans Grubbs 2009. I discuss the laws in more detail in my book *Children without Fathers in Roman Law* (in progress), chapter 6.
[48] Codex Theodosianus (Cod. Theod.) 5.9.1, addressed to the praetorian prefect Ablabius. Not found in the Cod. Just., because Justinian's later law superseded it.
[49] Aid to needy families: Cod. Theod. 11.27.1 (date uncertain, perhaps 329), to Ablabius, regarding aid to families in Italy; Cod. Theod. 11.27.2 (322), to Menander, evidently an official in Africa. Legalization of sale of newborns: Cod. Theod. 5.10.1 (329, addressed to Italians) and Cod. Just. 4.43.2 (329, to provincials). These laws bear the same date, but differ in content; some scholars think that Cod. Just. 4.43.2 is a Justinianic reworking of Constantine's original law. See Evans Grubbs 1993, 133–36.
[50] Cod. Just. 8.51.2 (374) to the praetorian prefect Petronius Probus, says that whoever exposes a child is subject to the penalty already laid down; this is presumably that of Constantine's law of 331(loss of *potestas*). This law appears to have been merged with a law of Honorius (see below) by Justinian's compilers, and so its text is problematic. Cod. Theod. 9.14.1 (374) also to Probus and dated a month earlier, says that killing an infant merits capital punishment. (Some have thought the penalty referred to in Cod. Just. 8.51.2 was also capital punishment, but deprivation of *potestas* is more likely.)
[51] Cod. Theod. 5.9.2 (412) to the praetorian prefect Melitius.
[52] Council of Vaison (held in 442), canons 9 and 10. Text in C. Munier, *Concilia Galliae A.314–506*, Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum Latinorum 148, Turnhout, 1963, 100–01. See Fossati Vanzetti 1983, 216–18; Boswell 1988, 172–73; Tate 2008, 114–15. The ecclesiastical punishment was presumably penance.
[53] Cited by Boswell 1988, 202–204 and 217–18.

[54] Cod. Just. 8.51.3 (dated 529), to the praetorian prefect Demosthenes.
[55] Justinian, Novel 153 (dated 541) to the praetorian prefect of Illyricum.
[56] See Boswell 1988, 138–61 for Jewish and Christian objections. I have not yet seen Koskenniemi 2009.
[57] See Evans Grubbs 1993, 135–36 and "Church, State and Children" (2009), 126–29.
[58] See Tate 2008, 134–36, who does not think Constantine's law was influenced by Christianity, but sees the law of 412 as the first clear evidence for such influence.
[59] See Augustine, Epistle 98.6 to Boniface (in *CSEL* 34, 527–28), dated 408; Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Macrina 26.30 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 178, 232), mid–fourth century.
[60] Boswell 1984; Boswell 1988, 228–55.
[61] See Vuolanto in this volume, who criticizes the widespread assumption that ecclesiastical and legal sanctions would have restrained, or even stopped, abandonment.
[62] Miller 1996; Miller 2003, 51–62 (*Orphanotropheion*) and 152–55 (*brephotropheia*).
[63] Bolton 1994. In Florence, it appears tht Santa Maria de San Gallo also took in abandoned infants (as well as the destitute) as early as the 13th century: see Trexler 1994b, 227–8.
[64] Florence: Gavitt 1994; Trexler 1994a and 1994b. Milan: Hunecke 1994; Hunecke 1987. See also the collection *Enfance abandonneé et société en Europe XIVe–XXe siècle* (École Française de Rome, 1991) for studies of abandonment in early modern Europe.
[65] Ransel 1988. The idea that Russian foundling children would escape the degradation of village life and be trained for a productive career, championed by the reformer Ivan Ivanovich Betskoi, soon fell away, but the system of foundling homes and fostering of abandoned children in the countryside continued till late in the 19th century.
[66] The phrase is that of David Ransel in Tilly, Fuchs, Kertzer, Ransel 1992, summarizing the conclusion of Ransel 1988: "This is a study of unintended consequences on a massive scale."
[67] For abandonment of legitimate children in Italy, see Hunecke 1994 and Viazzo 1994. Kertzer 1993, 71–102 stresses that abandonment of legitimate children was much more prevalent in Milan and Florence than other parts of Italy, where illegitimate infants continued to be those most often abandoned through the 19th c.
[68] Boswell 1988, 427 describes the establishment of foundling homes in early modern Italy as having "tragic, unintended consequences" because (he believes) infants had less chance of survival in the homes than they had in antiquity when left to be picked up by strangers. But his view of ancient *expositio* is far too rosy; surely the likelihood of death before rescue for *expositi* was as great as that of children consigned to foundling homes.
[69] Gavitt 1994, 72.
[70] Hunecke 1994, 125–6 (quote at 125).
[71] For abandonment in 19th c. New York, see Miller 2008; Gilje 1983.
[72] "Newborn is found alive in trash bin" by L. Thorsen, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 May, 2008; "People eager to adopt tot left in bin," by J. Kohler, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 7 May, 2008. Missouri has a safe-haven law, but in this case it clearly was not followed.
[73] "Unintended Consequences: 'Safe Haven' Laws are Causing Problems, Not Solving Them" a report of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute released March 10, 2003, available at http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/ – infantabandonment (last accessed 11/23/09). See also "Update: Safe Havens for Abandoned Infants," National Conference of State Legislatures October 21, 2003, at http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/ailaws.htm (accessed 4/13/05); "The Drive to Enact 'Infant Abandonment' Laws–A Rush to Judgment?" by C. Dillard, in *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy* vol. 3.4 (Aug. 2000) at http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/03/4/gr030401.html (last accessed 11/23/09); "A Mother's Choice: Do laws that let women abandon their infants protect babies or encourage parents to desert them?" in *Time Magazine* 25 September, 2006, 64.
[74] "Nebraska lawmakers vote to limit safe-haven law," a report on CNN.com dated 22 November, 2008 at http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/11/21/nebraska.safe.haven/ (accessed 26 November, 2009).
[75] "German group to offer place to drop off unwanted babies," in the *Lynchburg (Virginia) News and Advance*, 8 March, 2000.
[76] "In Rome, a baby abandoned in the safest way," by E. Povoledo, appearing in the *International Herald Tribune* (New York Times) 26 February, 2007 (last accessed 11/26/09) at http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/26/world/europe/26iht–babies.4727643.html; "Italy Takes High-Tech Tactics for Abandoned Babies," report by Sylvia Poggioli for National Public Radio 7 March, 2007 (last accessed 11/26/09) at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7730566.

[77] "Parents reclaiming abandoned female children," in *The Hindu* 29 June, 2004 at http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2004062906870400.htm&date=2004/06/29/&prd=th&; an updated version (reporting that the number of babies abandoned since 2002 was 1037, 996 of them girls) dated 31 January, 2008 at http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2008013153610500.htm&date=2008/01/31/&prd=th& (accessed 11/26/09). In Berlin, a couple who had left their newborn in a "baby hatch" (set up for parents who are unable to care for their children and want to abandon them) over the weekend, regretted their action almost immediately and called the hospital to retrieve their child (on-line version of the *Pakistan Daily Times*, "Parents reclaim abandoned child," dated 14 April, 2005 (accessed 4/13//05; I was not able to find it again).

[78] See above at n. 24–25.

[79] See above at n. 21 on Musonius; for Philo and Christian writers, see at n. 56–57.

[80] Bradley 1984, 81–112; Wiedemann 1985.

Part II

Disabled

3
Disabled Children in Gregory of Tours

Christian Laes

Introduction

To write about disabled children in late Antiquity is to explore a subject about which our sources are largely silent. Childhood has rightly been called *le grand oubli d'histoire*: ancient writers were not that keen to write about the little ones who were somehow outsiders in the social hierarchy of their times. So much more is this true for disabled children who, contrary to their peers, would never make it as fully-fledged and participating adults. The scant information on the impaired provided by ancient authors makes it difficult to answer even the most basic questions about their daily lives. At best, disabled children appear more as an abstraction with theological significance than as a historical reality.[1] Luckily, there are Christian authors who are an exception to the rule. This chapter sets out to collect and catalogue the various instances of disabled children in the extensive oeuvre of Gregory of Tours (538/9–594). Though this seems like a quite straightforward and well-defined subject, the endeavour is in fact studded with difficulties, both practical and methodological.

First, the sixth century is often considered a transitory period: too late for classicists and ancient historians, too early for mediaevalists, but excellent recent scholarship can show the way.[2] Neither is the extent of Gregory's writings unsurmountable for those prepared to embark on approximately nine hundred folio pages of Latin edited in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. The works containing miracle stories referring to disabled children include his *Historia Francorum*, the Eight Books on Miracles (including *Liber in gloria Martyrum*, *Liber de Passione et Virtutibus Sancti Iuliani Martyris*, *Libri I–IV de Virtutibus Sancti Martini Episcopi*, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*) as well as the apocryphal *Liber de Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli*.

Other problems are methodological. First of all, disabilities in themselves were not Gregory's concern. Hence, he does not show any interest at all for the aetiology of people's handicaps, unless he can ascribe it to sin.[3] His almost endless lists and catalogues of miracles and wonders testify to the attitude that 'if you doubt, look at the miracles that are heaped before your eyes'.[4] The capability of performing miracles distinguished the true Catholic saints from false prophets belonging to the heretical side. Offering help and protection, saints and bishops acted in the same way that powerful patrons of the senatorial-aristocratic elite had acted in pagan times. As such, Gregory considered himself as an *alumnus* of Saint Julian, who had acted as the protecting

patron of Gregory's father in the city of Clermont.[5] Miracles were a radiation of the saints' *virtutes.* Waiting for God's Heavenly Kingdom and the Final Judgement to come, believers had to rely on liturgy, relics and miracles as intermediaries between God and His people. In Gregory's view, the Christian people were servants of the Empty Throne, which would be occupied one day by Christ the Lord. Meanwhile, the emperor or the king acted as worldly authorities, assisted by the bishops as the highest servants outshining the secular potentates.[6] Focusing on disability in Gregory of Tours thus means a transformation or metamorphosis of the source material to a subject which was not at all the author's concern. This, however, is the case with many socio-cultural studies in Antiquity dealing with for instance sexuality, gender and other sociological issues.[7]

Second, recent contributions to the fashionable field of disability studies have pointed out again and again that one should discern between disability, which is essentially a social and cultural construct, and impairment, which points to the physiological and biological side of the matter. In other words, while the physiological fact of say blindness is the same in all cultures of all periods, the way people viewed and catalogued blind persons may very well have differed between various cultures. This methodological issue reminds one of the *nomos* versus *physis* discussions in the field of sexuality studies (with people performing same-sex sexual acts and having same-sex appetite in all periods of history, while it is far from certain that the concept of homosexuality existed throughout the centuries). It admonishes socio-cultural historians to approach the sources not from their own standpoint, but starting from concepts and categories innate to the writers of the sources themselves. It also means that modern definitions of 'disability' are not of great use when approaching the miracle stories in Gregory of Tours. In this regard, even the aspect of being incurable and permanent is not particularly helpful: people in the past may very well have hoped that a medical condition might still have improved, although modern medicine teaches us that it is in fact incurable, while on the other side fractures, infected wounds or fever might have lead to a condition of permanent impairment or even to fatal outcome, much more than it is nowadays.[8] I do believe, however, that the urge for methodological soundness and caution must not deter us from approaching the sources, and that, in the end, medical and biological similarities between people throughout the ages lead to less difference in practice than one would perhaps initially expect.[9] I will elaborate upon this point in the final conclusion. As such, I will more than once mix the terms 'impairment' and 'disability', since everyday usage does not distinguish between the general biological and the culturally-determined meaning.

Third, one may ask whether it makes any sense whatsoever to catalogue the numerous instances of impairment as they appear in Gregory's writings. Our writer is obviously deeply imbued by his biblical background: the miracles he records call to mind the healing miracles performed by Jesus Christ and recorded in the Gospels.[10] His stories should be approached from a literary angle, taking into account the requirements, customs, and the rhetoric of the hagiographical genre. And obviously, to the modern reader's eyes, the reality and historical truth of the recorded case may be questioned. Though these objections are undoubtedly true, many scholars have pointed to the vast potential of hagiographical material for the study of every day life. In fact, it is by their mention of so called non-essentials, the "incidental or circumstantial details", that

these stories offer so many details that do not cast in any other source whatsoever.[11] In any case, Gregory was convinced of the truth of the stories he had been recording so faithfully in the eighties of the sixth century when he was promoting Saint Martin's cult as a bishop of Tours.[12] Moreover, to modern historians the reality in these miracle stories is not necessarily, if ever, a literal one. In the Anglo-Saxon Life of St Guthlac, two weeping parents brought their mentally disturbed child, who had killed several people in mad fits, to the saint in the hope that the child would be cured. Though we may of course doubt whether Guthlac has ever lived, let alone whether he really healed a suchlike child, the concept of caring parents maintaining a mentally unstable and even dangerous child at home was not at odds with the Anglo-Saxon perception of their society.[13]

As a final introductory point, something needs to be said about the way modern scholarship has dealt with the phenomenon of miraculous healing. Some interpreters have explained miracles as products of an anxiety-ridden society which resorted to faith healing as a last resort in times of extreme insecurity.[14] Others have looked at miracles from a biomedical standpoint, pointing to faulty diagnosis by medical ignorance and spontaneous healing which was then considered as miraculous.[15] The socio-anthropological approach is surely the most fashionable nowadays, stressing the social experience of illness and healing, and believing that "considerations of psychological anxiety and biomedical ignorance are of less importance than the social and personal worry that people expressed".[16] Miracles encouraged the healing of the community by liturgy, as well as the healing of social relationships between people (they could free slaves or the indebted, call people to the service of God, make the healed feel better than ordinary people). Moreover, miraculous healing stories reinstalled theological issues: showing the power of Catholicism over Arianism, showing how opponents in theological debates fell ill.[17]

Counting healing stories

Apart from numerous local people from Tours, more than 250 pilgrims from elsewhere are recorded by Gregory for a period of almost a decade. Most of them came from Central Gaul, and were presumably linked with Gregory's family from Clermont. Forty percent of these pilgrims were not from the elite, making travel and leaving their hometown a risky and cumbersome undertaking. Even for the more well-to-do, travel was not easy especially when one was struck by illness or impairment: "by choice, all pilgrims were 'foreigners' and all were poor."[18]

Obviously, the miracles recorded by Gregory of Tours are not a collection made by an archivist or by a judge in processes of canonisation. It is therefore revealing to take a closer look at the selection made by Gregory, that is the distribution of children and adults, male and female, in the recorded healing miracles. By healing miracles, I refer to those miracles improving the health condition of the persons involved, excluding other miraculous events as divine punishment, weather or climate miracles, sacramental miracles or prisoners being relieved from their chains. Over 90% of the miracles recorded in *Octo Libri Miraculorum* belong to this category of healing miracle, a collection of about 360 miraculous events which lends itself for statistical enquiry.[19] In comparison, the

Historia Francorum which is even lengthier in volume than the *Octo Libri Miraculorum* only records 23 healing miracles, the apocryphal *Liber de Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli* has 26 healing miracles. Both collection are evidently less suitable for statistical enquiry and are therefore only cited in the appendix.

Table 1: Distribution of age and sex in the healing miracles of the Octo Libri Miraculorum[20]

	Children	Adults
Male	48	190
Female	27	57
More people involved	1	56
TOTAL	76	303

This admittedly rather rough sketch (see the numerous difficulties cited in note 20) testifies to a considerable number of children in the miracle stories, a total of 25% – in any case a rich potential of case stories.

The second table demonstrates from which symptoms these children were healed. As mentioned in the introduction, it is crucial to start from Gregory's categories, which essentially derive from symptoms, rather than from modern pathological analysis related to causes. Therefore, the category of paralysis/mobility problems includes a wide range of symptoms which present day medicine would catalogue seperately: lameness or paralysis caused by brain haemorrhage, crippledness due to fractures and contracted hands by neurological or rheumatical causes. The same obviously applies to mental disorders, which in the early medieval perception are mostly linked with possession or epilepsy.

Table 2: Children's diseases and/or disabilities in the Octo Libri Miraculorum[21]

	Number of instances	Percentage
Resurrection	1	1
Contagious disease of the skin	3	4
Paralysis, mobility problems	26	31
Blindness, eye problems	12	14
Deafness	2	2
Muteness	5	6
Mental disorders	5	6
Difficult birth	0	0
Fever[22]	8	23
Accident	3	4
Teratology	1	1
Disorder of the humors	1	1
Miscellaneous	7	8

The percentages of this table make more sense when compared with the catalogue concerning adults:

Table 3: Adults' diseases and/or disabilities in the Octo Libri Miraculorum[23]

	Number of instances		Percentage
Resurrection	2	0	0
Contagious disease of the skin	6	1	2
Paralysis, mobility problems	88	7	25
Blindness, eye problems	80	15	25
Deafness	8	0	2
Muteness	22	0	5
Mental disorders	38	20	15
Difficult birth	0	0	0
Fever	37	16	14
Accident	7	0	2
Teratology	1	0	0
Miscellaneous	16	0	4
Sterility	1	0	0
Leprous	3	2	1
Unspecified (*infirmi, aegroti, etc.*)	4	8	3

In both tables, paralysis and mobility problems are the most frequent symptoms. This is in line with earlier research for the Early and the High Middle Ages. This occurence is linked with the stress on healing motor impairments in the Gospels, as well as with the fact that mobility problems are a rather broad category consisting of various symptoms which may indeed have affected relatively large parts of the population.[24] As will be clear from the appendix, the instances of mobility problems are far less in Gregory's apocryphal and historiographic writings. The frequent occurence of eye disease may also be linked with Jesus' healing miracles, but the difference between children and adults is significant and points in my opinion to the fact that the many reported records of blindness are in fact cases of diminished sight or eye infections, not of 'real' blindness.[25] Mental disorders are remarkably more attested with adults, but this may be linked with the high number of anonymous groups of insane or possessed (the so-called *inergumeni*) being mentioned in the miracle stories.[26] On the contrary, the significantly higher instance of cases of fever with children might very well be connected with the dangers to which people of tender age were exposed, not to mention possible instances of all sorts of childhood diseases.

This categorisation of the various instances is a laborious task, which has to be done in order to identify Gregory's specific preferences in mentioning, pointing to possible anxieties, or preoccupations, social realities and/or literary fashion. Admittedly, this whole inquiry does not lead to remarkable new facts in the history of disability. Therefore, we should turn our attention to the separate case stories reporting miraculous healing of children. As I hope to demonstrate, it is in this particular area that Gregory of Tours had a lot to offer to historians, more than has been acknowledged upto now.

The birth of disabled children, infants and diseases

In the early Christian centuries, phenomena such as infanticide, exposure, child abandonment and oblation are documented in both secular legislation and in canonical law. In the year 374, a constitution by the Emperor Valentinianus I classified infanticide as subject to capital punishment, while at the same time he prescribed that those who had picked up an exposed child could keep it in the social status they wanted it to have.[27] As for canonical regulations, in 442 the Council of Vaison had ordained that the finding of an exposed child should be announced in church on Sundays, after which the biological parents were given ten days before definitively losing their rights to the baby. The dispositions known as the Second Council of Arles (442–506) ordain similar measures, as does the Council of Agdes from the year 506.[28] In the regulations of early medieval kingdoms, the killing of the newborn is disapproved of and subject to legal punishment in the form of fines (though these are not as high as for the murder of adult persons), but not often mentioned,[29] while various regulations point to the frequency of exposing children or handing them over to other people or religious institutions. However, impaired children are hardly ever mentioned in this context, and as such they are largely absent in John Boswell's work *The Kindness of Strangers* – as they are absent in most scholarly studies on child abandonment and infanticide in Antiquity.[30] Therefore, the large collection of case stories in Gregory of Tours, with its focus on non-essential details, promises to yield new information.

Focusing on congenital birth defects and the way parents reacted when faced with them, causes a methodological problem. A certain Anagildus is described as "mute, deaf, blind and defective in all his limbs". Since he could not earn a living by working with his own hands, he was brought to church, where he sat as a beggar for a whole year. Nothing is said about his age, but we might suspect that his impairments were visible from birth (at least the limbs).[31] We may suspect defects visible from birth in the case of feet twisted towards the legs, or possibly in other instances of mobility problems such as contracted hands or feet. Here we are faced with a fundamental problem of the sources: they hardly ever pay attention as to whether these defects were congenital. To Gregory of Tours, congenitality was simply not the main concern, so in most cases we can just never know for sure whether the disabled people involved suffered from birth.[32]
A classic case is reported in *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini* 2, 24:

> At Bourges a woman gave birth to a son, whose knees were bent up to his stomach, his heels fastened to his legs, his hands hugged his chest, his eyes were closed. He looked more like a monster than a human being. Many looked at him with laughter and the poor mother was criticised because such a monster had come out of her. In tears, she confessed that she had conceived him on a Sunday night. Since she did not dare to kill him, she raised him as a healthy child, as mother usually do. When he grew up, she handed him over to beggars, who placed him on a cart and dragged him around, displaying him to the people, who gave lots of money to watch the prodigy. While this had been happening for quite a long time, when he had reached age ten, he arrived at Saint Martin's feast. He was left outdoors and lay in misery before the saint's tomb.

Ultimately, this intriguing story leaves us with more questions than answers. The text suggests that it was inconceivable that mothers should kill even deformed children. One wonders whether this could be ascribed to wishful thinking by Gregory of Tours?[33] In the whole story, there is no mention of the father at all. Is this omission to be explained

by the fact that the father was just not important for the plot line of the story? Why is his sin of procreation on Sunday not mentioned? Was the mother unmarried, which would even have enhanced her sin? But then, why is this not mentioned? And might there be stress on "as mothers usually do" (ut mos matrum est), thereby deliberately opposing the choices of mothers, who were closer to their offspring, to the decisions of fathers, who would have rather opted for killing the deformed infant? Earlier in this volume, Ville Vuolanto has explained that for Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages the attribution of decisions concerning abandonment and infanticide to the fathers is in fact a preoccupation of modern historiography. This is seen as a result of legal rights as the patria potestas. However, medievalists have depicted abandonment as a resort of the mothers. This passage in Gregory of Tours either suggests the mothers' power in difficult decision making, or their possible opposition towards paternal power. Interestingly enough, other cases of newborns looking like a monster but still surviving are ascertained in other sources. Finucane reports on a fifteenth century case of a girl born prematurely after her mother had had an accident. She was so disfigured that she appeared as 'a monstruous imitation of a child'. Still she lived for nine months in this condition.[34] In the case of monstruous birth, sin commited by parents is also suggested by Gregory in the case of a baby born with contracted hands: at age ten his nails were grown into his hands. His inability to perform work is explicitly mentioned.[35]

Other instances in Gregory of Tours testify to the survival of children with severe handicaps, as well as of strong parental involvement in the case little children became sick as to nearly dying.

There is the case of a young boy with his eyelids shut, his ears and mouth obstructed and no capability of using his hands or feet: breath was the only sign of life he had in him.[36] A one-year-old infant who was contracted in a way that his knees could hardly be separated from his mouth, was left with the holy relics while his parents were praying in church. It is explicitly stated that the parents did not hope for any good to become of the little child, yet they had chosen to keep it.[37] Two boys were so severly contracted that their bodies had a circular form.[38] Even in the case of disabled slave children, some survived. Securus is pictured as having a dry hand and a dry foot from birth on, in such a way that he ressembled a monster. After seven years, his masters decided to transport him to Saint Martin's shrine in order to have him sustained by passers-by, since he would never be fed by his own work. After his miraculous healing, the boy was set free, baptised and put under protection of the Church. It is not said why his baptism had been delayed: it is unlikely that the impairment which appeared from birth or his slave status would have been the cause of this – quite the contrary, since his parents might have opted for emergency baptism.[39]

Obviously, neglect by parents or guardians could cause a healthy infant to become ill and weak. A touching story reports on the birth of a baby whose mother died. The father, viewing the child as the only memorial of his love for his wife, searched for a wet-nurse who unfortunately could not provide enough milk but nevertheless carried on breastfeeding the child for almost a year. When the severely emaciated and weakened child almost died from fever, his desperate father took him to Saint-Martin's church in order to have him baptised. The baptism did not seem to offer much help but, covered with tears, the poor man laid the child near Saint Martin's grave, after which it recovered![40]

In most cases, however, deep emotional attachment towards infants is attested. A three-months-old suckling became so ill from fever that he did not suck his mother's breast any more, and died. The devastated grandparents and parents took the child to Saint-Martin's altar and found him alive the next morning.[41] As in Antiquity, the lactation period in Gregory's days was quite protracted, as in the case of a child who was still breast fed in his third year. He was also afflicted by severe fever, refused breastfeeding and was put before an altar of Saint Martin. The father was so struck by grief that he could no longer bear the sight: he left home and asked his wife to see to the burial. When the evening fell, the little boy recovered, uttering in his childish voice "Sister, where are you?" (sister being the term of endearment with which he named his mother).[42] A ten-month-old baby fell so ill that the only sign of life he gave was the fact that he was still breathing. His mother was stuck with grief and concern, that were increased because the infant had not yet been baptised, and took him to the shrine of Saint Illidius. When a cock announced a new day, the little one was healed, eloquently asked for water and then returned to childish crying till he reached the age at which infants normally start speaking.[43] A rather touching scene portrays a nearly three-year-old boy who was still breastfed by his mother. He was struck by such severe fever so that he refuse to suck the breast nor take any other food. His desperate parents are called his *amatores.* The small boy eventually recovered after a night in the shrine of Saint Maxim the Confessor: his parents found him while he was holding himself up with difficulties on the bars of the shrine, since he was not yet of the age to be able to walk.[44]

Paralysis and mobility problems

In the case of both children and adults, medieval hagiographers linked paralysis with dryness of the nerves. In the same way that plants languish and slowly die without sufficient water, so people become immobilised because of problems with the 'humours'.[45] Obviously, people were not familiar with diagnoses such as a stroke, which must have happened in the case of a twelve-year-old girl who was lying in her bed for six years, not moving, totally blind, and mute and deaf.[46] In most cases, those of impaired mobility had to be carried around either by other people, or on a cart drawn by animals.[47] Sometimes, they could help themselves with sticks.[48] In the case of an adult man who was lame in one foot, there is even one testimony to prosthetics, which are also attested in Classical Antiquity.[49]

> He cut a staff to the height of his knee, put a piece of leather on top of it, bent his foot back, and attached the staff to his knee; with the assistance of this peg leg he regained his mobility when he tried to move on foot.
>
> (*VM* 3, 9; transl. R. Van Dam 1993; 264)

There are some other examples of children with mobility problems. A young slave (*vernaculus*) was brought to Saint Martin's shrine by his master.[50] A boy, paralysed in both hands and feet, was raised with much trouble by his parents for six years. They eventually took him to church.[51] Some children took the initiative themselves. A priest's daughter, who had lost the use of one foot, went to church herself. A girl who was totally paralysed asked to be brought to the basilica. So did a boy with twisted legs:

he went to church with his parents.[52] A father exposed his paralysed daughter before the church so that she might deliver some profit as a beggar.[53] In each of these cases, going to church produced a cure.

Another telling story is about a small child (*puerulus*) who was limping in his left foot but who nevertheless travelled around with a group of day labourers. When he was not able to go any further due to the pain in his foot, his fellows who were keen to attend Saint Martin's feast, left him at a distance of ten miles from the city of Tours. He was left crying at passers-by, who eventually took him on a cart and brought him to the city.[54] Ultimately, this story leaves us with intriguing hints and questions. Apparently, this boy's impairment of the foot was in no way an obstacle to joining a wandering group of people searching for their daily living. Was he an orphan, or someone left without family (a condition which would have forced him to join)? Did his parents place them in the group? Was the group's solidarity always so weak that they did not care about leaving their comrade behind, or was this just their eagerness to attend the special Saint Martin's festivity?

Another story mentions a small boy (*puer parvulus*) who acted as a cowherd. He fell asleep near a fountain. When his friends came back, they found him in great pains of the limbs, unable to move around, and carried him to his parents. The latter waited till he was free of pain, but nevertheless decided to turn the lame boy over to a group of beggars, with whom he travelled around for about ten years.[55] In the two last instances, we see clear examples of the so-called community concept, to which I will return later (see note 127): despite their physical impairment, these children were somehow integrated into the labouring process. The latter case testifies to the economical necessity which forced the parents to turn their son over to a group of beggars, the former case even shows a young boy with a limping foot as a labourer, be it out of necessity to provide for his own living, or placed by his parents.

Blindness

The very same lack of attention for congenitality appears from the quite frequent descriptions of the healing of blindness. We are not often informed whether blindness was acquired at a certain stage of life, or an innate condition. The expression *lumen recepit* might suggest that it is about people regaining their sight, but some instances suggest that this is not always the case.[56] As mentioned before, blindness is not an unambiguous term: even nowadays, people may be legally classified as 'blind' while they still have some capacity of seeing (see note 25).

In the same way as adults, blind children had to be accompanied and could make use of a walking stick.[57] In the absent of asylums or houses of charity, being left without help or family must have been a terror to blind peoplen condemning them to begging and the pity of passers-by.[58] Blindness was obviously considered a miserable condition in the case of children.[59] Would blind people in their misery connect to each other and form families? There is a suggestion in this direction in the healing miracle by which Andreas cured a family of blind people. In this story both the father and the mother and their son are blind. Andreas considers this a work of the Devil. He calls them mentally and physically blind, referring both to their impairment and the fact that they did not

believe in God. I strongly suppose that the reference to their being mentally blind, is revealing about their trailing behind as social outsiders.[60]

Some case stories describe the circumstances of children becoming blind.[61] The story about a little boy from Limoges is worth to be quoted in full:

> After these events, a little blind boy (*puerulus*) who came from Limoges regained the sight of his eyes in the following way. He was two years old: he was just beginning to set his first steps, speech was developing, he began to form words, he sweetly tattled towards his mother, he gave her little kisses, he was hanging on her neck, carried around in her arms. Suddenly, by diabolic forces winds were released, dust was raised from the ground into the air together with chaff. Both mother and child were covered by the heavy winds. The country woman, who was imprudent, did not take measure as to protect herself and her son with a banner. Therefore, since the devil's trap was there, the eyes of the little boy (*adolescentis*) were covered with dust and closed. He was crying for a long time. His mother eventually calmed him down, but he remained blind. When he grew up (*adultus*) he was handed over to a group of beggars in order that he would go around with them and acquire some income. His parents were very poor. So in the twelfth year of his blindness, he arrived at Tours, on Christmas Eve.

Eventually, when the others had already left church, the boy remained in order to pray. He felt as if someone had punctured his eyes with a sharp arrow, blood came flowing out of them, he saw the candles in church, and realised his sight had recovered![62] Two other stories mention children playing on the street and being blinded by dust.[63] The begging existence of a young blind boy is also attested in a story from Lyon. After the lad (*puerulus*) was healed, he continued to receive alms, till he was forbidden by some city aristocrats.[64]

Infections of the eyes could provoke blindness, as in the case of a girl who was brought by her father to Saint Julian's basilica and healed because of her father's charity towards some beggars sitting in front of the church.[65]

Deafness and muteness

Following the tradition of ancient medical theory, people did not emphasise the concept of deaf-muteness till the nineteenth century. Of course, it was observed that people who were deaf by birth were also mute. But in the ancient world the stories focus on the disability which in an oral culture caused the greatest nuisance: the inability to speak. Moreover, it was believed that a physical obstruction of the tongue caused the person to be mute.[66] As is clear from tables 2 and 3, also Gregory of Tours put more emphasis on the disability of being mute, leaving though not establishing the possibility that the person in question was also deaf.[67] A single instance where only hearing seems to have been lost, appears with a man who came together with his parents towards Saint Monegunde, asking for healing.[68] More typical of the ancient way of presenting things is the case of a beggar named Theodomundus, who was both deaf and mute. He lived from alms for three years but also gave alms to other indigents. In the end, blood and dirt flew out of his mouth and ears, and he was unable to speak and hear.[69]

Obviously, deafness and muteness are conditions which become apparent only some time after birth. But the ancient concept of the obstruction of the tongue even

presumed the possibility of a baby's mouth being so obstructed that it could not cry out (one wonders how such an infant would have been able to suck milk). When one such baby's sad mother took her to Saint Martin's grave, she asked the girl whether the incense smelt nice and whether the water from the holy spring tasted well. When the girl answered twice '*bonum*', the lucky mother returned with her healed child.[70] A very peculiar case of muteness appears with a boy named Piolus who was born with a contracted hand, suffered heavily from this since he was ten, and became mute due to fever at the age of fifteen. The entrance to his mouth was said to be so obstructed that he could not even utter cowish bellowing (*mugitus*).[71] Therefore, he made use of three wooden tablets which he connected with a shoe-latchet: the same process used by vine-dressers in order to scare off birds from their vineyards.[72] One night, he slept in Saint Martin's basilica, saw a nightmare, cried out and thus regained speech and hearing, the latter a remarkable addition, since it was never said before that he had actually lost his hearing.[73] The conceited reference to the uttering of cowish bellowing also occurs with late- antique and early medieval lexicographers and encyclopedists.[74] A similar case of a man becoming deaf and mute (this time explicitly acknowledged) after fever is attested in the case of an adult inhabitant of Angers. He is said to have been thrown out of the house by his brothers, since they believed that he had gone insane (a typical prejudice towards deaf-mute people throughout the centuries). Gregory of Tours explicitly condemns the brothers' attitude as an infringement of God's laws and the protecting of family members. The poor man made a living as a beggar for five years, and, like the boy named Piolus, he made use of wooden tablets in order to make himself understood.[75]

Mental disorders

A thorny problem of vocabulary raises in the case of the mentally disabled. 'Discriminant subtlety in mental diseases has been achieved only in recent decades and we cannot sift the confusion of ancient accounts'.[76] The ancient vagueness in terms and the lack of distinctions remains a considerable problem for those scholars wishing to highlight the mentally disabled in Antiquity.[77] Therefor in the case where possession by devils or evil spirits is mentioned, many problems of diagnostics or classicification turn up. The late-antique lives of the saints and apostles are full of stories about forms of insanity. Were such children epileptics, manic depressed bipolars, or mentally disturbed? Of course, one can never know for sure. A boy was possessed by a *spiritus immundus* and hung himself.[78] While we would classify this as a case of suicidal depression, ancient people discerned the bad influence of evil spirits or devils.[79] What was meant by the *nequitia* from which two girls from Lemovicinum were healed with Holy Oil? We would spontaneously think of a sort of long lasting depression, a symptom which was evidently unknown to Gregory of Tours.[80] Even sudden panic or attacks of fear were interpreted as a demonic attack upon a youngster.[81] Contractions of hands and feet were also sometimes attributed to such attacks.[82] Some ancient authors now and then try to make distinctions. According to Saint Augustine, *frenetici* (madmen) should be distinguished from people suffering from *possessio*.[83] Gregory of Tours mentions the case of Landulfus, possessed by a demon who made him a lunatic (*lunatici daemonii*). He

often fell on to the ground vomiting blood and saliva, so that he was considered to be dead. In this case, comments Gregory, the condition was a disease that the doctors called *morbus ephilenticus* and peasants the falling disease (*morbus cadivus*). This however is a rare instance of an author trying to classify; mostly we are left with doubts as to what diagnosis can be brought forward.[84] As far as therapy is concerned, harsh treatment as shock therapy with clubs or whips in the case of the mentally possessed is alluded to when it is said that many used the rod Saint Gregory carried with him in order to expel demons in his name.[85]

As is clear from the tables, the inevitably rather vague category of 'mental disorders' appears to be a popular one, especially in the apocryphal *Vita Andreae*, obviously referring to Christ expelling demons, but also in the *Octo Libri Miraculorum* where it is an especially popular category in the case of anonymous herds of *inergumeni* (possessed) being healed *en masse*.[86]

In the present discussion, however, it should be noted that there are not many concrete cases of children being cured from possession. The daughter of the Emperor Maximus of Trier (383–388) is said to have been vexed by an evil spirit and healed by Saint Ilidius.[87] Likewise, the possessed daughter of the Emperor Leo was cured by Saint Helius.[88] A young man (*puer iuvenis*) suddenly experienced possession, held on to a column in church and could not even be dragged away by ten men.[89] Gratius' son was still a child, since he made use of the public baths for women, when he was suddenly attacked by a demon and brought home. Eventually the boy himself, his father and his mother became possessed as a consequence of sexual sin both parents had committed.[90] As mentioned above, the theme of possessed children is particularly frequent in the apocryphal *Vita Andreae*: the suicide case (see note 78), another boy being attacked by a demon in the baths,[91] an entire household including the daughter of the house being possessed,[92] or a favourite pet child slave named Algmana, who was lying spitting in the atrium of the house. 'I had rather been swallowed by the sea, than to have to watch this happening to my boy', cries out poor owner Stratocleus.[93]

One would like to find evidence about mentally retarded children, but there is just one single clue pointing in that direction. A married man is said to be 'simple by birth' (*natura simplex*).[94] A sudden panic at night caused him to jump out of the conjugal bed, to wander throught the house and to become mute. On his own instigation, his wife brought him to church, where he recovered after six months. I suggest that the description of his regained speech (*eloquium, sicut antea habuerat*) refers to his speaking with difficulty due to his mental problems. At least, the mention of his being married reminds us of one rare ancient testimony on marriage with people who were somehow retarded.[95]

Attitudes towards the disabled: pity and mockery, dread and fascination, guilt and sin

The story already mentioned about the monster of Bourges contains several examples of attitudes towards disability: derision and mockery, fascination (with people paying to see the boy and itinerants making profit of it), and guilt attributed to the poor woman who had to admit that her child was conceived on a Sunday night. Indeed the chapter

concludes with an elaborate admonition against sexual activity on the Day of the Lord: do not let the pleasure of one night have consequences for a whole life to come.[96] Other instances in Gregory of Tours testify to handicaps of children as a punishment for parental sin. In the case of a boy who was born with contracted hands, possible sin of the parents or even the child itself is mentioned.[97] In that of an adult man who had been blind from birth, the impaired person says of himself that he knows he has not deserved to see light.[98] Where children are concerned, disability is mentioned as an instant punishment for transgressions or crimes. Two little boys (*pueruli)* forgot to cross themselves when they were faced with a legion of demons in church, in the disguise of a choir of singing women. Both of the boys became blind and one also lame.[99] A girl tried to cheat a merchant, but was paralysed and became mute when she swore at the grave of Saint Eugenius.[100] Another girl was combing her hair on Sunday: the comb got stuck into her hand.[101] A third girl was covered with wounds, apparently a skin disease as a consequence of her being a prostitute, so some people rumoured.[102] A child was punished together with his parents for their sexual sins: the whole household became possessed by demons.[103] The theme of disability as a punishment, is frequent in the case of adults.[104] It seems to be a typical preoccupation of Gregory of Tours. In fact, both Jenni Kuuliala and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa have demonstrated that the idea of (parental) sin causing disability, is quite rare in the medieval sources.[105]

Impairment could also evoke people's pity. A young slave boy (*vernaculus*) suffered from such pains in his feet, possibly gout, that he was not able to walk. His suffering moved the neighbourhood. An adult paralytic came on a cart to Saint Martin's basilica in Tours. People from the vicinity rushed together when they heard his heartbreaking cries.[106] A sailor's son had been thrown out of the parental house because of his being severely and incurably disabled. Though the description of the poor man lying near the coast for fifty years, covered with ulcers and worms, may be rhetorically exaggerated to evoke pity, it also gives a clue of the cruel fate such persons awaited.[107]

Miracle stories and family history

Gregory often leaves many things unsaid which socio-cultural historians would very much like to know. As such, we are not told whether relatives of disabled children had recourse to doctors before they attended shrines for divine help. At most, we read about those entrusting their offspring to pagan superstition or magicians, of course in vain.[108] Gregory's reticence does not mean that people never attended doctors; it is just that this is not the focus of his concern.[109]

In the same context he rarely mentions who accompanied the sick children to the shrines. Again this does not imply that these were children left without parents or family. Isabelle Réal has carefully listed patterns of people accompanying children in a vast collection of Merovingian healing stories, and found a slight dominance of the combination parents/ children. My own search for persons taking action in favour of the child in Gregory's miracles stories reveals the same tendency, again without any pattern being predominant.[110]

Some testimonies seem to imply that a disabled child managed to carry on its life without the presence of parents. Thus a *puerulus* who had been blind for a long time

made his living as a beggar. He had someone accompanying him, and even went on begging after his healing, yet no parents are mentioned.[111] However, he may also have been exposed by his parents in order to bring in some money by begging, as this was the only way he could contribute to the household.[112] A young tailor suffered from melancholy and fever which turned him blind. He was healed but captured by a man who considered him a fugitive slave: the whole story leads one to suppose that he actually lived without parents.[113] One could speculate as to why an eleven-year-old suffering from fever (*febris tertiana*) was carried to a shrine by his friends, not by family members.[114] On the other hand, some instances point to disabled people being cared for by their family and kept in the parental house. A twelve-year-old girl lived for six years in what we would call a coma. Totally blind, deaf, mute and lame, she was lying in a bed which was installed inside the house. Her parents left home to do their votive prayers at a nearby saint's tomb.[115] A boy with contracted hands and feet was looked after and carried around by his parents for a period of six years.[116] Parental care might continue into adulthood. A congenitally blind woman was brought to the shrine by her parents, an adult man who had suffered from a stroke was accompanied by his parents, and a deaf man was introduced to a saint by his parents.[117] Yet, as we have seen, family solidarity did not always persist. An adult man who became permanently deaf and mute after a severe attack of fever, was thrown out of the house by his brothers.[118] In times without social security, it seems as if family solidarity was considered the normal basis of care for the impaired: the situation of not having relatives to look after you, is explicitly mentioned as a most deteriorating condition. A cripple had to drag himself along, since he was alone and not able to afford a helping hand. A blind man lived a beggar's life and did not even have a home to protect him.[119]

Sometimes careful reading can reveal interesting results on family relationships and role patterns. In the case of an infant suffering from severe fever, it is the father who goes to church after nightly prayer: evidently the mother was supposed to stay at home to look after the little baby. In the case of the young boy who was blinded by dust (see note 62), it was his grandmother who saw a vision in her dreams and went to church for the boy. We may suppose that he boy was raised as an orphan by this woman. One other story about a couple who had been longing for a child for a long time, reveals that one grandmother actually lived together with them or at least close to them.[120]

Conclusion

More than one scholar will be familiar with the phenomenon of 'erotic involvement' of authors with their subject, leading them to overemphasise 'their' hero or theme. In the case of Gregory of Tours, when one has studied about nine hundred folio pages of Latin, this should not be too surprising, but at the same time be avoided.

Let us first identify what Gregory of Tours cannot teach us. The various miracle stories cannot offer demographic clues, any more than records from modern Fatima or Lourdes can be expected to give hints about demographic occurences of handicaps or illnesses in the present day. At the best, Gregory of Tours' testimonies indicate that much disabilities existed also in the past, but that is a biological truth that archaeology and medical sciences have taught us long ago.[121] As such, Gregory's miracle stories do not make a

case for the systematic survival of those babies who were severely impaired from birth. Only that of the boy from Bourges explicitly testifies to the fact that mothers usually did not kill such babies. Neither do such stories contradict the survival of such infants. It is just that the stories are not about this subject: even there was massive infanticide, it would not have been the subject for miracle stories which are of course about survivors. Meanwhile, study of passages from the laws of the post-Roman 'barbarian' kingdoms show that, despite Christian concepts, people still distinguished between biological birth and social birth, leaving the possibility of eliminating the child before the giving of the name, since it would not have a legal personality. This distinction goes back to the Roman habit of granting a child its name only on the *dies lustricus*, the ninth day for boys and the eighth for girls[122], while in Christian times, a name was only given at baptism (regularly administered on the days before Easter and Pentecost).[123] Of course, the difficult decisions involved in getting rid of a baby would have been shrouded in silence and unlikely to be mentioned in the sources. And obviously, the distinction between biological and social birth involves social customs and conventions trying to cope with the harsh reality of life. It would be an error to deduce from this that people disposed of their unhealthy babies with detached indifference. To claim that they did so is like adopting the perspective of the contemporary westerner who fails to grasp the customs of other people and consequently deems them devoid of genuine human emotions.[124]

On the other hand, Gregory of Tours' miracle stories testify that even the severely impaired sometimes survived. He witnesses to strong parental involvement in taking care of such children, while hoping for possible cures. Even those babies who in no way might have survived to be able to work, and who were economically useless, survived. Often too, when a child became severely impaired by accident or a stroke, the family took on its shoulders the difficult task of raising it. The latter case is anthropologically well attested: getting rid of children by killing them at a later age (*Pädizid*) is in fact a very rare phenomenon throughout various cultures.[125] But economical necessity could force parents to hand such a child over to a group of itinerant beggars, as is attested in some other stories. One can only guess at parents' motivations in the case of keeping a severely handicapped baby: perhaps they had been longing for a child for a long time, perhaps they did not want to lose their sole heir, perhaps they just could not bring themselves to get rid of the baby. The investment may have been considered more worth making in the case of a boy.[126] The very different ecological regime of the ancient world may have instilled attitudes in parents that were quite different from nowadays: the condition of all the newborn were fragile; whereas sophisticated medical testing makes everybody in the modern world expect a baby that conforms to somatic ideals. People in the past may have hoped that children would still grow out of their handicap, in cases in which modern medicine teaches us that this will not be the case. Finally, quite some emotional factors are simply beyond our apprehension – as well as we cannot tell how much Christianity and its moral imperatives had an impact on people's minds.

As mentioned in the introduction, Metzler has made a strong case for the difference between impairment (a biological concept) and disability (a social concept). People would of course have noticed that for instances crippled persons did not posses the same abilities as those who were healthy, but that should not have prevented the impaired persons from being involved and integrated in the daily labour process. In this sense,

people from the past were impaired, but not necessarily disabled. It is precisely this 'community' concept which distinguished approaches from the past from the modern tendencies to treat people with a disability differently and distinctively. The absence of a social welfare system strongly encouraged the necessity of integrating these people as much as possible in daily life, even if this meant making a living as a beggar.[127] In contrast to understandings of childhood in present-day western society, children were seen as parental investment and expected to work for the family as soon as they were able.[128] To this law even impaired children were not an exception: they were expected to contribute to the family income as best they could. On the level of concepts, there was nothing as a separate group of disabled. In this context, it is not advisable to exclude for instance the many cases of fever attacks in the miracle stories. There is nothing that indicates that Gregory of Tours distinguished between what we would call illnesses or disabilities, nor that he considered the healing of the latter more spectacular or peculiar that the healing of the former. Both were considered as one single and at the same time somewhat vague category of *infirmi.*

The greatest value of the miracle stories, I believe, lies in their richness in detail, which is not encountered in any other ancient source. The various citations and case stories have illustrated this point. This should lead us to read and analyse the various saints' lives and miracle stories of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, especially with regard to their chronological and geographical framework (for instance, reading a representative collection of miracle stories from Merovingian Gaul upto 750 CE). The richness of these sources would help in sketching a broader picture of daily life and socialisation of disabled children, as did the study by Finucane who used records of accidents in order to paint his tableau of daily life in the High Middle Ages. Moreover, such analysis might help in other branches of disability history. In another contribution, I have pointed to the problem of deaf-muteness in Antiquity (Laes 2011). Rare studies on the concept of deaf-muteness only mention case stories and theories from Antiquity, before moving to the Renaissance – whereas the study of deaf-mutes in Gregory of Tours yields unexpected details such as the comparison of inarticulate speech with animal sounds or the continuous stress on muteness above deafness.

Other questions for future research come to mind. Do the sources reveal traces of a differentiated gendered approach, with preference for boys over girls? Were disabled people depicted in art? How did concepts of the ideal body impact on approaching these people? Did medieval institutions of welfare or monasteries receive disabled children? What was the precise impact of Christianity, and might one perceive differences when looking at contemporary attitudes or practices in Judaeism and Islam?[129] Could comparative demographics and paleopathology add to our knowledge? Some conclusions may be expected from all these approaches. We are dealing with a period for which we have no leading demographic studies, not many osteological finds,[130] few details on social history, and scholarship which is just about to awake. In the mean time, an accurate reading of the sources might yield the best results. In any case, these case stories testify to how people tried to cope with the 'anomalies' or dark sides of their existence.

Appendix

Appendix table 1: Distribution of age and sex in the healing miracles in the Liber de Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli [131]

	Children	Adults
Male:	7	11
Female:	0	3
More people involved:	0	5
TOTAL:	7	19

Appendix table 2: Children's diseases and/or disabilities in the Liber de Miraculis beati Andreae apostoli [132]

	Number of instances	Percentage
Resurrection	2	20
Mental disorders	4	40
Accident	1	10
Blindness, eye problems	1	10
Unspecified	2	20

Appendix table 3: Adults' diseases and/or disabilities in the Liber de Miraculis beati Andreae apostoli [133]

	Number of instances	Percentage
Resurrection	2	8
Paralysis, mobility problems	3	12
Blindness, eye problems	5	20
Mental disorders	8	32
Difficult birth	1	4
Fever	1	4
Accident	3	12
Unspecified (*infirmi, aegroti, etc.*)	2	6

General remarks on appendix tables 1–3:

Resurrecting the dead seems to belong more to the realm of the mighty apostle miracle-doers as Andreas than to the genre of hagiography. The apocryphs are full of stories on the healing of the possessed and the victory over the Devil; hence the high number of 'mental disorders' both with adults and children. The distribution children/adults is more or less at equal foot with the distribution in Gregory's Books on Miracles.

Appendix table 4: Distribution of age and sex in the healing miracles in the Historia Francorum[134]

	Children	Adults
Male:	3	7
Female:	1	4
More people involved:	0	13
TOTAL:	4	24

Appendix table 5: Children's diseases and/or disabilities in the Historia Francorum [135]

	Number of instances
Mental disorders	1
Muteness	1
Deafness	1
Fever	1
Unspecified	1

Appendix table 6: Adults' diseases and/or disabilities in the Historia Francorum [136]

	Number of instances	Percentage
Resurrection	1	4
Blindness	5	21
Mental disorders	7	29
Fever	1	4
Paralysis, mobility problems	1	4
Muteness	1	4
Deafness	1	4
Contagious disease of the skin	2	8
Miscellaneous	1	4

General remarks on appendix tables 4–6:

As pointed out in the introduction, Gregory of Tours as an historiographer is far less interested in miraculous healing than he is in his hagiographical work. The instances of disabled children are too few as to lend themselves to statistical analysis. As for adults' disabilities, one finds again the preponderance of blindness and mental disorders, while paralysis/mobility problems is not a significant issue at all.

How to find your way in the works of Gregory of Tours?

The endnotes are conceived in a way that the main message of the sources can be understood from the citation. Those who would like to check all references are referred to the monumental series *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Series Rerum Merovingicarum* (MGH SRM), now to be found entirely online.

Abbreviations

GC *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*: ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 744–820.
GM *Liber in Gloria Martyrum:* ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 484–561.
Hist *Historia Francorum*: edd. W. Arndt et B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 1, 1 (1884) 31–450.
MA *Liber de Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli*: ed. M. Bonnet, *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 826–846.
VJ *Liber de Passione et Virtutibus Sancti Iuliani Martyris*: ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 562–584.
VM *Libri de Virtutibus Sancti Martini Episcopi*: ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 584–661.
VP *Liber Vitae Patrum*: ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 661–744.

All of Gregory's works also exist in modern translations:

Hist Thorpe, L. (transl.) 1974: *Gregory of Tours: the History of the Franks*. Liverpool: Harmondsworth: Penguin books.
GC Van Dam, R. (transl.) 1988: *Gregory of Tours. Glory of the Confessors.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
GM Van Dam, R. (transl.): *Gregory of Tours, Glory of the Martyrs.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
MA Prieur, J.-M. (ed. and transl.) 1989: *Acta Andreae.* Corpus Christianorum. Series Apocryphorum. Vols. 5–6. Turnhout: Brepols.
VJ Van Dam, R. (transl.) 1993, pp. 162–195 in Van Dam, R. *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press
VM Van Dam, R. (transl.), pp. 200–303 in Van Dam, R. *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
VP James, E. (transl.): *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers.* Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.

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Notes

[1] Kelley 2009 is the most recent study on the subject. See Kelley 2009, 199 (authors being largely silent); 225 (theological issue).
[2] See the volume by Rousseau 2009, in which for the present subject the contributions by Testa 2009 and Burton 2009 are peculiarly important. The land mark study to this time period (and beyond) is by Wickham 2009, esp. 111–129. As surveys of the Merovingian period, one may refer to Wess 1994; Wood 1994; Halsall 1995; Le Jan 1995; Réal 2001. For introductions to Gregory of Tours, see Van Dam 1993; Heinzelmann 2001; Mitchel and Wood 2002.
[3] Van Dam 1993, 87.
[4] See the inscription in Le Blant 1856–1865 vol. 2, n. 176 which aptly expresses this idea. See also VM 2, 1: Gregory reports how he was cured from fever and dysenteria and thus received his faith from the tomb of Saint Martin.

[5] Van Dam 1993, 54.
[6] On miracles, saints and the power of bishops, see van Dam 1993; Heinzelmann 2002; Kirchner 2004.
[7] In the same line, Newbold 1994 has dealt with interpersonal violence in Gregory of Tours; Newbold 2006 with the subject of fear and grief in the same author.
[8] Neubert and Cloerkes 1994 point to the thin line between impairment and disease in various cultures and various periods of history. On sick children in Late Antiquity, see Holman 2009; Horn 2009.
[9] See for instance the different approaches by Rose 2003 and Gourevitch 2005 in the field of ancient history and disability history. While the former is more methodologically and anthropologically based, the latter much more goes immediately to the sources. In the end, both approaches reach quite similar and in any case revealing results for the study of Antiquity.
[10] Ward 1987, 34–35; Metzler 2006, 133–134 point to the mixture of medical diagnosis and literary examples for the Gospels. For a collection of disabled people in the both the Old and the New Testament, see Ohry and Dolev 1982.
[11] Metzler 2006, 127.
[12] Van Dam 1993, 78–80. See *VM* 3, 45; 4, 18 and *Hist.* 5, 34 about eye witnesses or people reporting themselves on their being healed. Several times, Gregory points to the fact that a miracle has occured very recently: *VM* 2, 32; 2, 40; 3, 1; 3, 22; 3, 60; 4, 1; 4, 45; 4; 47.
[13] Crawford 2001, 38.
[14] Rousselle 1990.
[15] Sigal 1971 and 1985 are examples of this approach.
[16] Van Dam 1993, 87.
[17] Van Dam 1993, 95–96 (the healed better than the others); 101–105 (freeing slaves, women, indebted); 105–115 (settling theological discussions).
[18] Van Dam 1993, 127. See also Pietri 1983 on social and geographical origin of the pilgrims. Van Dam 1993, 128–135 for a vivid description on these people entering Saint Martin's church; 136–142 on the way pilgrims contributed to the further spread of Saint Martin's cult.
[19] This will be the first study to do so. As the author herself admits, the article by Treffort 1997 is nothing more than a "rapide tour d' horizon" (p. 125).
[20] Not recorded are the miracles by Christ mentioned in the historical survey of *GM* 1–4. When a miracle records two persons, I have counted them as two persons in the list. However, in order not to distort the evidence by singles instances as the healing of ten *leprosi*, all cases in which more than two persons are involved (as the many instances with phrases as *multi sanabantur*, or the case of a family being cured in *VP* 15, 3) have been catalogued under "more people involved." When it is not said explicitly stated that a child is involved, a case is always recorded in the category of adults. Particular problems come to the fore in the case of *filius*/*filia* being mentioned. Since all these sons or daughters are mentioned in the context of being cared for by their parents, I have included them in the category of children, though this cannot be ascertained beyond doubt. Even more difficult are the numerous instances of *pueri*/*puellae*, who can also be servants. When it is clear from the story that servants were meant, I have catalogued them under the heading "adults", otherwise they are recorded as child. Sometimes, Gregory's age terminology is not consequent. In *VM* 3, 37 mention is made of a *puella* who is in the same chapter called *mulier.*
[21] For these various categories, see Metzler 2006, 130 and 133. For obvious statistic reasons, when a child is mentioned as suffering from various disorders, each of these disorders is listed. Hence, a child being deaf, mute and blind is recorded three times in this table.
[22] I have only included these instances in which fever is the illness from which people wanted to be healed. If fever is only mentioned as the cause for other symptoms (*e.g.* being mute or paralysed), it is not catalogued separately.
[23] Once again, when an adult is mentioned as suffering from various disorders, each of these disorders is listed. In order not to distort the evidence, I have listed all the instances involving more than two persons in the second column.
[24] Metzler 2006, 131 on the prevalence of mobility impairment in the literature of the Early and the High Middle Ages. Sigal 1971 is an interesting study trying to explain the reported cases of paralysis and mobility impairment from a modern medical point of view. See also Sigal 1969 for paralysis in the twelfth century.
[25] Note the fact that even nowadays, people may be legally classified as 'blind', while they still have some capacity of seeing. See Rose 2003, 80.
[26] See for instance *GM* 5 & 14; *VJ* 48; *VM* 1, 2; 2, 34; 3, 58; 4, 6 & 4, 38; *VP* 3, 4; 7, 2, 7, 5; 8, 8; 19, 3; *GC* 9; 21; 32; 48 & 58.

[27] *CJ* 9, 16, 7 (capital punishment); *CTh* 5, 9, 1 (on *expositi*). See further p. 28 in this volume.
[28] Council of Vaison 9–10; Council of Arles II,51; Council of Agde 24. See Réal 2001, 405–407.
[29] *E.g. Pactus Alamannorum* 2, 31 (MGH Legum Tomus III, p. 35); 2, 79 (MGH Legum Tomus III, p. 79); *Lex Frisonum* 5, 1 (MGH Legum Tomus III, p. 663); *Lex Ribuaria* 40, 10 (MGH Legum Sectio I, Tomus III, Pars II, p. 94); *Lex Salica* 41, 20 (MGH Legum Sectio I, Tomus IV, Pars I, p.161).
[30] Boswell 1988. Disabled babies and child abandonment are treated in Rose 2003, 29–49; Schmidt 1983–84; Laes 2008 b, 92–99.
[31] *VJ* 12.
[32] For clear instances of defects which in all likelihood were congenital, see *VM* 2, 3; 2, 5 (in both cases, the impaired with twisted feet evoked pity as beggars). In *VM* 4, 19 information on congenitality is included (*ex infantia membris suis debilis*). See also *VM* 2, 26 (*a nativitate procedens manus clausas laborioso mundo protulit*).
[33] That at least is the interpretation by Boswell 1988, 212 and Van Dam 1993, 240. It is not impossible that *ut mos matrum est* should be connected with *interemere.* The text would then indicate that in normal cases, mothers would have get rid of such monsters – quite the contrary of what many scholars have indicated before.
[34] Finucane 2000, 25 refers to Grosjean, P. 1935 (ed.). Henrici VI Angliae regis miracula postuma. *Subsidia Hagiographica* 22, 223–224. Finucane interprets this case as evidence for parental care and affection, while the baby would have been an obvious victim for abandonment or infanticide. See Metzler 2006, 225 for a four-year-old boy ('And so he lay 1 year and 3 weeks like a monster'), quoting from the Miracles of St Elisabeth at Marburg (1207–1231).
[35] *VM* 2, 26: *a nativitate procedens manus clausas laborioso mundo protulit, in usu laboris inertes.*
[36] *VM* 3, 49: *Ita erat omnium membrorum usu praemortuus, ut solo spiritu palparet.*
[37] *VJ* 39: *sine spe alicuius boni nutriebatur.* I do not believe that the phrase *proiectum infantulum coram sacrosanctis reliquiis* means that the infant was exposed by his parents, who were praying in the church (*cum ad sanctam basilicam vigilassent*).
[38] *VP* 15, 3: *membris omnino debiles et in modum spherae in rotunditate contracti.*
[39] *VM* 1, 40: *ex utero matris egrediens manum aridam pedemque protulerat (…) ut monstrum simularet.*
[40] *VM* 2, 43. Memorial of conjugal love: *Erat autem unicum patri de uxoria dilectione quodam memoriale.*
[41] *VM* 3, 8: *et cognoscens eum resumpsisse flatum, adplicat ad papillam, qui protinus, hausto lacte, confortatus est.*
[42] *VM* 3, 58. On breastfeeding, see the end of the story: *At illa accurrit, dicens: "Adsum, fili dulcissime", susceptoque eum in ulnis, moxque porrecta papilla, hausto lacte, convaluit.*
[43] *VP* 2, 4: *Deinde ad pristinos infantiae vagitus rediens, loqui ultra non potuit, nisi cum ad illam aetatis seriem, in qua infantium lingua ad loquendum laxari solet, educatus accessit.*
[44] *GC* 82: *Infantulum erectum se per cancellos sepulchri trahentem se atque ambulare conantem aspiciunt.*
[45] In the case of children, see *VM* 1, 2 (*paralisi humore gravata*); 2, 13 (*paralisi humore percussa*); 2, 55 (very plastic description of a boy's hand getting humid again); 3, 13 (*ab umore pedum*). On this particular hagiographical concept of the link between dryness and being lame, opposed to physiological explanations by *e.g.* Galen, see Sigal 1971, 197–200.
[46] *VM* 3, 2: *per sex annos tamquam mortua in domo parentum lectulo decubabat, non gressum faciens, non opus manuum implens, non lucem cernens, non sermonen eloquens, non audiens elocutum.* For telling descriptions of sudden strokes with adults, see *VM* 1, 22; 4, 36; 4, 40.
[47] In the case of adult paralytics, see *e.g. VM* 2, 5 (*qui aliorum manibus deportabatur);* 2, 6 (*carruca devectus*); 4, 30 (*carrucae imposita, bubus trahentibus, ferebatur* about a paralysed woman); *GC* 94 (*evectus plaustro*; on a man totally lame); *VM* 2, 47 for the telling story of a *contractus* living as a hermit, who had one single cow and who was carried around by that animal, going through the villages sitting on a cart and begging. See also *VM* 3, 15 (*qui antea duobus pueris sustentatus ibat*). When there was nobody around to help, this was considered a major impairment. See *VM* 2, 7: *se per terram trahens, quia paupertate faciente non habebat qui eum ferret.* Also *GC* 79 on a man who supported himself on his knees and arms to walk around.
[48] *VM* 3, 9; 3, 14; 4, 41.
[49] There might be another instance of prosthetics in *VM* 4, 41 (*adhibito sibi ad geniculum fuste*). For Antiquity, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 9, 36–37 and Plutarch, *Mor.* 479 b (on Hegistratus of Elis who procured for himself a wooden foot); Pliny the Elder, *NH* 7, 104–106 (Marcus Sergius Silus with an right-hand of iron); Martial, *Ep.* 10, 100 (on a wooden leg); Lucian, *Adversus indoctum et libros multos ementem* 6 (man suffered from frostbite and procured two wooden feet). For a thorough collection of all ancient evidence on prosthetics, see Bliquez 1996 and Samama 2010.

[50] *VM* 2, 4: *iussit eum… deportari.*
[51] *VM* 3, 27: *per sex annos a parentibus baiulatus.* See also *VP* 15, 3: *sunt delati* (on the two contracted boys having a circular form, see note 24); *VP* 19, 3 (*inter manus dilatus est aliorum* (on a paralysed boy).
[52] *VM* 3, 13; 3, 26 (*rogat se ad eius basilicam deportari*); 3, 6.
[53] *VM* 2, 14.
[54] *VM* 2, 46.
[55] *VM* 3, 58.
[56] *VJ* 47 about a woman who is said to have been *a nativitate caeca.* Nevertheless, according to the Latin, she regained her sight (*lumen recepit*). Another congenital blind woman (*a nativitate caeca*) in *GC* 94; a congenital blind man in *Hist.* 6, 6 (*a nativitate caecus … quae sit lux ignoro*). For a clear instance of blindness due to old age, see *VM* 4, 12. In some cases, it is indicated how long a person had been blind. See *e.g. VM* 4, 5; 4, 24; *VP* 9, 3.
[57] Adults being accompanied: *GM* 14 (*amminiculo deducente*); *VJ* 22 (*arrepto baculo, adminiculante puero*); *VM* 1, 8 (*nesciens tenere viam, nisi alio ducente*). In the case of a child (*puerulus*), see *GM* 60: *cum reliquis plangens, adminiculo sustentante, sequebatur.*
[58] *VM* 2, 8: *caecus … cui non erat aliud in victu, nisi qui manum porrexisset pietatis intuitu, nec erat domi praesidium nisi miseratio devotorum.* On blind persons and begging, see *e.g.* also *VJ* 22.
[59] *GC* 25: *puer nimia caecitate detentus et ipsam adhuc aduliscentiam aetatis primae ab hoc contagio deturpatam nimis deflens.*
[60] *MA* 32: *Vidit hominem caecum cum uxore et filio et ait: «vere diaboli hoc est opus. Ecce enim quos et mente caecavit et corpore.»*
[61] See also *GM* 5 on a girl who became blind.
[62] *VM* 3, 16. On an adult man becoming blind due to dust intruding his eyes while he worked on the land, see *VM* 3, 20. Ironically, this man had been used to aid blind persons before: *qui diu caecis via fuerat ipse domi alio regente deducitur.*
[63] *VM* 4, 17 (on a boy who had just been baptised): *cum reliquis infantibus ludum in platea exercens, ut aetas illa patitur, huc illucque discurreret*; 4, 18 (on a little girl): *dum enim cum reliquiis puellulis per stratas villae ludum exercendo percurreret.*
[64] *GC* 60.
[65] *VJ* 38: *puella quaedam lippis oculis et, nimio imbre lacrimarum profluente, pene caecata.* For an instance of watery eyes , see *VM* 2, 19; 2, 41 (*decidentibus cataractis*) On blood coming out of the eyes, see *VM* 2, 29; 2, 50. For another instance offering information for the history of medicine, see *Hist.* 5, 6: a man had cups for bloodletting put on his arm, which would give him better sight. As this was a bad advice, offered by a Jew, he became blind again. He went back to church, hoping to be redeemed again: as a punishment for having trusted a Jew, he never was.
[66] Laes 2011.
[67] *Hist.* 8, 16 is the only instance of a boy explicitly labeled as deaf-mute (*mutus surdusque*) and brought to church by his parents
[68] *VP* 19, 1: *qui olim auditum perdiderat (…) aures surdi apertae sunt.*
[69] *VM* 1, 7: *audiendi loquendique obstructu aditu.*
[70] *VM* 2, 38: *ab utero matris suae muta processit. Cuius os tantum obseratum fuit, ut nec illas quae a cunabulorum tempus exegit possit voces emittere.*
[71] In *VM* 2, 30 a mute adult woman is said to have uttered only *mugitum ut animal.* See also *VP* 19, 4 (*corde tantum implorabat et non voce solubili*); *GC* 28 (*rigente lingua mutus effectus est, ita ut non vocis humanae, sed bidentis mugitum simulare videretur*); *Hist.* 10, 29 (*ricto patulo sine vocis officio*).
[72] Van Dam 1993, 82 believes that the boy was hired as a scarecrow (see also his translation Van Dam 1993, 242). However, I believe that the present tenses used in the phrase (*VM* 2, 26: *Hoc opus vinitoribus utile est, cum vinita ab infestantium avium catervis defensare nituntur*) just refer to the ressemblance of his use of tablets to scarecrows, not to the fact that the mute boy was actually hired as such.
[73] *VM* 2, 26: *vocis eloquutione multatur …. sine loquellae officio permanebat.* See however in the end: *et sic erumpens ab ore et faucibus eius sanguis, auditum pariterque eloquiumque recepit.*
[74] Isidorus of Sevilla, *Etymologiarum libri* 10, 169 (*mutus, quia vox eius non est sermo, sed mugitus: vocalem enim spiritum per nares quasi mugiens emittit).* See also Nonius Marcellus, *De compendiosa doctrina* 14 (ed. Lindsay) (*mutus onomatopoeia est incertae vocis, quasi mugitus. Nam mutus sonus est proprie, qui intellectum non habet).*

[75] *VM* 3, 23: *auditu et elocutione privatur.* About his brothers throwing him out because he was insane (*"Hic amens affectus est"*): *sed nihil cogitantes de his quae Dei erant, eiecerunt mutum et surdum, quem potius fovere debuerant.* On his particular way of communicating: *Porro autem, adprehensis manu tabulis, inter se collisis, vocem quaerentis imitabatur.* On the other hand, a woman (*mulier*, also called *puella*) was mute for three months after having seen a spectre: the women with whom she lived in the house took care of her: *VM* 3, 37.
[76] Wells 1964, 129.
[77] Laes 2008 b, 91. The best treatment on mental disease in Antiquity is undoubtedly by Stok 1996. See also the recent volume by Bosman (2009), in which particularly the contributions by McDonald (2009) and Cilliers, Retief (2009).
[78] *MA* 14.
[79] Vice versa, consider the cases of people becoming mute after a frightning experience (*VM* 3, 37 and 3, 54). While modern medicine interprets this as an hysteric disorder caused by trauma, ancient people just considered the consequence of being mute and did not consider it a 'mental' disorder.
[80] *VP* 9, 3.
[81] *VM* 1, 26: in the case of a young boy who went out hunting with his father. At first, his parents wanted to resort to sorcery to heal their boy.
[82] *VM* 3, 27: *Puer … per immissionem, ut ipse adserebat, artis diabolicae, manum pedumque perdidit usum.*
[83] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 12, 17, 35–36.
[84] *VM* 2, 18: *Quod genus morbi ephilenticum peritorum medicorum vocavit auctoritas; rustici vero cadivum dixere, pro eo quod caderet.* See Marcellus, *Empir.* 20: *dicitur cadivus, qui caduco morbo laborat.* On the history of epilepsy, see Temkin 1945. For vivid descriptions of epilepsy with Gregory of Tours, see *VP* 8, 8 (*plerumque cadens ac spumans, linguam suam propriis dentibus laceraret*).
[85] *VP* 7, 2. On shock therapy, see Augustine, *Contra secundam Iuliani responsionem opus imperfectum* 3, 161 (PL 45, 1314–1315). See Laes 2008 b, 109. Castigation of the mentally disturbed was a well-known strategy of ancient medicine. See Seneca, *Ep.* 94, 36; Celsus, *De medicina* 3, 18, 10 (on *insani*); 3, 18, 21 (on *phrenetici*); Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1, 175; 1, 178–179. See Stok 1996, 2383–2391.
[86] Apart from the frequent term *inergumeni*, Gregory sometimes recurs to the participle *debacchans.* See *e.g. GC* 3. See also note 25 on *inergumeni*.
[87] *VP* 2, 1: *filia … ab spiritu immundo correpta*.
[88] *GC* 62: *cum ab spiritu vexaretur inmundo.*
[89] *VP* 17, 2: *arreptus a daemone*.
[90] *MA* 5.
[91] *MA* 27 on a *puer adolescens* with the revealing remark: *inimicus generis humani ubique insidiatur, sive in lavacris sive in fluminibus.*
[92] A standard description of a whole household being possessed in *MA* 29: *vidi alios pueros stridentes dentibus et in me impetum facientes et adridentes risos insanos.*
[93] *MA* 34: *unus ex pueris eius Algmana nomine, quem praetiosum habebat, ab inpulsu daemonis percussus, iacebat spumans in atrio (....) «Utinam me prius mare obsorbuisset, quam haec vidissem de puero».*
[94] *VM* 3, 54.
[95] Plato, *Leges* 925 e–926 b considers the possibility of men married to retarded women.
[96] *VM* 2, 24: *Sat est aliis diebus voluptati operam dare; hunc autem diem in laudibus Dei impolluti deducite. Quia, cum evenerit, exinde aut contracti aut ephilentici aut leprosi nascuntur. Sitque documentum, ne malum, quod una nocte committitur, per multorum annorum spatia perferatur.* The theme also occurs with Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 44, 7. Other sermons linked deformities with having sex during menstruation. See Boswell 1988, 260; Metzler 2006, 89. Adult man being punished for working on Sunday: *VJ* 11. Also canonical law imposed punishment for working on Sundays: Council of Orléans III 31; Council of Chalon 18.
[97] *VM* 2, 26: *Et cur hoc accesserit, utrum hic aut parentes eius peccaverint, ut sic mancus nasceretur, non est nostrae discretionis exsolvere.* For a similar thought, see *GC* 28: *nescio quo existente peccato* (on a girl with contracted hands). See also Metzler 2006, 89; Kelley 2009, 208–216 on (parental) sin.
[98] *Hist.* 6, 6: *Ego autem ab initio aetatis meae usque nunc videre non merui.*
[99] *VM* 2, 45: *… nec se, ut esset aetatis infirmitas, signo salutare praemuniunt*.
[100] *GM* 57.
[101] *VP* 7, 5.
[102] *VP* 19, 3: *Mulier quaedam filiam suam exhibuit vulneribus plenam, et, ut quidam vocant, putae haec causa genuerat.* See the comment by Krusch: «*puta, Gall.* 'pute', *meretrix, scortum.*

[103] *MA* 5.
[104] Some examples of adults being punished: *VJ* 19; *VM* 1, 2; 2, 28; 3, 3; 3, 29; 3, 38; 3, 45; 3, 55; 3, 56; 4, 45; *VP* 5, 1; *GC* 17; 28 (punished for swearing in church); 91; 97 (working on a Saint's day, with the argument *Et hic quem colitis operarius fuit*); *MA* 12; 23; 25; *Hist.* 5, 6. See Van Dam 1993, 87–88. A remarkable example is *GC* 80 on a peasant insulting the saint and continuing working, with the argument "it is better to do what is necessary than to honor such a saint."
[105] Also Metzler 2006, 142 recognises this preoccupation of Gregory of Tours.
[106] *VM* 2, 4; 2, 6.
[107] *MA* 33: *qui ab annis quinquaginta in debilitate nimia proiectus a domo, iacet in litore, cui nullius medici potuit cura valere. Ecce enim est ulceribus plenus et scatens vermibus.* See also *MA* 31: *vidit hominem iacentem in stercore.*
[108] *VJ* 46; *VM* 1, 26. Superstition and magicians are recurrent themes in the sermons of Caesarius of Arles. See *Serm.* 52, 6 (enchantors and magicians); 54, 2 (Evil Eye may harm children); 50, 1 (protective amulets).
[109] Ferngren and Amundsen 1996 offer an excellent overview on the compatibilities and tensions between Christianity and medicine.
[110] Réal 2001, 442. For Gregory of Tours, I counted three instances of father-daughter, eight of father-son, four of mother-daughter, six of mother-son, eleven of parents-son, three of parents-daughter, one of parents plus grandparents for a son, one of a grandmother for her grandson.
[111] *GC* 60.
[112] This situation is attested in *VM* 2, 13 (father exposing a paralysed girl to make a living by begging), and maybe in *GC* 22 (a girl being *exposita*).
[113] *VM* 2, 58.
[114] *VP* 14, 3.
[115] *VM* 3, 2.
[116] *VM* 3, 28 (*per sex annos a parentibus baiulatus*).
[117] *VJ* 47 (*mulier… a nativitate caeca*); *VM* 4, 40 (*quasi percussus in cervicem*); *VP* 19, 1 (*homo ex pago … olim auditum perdiderat*).
[118] *VM* 3, 23
[119] *VM* 2, 7 (*se per terram trahens, quia paupertate faciente non habebat qui eum ferret*); *VM* 2, 8 (*nec erat domi praesidium*).
[120] *VM* 4, 3 (father going out); *VM* 3, 8 (grandmother seeing a vision); *VM* 4, 17 (grandmother living with a couple).
[121] Laes 2008 b, 100–102.
[122] Hanninen 2005, 56–57.
[123] See for instance, in a passage on baptism of *infantes*, the Council of Auxerre (561–605) 18: *Non licet absque paschae solemnitate ullo tempore baptizare, nisi illos, quibus mors vicina est, quos grabatarios dicunt.*
[124] Scheper-Hughes 1992, 271–272 is a telling account of resigned attitudes towards child death in twentieth century Brasil. See however Golden 2004, 146 who opposes against 'arrogant' westerner prejudices which fail to see the difference between social convention and personal emotions.
[125] Laes 2008 b, 97.
[126] Patterson 1985, 114 has suggested these possibilities for Greco-Roman Antiquity. There are however no similar hints with Gregory of Tours.
[127] Edwards 1997 on the community approach for Antiquity.
[128] Zelizer 1994.
[129] The best documented historic comparative study on disabilities in Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam is by Miles 1995.
[130] Some valuable case studies on burials in Anglo-Saxon England have been collected in Crawford 2001.
[131] See table 1 for specifications about the way the catalogue is organised.
[132] Same principles of recording as for table 2.
[133] Same principles of recording as for table 3.
[134] See table 1 for specifications about the way the catalogue is organised.
[135] Same principles of recording as for table 2.
[136] Same principles of recording as for table 3. Since all the tables are on particular instances of persons or groups of persons being healed after attending a sanctuary or asking for help with a saint, I have not included the various instances of saints stopping outbursts of epidemics in a town or region.

Part III

(Nearly) Lost

4

Hungry Witches and Children in Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Laura Cherubini

Introduction

Of the many literary characters surviving in the passage from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, there is one of particular interest in the context of the present book. It is the supernatural creature that the Romans called *strix* (or *striga* in the popular form),[1] a protagonist of some popular beliefs concerning mainly the world of childhood. As far as we know from Latin sources, the *strix* is a nocturnal bird of ill-omen, perhaps recognizable as one of the rapacious creatures called *Strigiformes*[2] and depicted by Ovid as sort of a white barn owl.[3] The strigiform image of this creature, usually represented as an owl or closely associated to the *bubo*, seems to be quite indubitable.[4] No more specific identification is possible, however, given the uncertainty that the Romans themselves seem to have had about this. In his *Natural History*, in fact, Pliny the Elder was not able to clarify exactly what kind of bird the *strix* corresponded to, and preferred to ascribe her to the impalpable dimension of what the Romans called *fabula* – that is the world of talks, rumour and tales – rather than to an objective reality.[5] As a bird, the *strix* is often involved in literary magical scenes, either as a gloomy and uncanny presence or an ingredient in sorcerers' spells; but her features continually change from those of a supernatural bird to those of an old hag, who takes the form of the bird at night in order to torment and kill babies.[6]

As an introduction to our discussion, it is also necessary to underline that the survival of the popular Latin *striga* throughout the Middle Ages, as a term for 'witch' in some Romance languages, is only the first and clearest sign of a link between the Roman *strix* and the witch of modern European tradition.[7] Fundamental characteristics common to both include nocturnal flight, animal metamorphosis, contiguity to beastly and liminal settings, or, the aspects that concern us most here, infanticide and anthropophagy, and, behind all this, the deep-rooted idea of a monstrous femininity that European literature about witches was to continually renew throughout the centuries. It is thus worth noting, from the classicist's point of view, the intersections between ancient *striges* and the feminine creatures whose features were combined during the Middle Ages to create the multifarious modern stereotype of the witch. But I would like here to focus on only one of the traits which reveals this relationship, by observing the motif of the witch's anthropophagous hunger – for humans in general, and with particular reference to babies – that in Medieval Europe seems to continue in some way the hunger of the Roman *strix*, and its cultural meaning in Antiquity.

The Roman Strix and the *Vitalia*

According to Roman fancies and tales, the Roman *strix* is able to steal the life of her victims, preferably from children and newborn babies, by virtue of dread prerogatives that make her one of the most terrifying child-killing demons of ancient beliefs. The *striges* were known for plundering and corrupting human bodies. It is worth noting more closely the way in which Roman culture expressed its homicidal and, more specifically, infanticidal, vocation.

These child-killing beings, in fact, were believed to be capable of tearing up and eating human entrails. The image of hunger occurs in the profile of the ancient *strix*[8] providing an effective solution for expressing her murderous nature. As a magical being, she is able to extract the entrails from the human body without necessarily damaging its external form. We are told about this ability first by Plautus, who refers in *Pseudolus* to the fact that the *striges* can devour the victim's internal organs while he or she is still alive. The cook hired by the procurer Ballio for his birthday banquet says that the other cooks work for little money, but then treat their guests as ruminants, stuffing them with evil poultices made of vegetables. When they prepare lunch, says Ballio, *non condimentis condiunt, sed strigibus, / vivis convivis intestina quae exedint*, 'they use for seasoning not seasonings, but screech-owls, to eat the entrails out of living guests!'.[9] We come across something similar in a Petronian scene, in which a hag blames the *striges* for having eaten Encolpius' *nervi*, the term here meaning his vital and virile strength.[10]

There is then Ovid, who in the sixth book of his *Fasti*, on the occasion of the kalends of June, describes the striges as supernatural creatures whose identity blurs from that of real birds and that of old hags who use to take this animal form by night. The poet informs us about how they used to 'tear up' (*carpere*) 'newborn babies' entrails' (*lactentia viscera*) with their beaks, and 'fill up the throat with their blood' (*plenum poto sanguine guttur habent*). Then, he describes the creatures – whose name derives from their habit of 'squeaking horribly by night' (*horrenda stridere nocte*) – as 'sucking' (from the Latin verb *exsorbere*) greedily at the chest of little Proca, a five-day old baby, destined to become the king of Alba once he has grown up.[11] This is a very dramatic scene, which certainly deserves a little more comment here. In the episode, the striges come to the cradle of the poor Proca and suck the blood from his chest; the 'nursemaid'(*nutrix*),[12] alerted by his cry, rushes to the baby, and recognizes the signs left by the *striges* on his body, namely scratches on his face, and the same coloration that leaves have in winter. The fear felt by this legendary wetnurse cannot have differed greatly from that of real nurses and mothers concerning the fleeting existence of infancy in Roman everyday life. As already pointed out, as an elaboration of such fears the child-killing figure – in this case the *strix* – does not work as a problem but rather as a code, an image through which people interpret and react to it.[13] In addition, as shown by Fritz Graf, after the passing of the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* (81 BCE), Roman law allowed the interpretation of any unexpected death as the result of magic, since it distinguished ordinary murders and unexpected deaths, those resulting from invisible causes and attributable to the so-called *veneficium*, that is, an action intent on provoking death through either poisoning or any kind of witchcraft.[14] Recently, such a tendency has been further investigated by the same scholar, in a work that examines in detail an epigraphical catalog of Greek and Roman inscriptions from the imperial era that blame φαρμακεία (*venenum*) or other

actions that we may define as 'sorcery', as well as witch-figures like *sagae* and *veneficae*, for the unexpected death of children, young men and women.[15] Many cultures have recourse to similar mechanisms in the face of adverse and mournful events. In this context, anthropologists often refer to the model that Evans-Pritchard found among the Azande of Central Africa, to whom witchcraft seemed to provide the explanation of an unfavourable incident as well as a cultural code that provided an answer to it.[16]

To return to Proca's episode in Ovid's *Fasti*, in this tale the focal issue seems definitely to be the *entrails* of the little victim, insofar as the misadventure is finally solved by a special character called Crane, who performs an exorcism against the *striges* that ends by offering to them the 'viscera' (*fibrae*) of a piglet in place of the 'internal organs' (*exta*) of the baby victim.[17] As to Crane, she is described by Ovid as a nymph to whom Janus gave power over doors' hinges in exchange for her virginity, but at the same time she is identified with Carna,[18] who, according to Macrobius, was the goddess in charge of human *vitalia*, comprising 'liver, heart and internal organs' (*iecinora et corda quaeque sunt intrinsecus viscera*).[19]

The *strix*, then, comes specifically in order to 'devour'. She plunders her prey in a pointedly rapacious way, and her voracity produces only contamination. Ovid underlines the creatures' capacity for spoiling the little bodies that they touch, for 'altering' (*vitiare*) them from what they were before.[20] After the contact with the *striges*, people lose their vitality as well as their physical integrity.[21] Since the *striges* suck the victim's blood and tear out his entrails, in fact, his body will look like that of someone deprived of his own internal vigour; more specifically, Proca's loss of vitality is emphasised when his complexion changes to one similar to the colour of leaves in early winter.[22] Something similar seems to be caused by the Petronian *strigae* in a short story reported by Trimalchio in chapter 63 of the *Satyricon*, as the human bodies that they attack appear immediately as nicked and faded, and even emptied and changed. In this famous episode, the *strigae* enter a house in which a group of people watch over the corpse of a child and reduce him to a sort of 'straw puppet' (*stramenticius vavato*) without 'heart' (*cor*) and 'internal organs' (*intestina*).[23] As for a big and strong slave who tries to fight with the evil creatures in order to chase them away, after he is touched by their 'evil hand' (*mala manus*) he becomes completely livid and dies in a few days.[24] According to Mauritz Schuster, though, the *strigae* empty the child's corpse by robbing it of its internal organs and then replace them with straw. To support this interpretation, the scholar provides some popular tales from different parts of Europe, in which a hag empties somebody's body and fills it with meat, straw or dead leaves.[25] The image of the substitution that involves the dead child's body recalls quite closely the medieval and modern tradition concerning the so-called *changelings*, *enfant changé* or *Wechsebalg*: that is, the fear that certain supernatural beings, like fairies and witches, may replace human, pretty and healthy babies with their own ugly and sick offspring.[26] This belief, widely documented for thirteenth-century France,[27] comes up again unexpectedly in the guise of the *Donne di fuora* of Sicilian folklore, capricious and bizarre feminine demons who have, among many special prerogatives, that of moving and changing babies. According to this tradition, described between the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century by the great Italian folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè in his famous *Usi e costumi credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*, the baby changed by the Donne is usually recognizable by an alteration in the complexion of its face and a general

physical deterioration[28] – the same process, we may note, that the Romans ascribed to a child touched by the striges.

Let us go back to Antiquity and the motif of the hungry witch, to which the child-killing *strix* conforms perfectly. In Latin literature we also frequently come across witches hunting for entrails, often those of children, even though they do not necessarily *eat* them. The Lucanian Erichto pulls out fresh blood and 'pulsing organs' (*exta trepidantia*) from her victims.[29] Horace's Canidia makes the marrow and liver of a young boy dry out in order to use them in a magic potion.[30] Pliny the Elder, nonetheless, while discussing remedies gathered from the human body, makes a review of 'witchcrafts' (*piacula*) derived from the use of entrails and blood, marrow and the brains of children. These operations would in fact demand the eating of the entrails and 'sucking the blood' (*sorbere sanguinem*) in order to absorb the 'life principle' (*viva anima*) of a human body.[31]

Anthropophagous Witches in the Middle Ages

Having defined the vampiric and devourer character of the child-killing *striges* that Roman Antiquity delivered to later tradition, as well as the general interests of ancient witches in the internal organs of their victims' bodies, we can better examine the recurrence of the hungry witch figure in medieval literature. There are many sources which scholars of the Middle Ages and the Modern Era can use to trace the vitality of this motif in its different declinations, but here it will be enough to mention briefly some famous late and medieval sources in which we encounter feminine figures avid for the flesh and blood of humans, often especially hungry for children, who in changed historical and cultural settings are sometimes still called by the Roman name *striges*.

The judicial texts of the sixth and seventh centuries emanating from the so-called Roman-barbarian kingdoms, for example, testify to popular beliefs that blamed certain women called *striae*, *strigae* or *mascae* for eating the flesh of live humans. The *Lex Salica* (507) punished the *stria* who 'ate a man' (*commederit hominem*);[32] while the Lombard Edict of Rothari (643) assigned a punishment to people who kill a servant who was believed to be a *striga* or *masca*, because it was impossible for a 'Christian mind' (*christiana mens*) to believe 'a woman to be able to eat a man' (*ut mulier hominem…possit comedere*), 'living' (*vivum*) and 'from the inside' (*intrinsecus*).[33] Thus, it seems that the beliefs concerning the *strigae* do always imply their prerogative of eating people. This also appears clearly in the pitiless capitulate imposed by Charles the Great on the Saxons at the end of the eighth century (782–785). This text ordered capital punishment for anyone who, deceived by the devil, kept a *striga* capable of eating humans, and who then burnt flesh, fed and ate with the *striga*.[34]

Even when there is no longer any use of the word *strigae*, the hungry witch motif continues to be represented; in fact, it appears in the list of questions compiled by Burchard of Worms at the beginning of the eleventh century as the *Corrector sive Medicus*, a penitential to be used during confessions which corresponds to the nineteenth book of the canonical collection known as the *Decretum*. Question by question, prescription by prescription, the text is for us like a guide to the superstitions of the time, real or presumed, and the penances connected to them. One of these pertains to the case of

the woman converted to the devil, who, even though her body remained close to her husband in a bedroom with a closed door, was believed to go out and cover large distances in order to kill baptized people with invisible arms, and then 'to cook and eat their flesh' (*decoctis carnibus eorum vos comedere*), 'to put some straw or wood' (*stramen aut lignum... ponere*) 'in place of their heart' (*in loco cordis eorum*) and, 'after having eaten' (*commestis*) them, 'bring them again to life for a short period' (*iterum vivos facere, et inducias vivendi dare*).[35] In addition, the *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, a sort of schematic reminder of pagan superstitions compiled in the Germanic area at the end of the eighth century for the use of bishops and missionaries,[36] already included an indication concerning some women who had power over the moon and were able to 'pull up hearts to men' (*corda hominum tollere*).[37]

Finally, we come to the supernatural, hungry creatures and their uncanny relationship with children. In the second part of the twelfth century, the storyteller Walter Map, at the English court of Henry II Plantagenet, reports in his *De nugis curialium* a story about a flying 'demon' (*demon*) who took the form of an honest woman in order to 'cut the throats' (*iugulare*) of newborn babies.[38]According to one story a knight had his first son by his dearest, good and noble wife; but the day after his birth, he 'found him in the cradle with his throat cut' (*iugulatum repperit in cunas*); in spite of a careful watch, the same happened to his next two sons, but when the fourth baby was born, a 'pilgrim' (*peregrinus*) arrived at the knight's home looking for hospitality and sat observing the baby during the night. After midnight, while all the others were sleeping and he was the only one well awake, he suddenly saw a venerable matron leaning over the cradle 'in order to cut' (*ut iugularet*) the little child's throat. At this point, the man stood up and caught her, saying 'that she was a demon' (*demonem esse*). It was then clear that the creature had turned into the form of an honest woman, who was the object of his envy; and as soon as the pilgrim let go of the woman-demon, she flew out of the window 'with laments and loud cries' (*cum planctu et eiulatu maximo*). This episode, which Walter Map certainly found in contemporary folklore,[39] resembles the Ovidian story of Proca in many ways. In fact, the two tales appear to share the same structure and key characters, with the exception of the wetnurse, not present in the medieval story. In both we find the incredulous and desperate parents, the supernatural being greedy for the blood of newborn babies and an exceptional character who is able to identify the demon and solve the problem. The child-killing creature which Walter Map talks about, who comes by night in order to bleed babies dry, just as the ancient *strix* does, seems to show some traits of rapacious supernatural creatures: flight, as well as the strident, intense voice with which she goes back to her world.[40]

In the same period, these kinds of nocturnal, anthropophagous infanticides connected with the world of witches are also present – this time not as the work of *strigae*, but rather of *lamiae* that dismember and 'devour' (*congeri*) 'babies' (*infantes*) 'with a voracious greed' (*edaci ingluvie*) – in certain nocturnal assemblies which are presided over by a lady called *Nocticula* or *Erodiade*, and described by John of Salisbury in terms of diabolic beliefs.[41] In the thirteenth century, we are told in the *Otia imperialia* written by Gervase of Tilbury (1214–1215) about the existence of popular beliefs regarding some troublesome creatures called *lamiae* or *mascae*, but called '*striae* in the Gallic tongue' (*in Gallica lingua striae*), as he says, and seen as 'hallucinations' (*ymaginationes*). According to Gervase, these beings used to enter the houses by night in order to ransack kitchens, pots and

barrels, to oppress the sleeping people and kidnap babies, and what's more to 'eat' (*comedere*) and to 'suck human blood' (*sanguinem humanum bibere*).[42]

It would be possible to go on with this list of horrors, in which *strigae*, *lamiae*, *mascae*, child-killing demons and diabolic hallucinations mingle together in a mixture of popular beliefs as well as learned quotations, but instead I will proceed to my third point and try to point out, with a few significant examples, how the paradigm of hungry witches, and their relationship with babies, comes up again in the modern folklore of some Italian areas, where children often appear as tormented by creatures which are still very similar to the Roman *striges*.

Other hungry witches

The harmful hunger of witches seems to occur in European folklore as well as in distant, different cultures. Before looking at the western tradition, to return to a very famous example of the Sudanese Azande studied by Evans-Pritchard, the sorcerer sends his witchcraft soul to take away the soul of the flesh of his victim. Then he will devour it very slowly, in small portions, and the poor victim will die at the precise moment when the entire soul of a vital organ has been consumed.[43] To focus more closely on babies, it is worth quoting the example of the vampiric *Surbile* of Sardinian tradition, a child-killing creature very similar to the Roman *strix*: she is a woman who generally turns into a fly, a greedy and bothersome insect,[44] and enters houses through invisible passages in order to suck the blood of newborn babies. They die slowly, the deterioration beginning with a discolouration of the body.[45] The name *Surbile* itself recalls the Latin verb *sorbilo*, which means 'to suck in small sips';[46] the word thus brings to mind the ability of this creature to consume the vitality of its victim slowly, portion by portion, causing a gradual deterioration.

Sometimes the hunger motif starts in the folklore with symbolic links between the witch and her animal doubles. This is the case of the grub, whose disturbing identity we can verify in many European popular beliefs and names of this creature in Romance dialects, which reveal it as a *witch*.[47] Considered a magic and diabolic being, the grub is able to cause mental diseases and skin rashes, to burrow under the skin of weak children, absorbing their strength, or to worm its way into people's brains, provoking madness, or to suck blood, cut off human limbs and vital organs.[48] One of the ideas implied in the interpretation of the grub as a witch and vice-versa, may be the hunger at that epitomises the harmful nature of both creatures.[49] So folklore often endows the grub, a hungry being, with skills that are very similar to those of ancient *striges*. Even now, they appear in Roman culture as real specialists in removing the vital elements of human bodies – particularly, as we saw above, those of babies.

Figures of Inverted Womanhood

Before drawing conclusions, there is one further important feature of the *striges'* profile to consider. Not only is the *strix* of ancient belief a 'devouring' monster, hungry for the little ones' entrails; but she also is commonly blamed for nursing babies with her

poisonous breasts. As we know from Pliny the Elder, the ancients ascribed to these evil creatures the habit of 'lending their breasts to the mouth of babies' (*ubera eas infantium labris inmulgere*).[50] This disturbing aspect of the *strix* is also preserved in a precious, emblematic sentence attributed to the author of *togatae* known as Titinius (second century BCE), and indirectly referred to in the *Liber Medicinalis* compiled by Quintus Serenus, a sort of didascalic poem focused on medical remedies, dated approximately to the late fourth century CE. In the chapter 'for babies bothered by the teeth or the *strix*' (*Infantibus dentibus vel strige inquietatis*), the author mentions the Titinian prescription that advises those looking after babies 'to interweave some garlic' (*alia necti*), in case the 'evil strix' (*strix atra*) 'torments the babies' (*premit puellos*) 'by feeding them with her poisonous breasts' (*virosa inmulgens ... ubera labris*).[51] Some Roman popular beliefs, then, interpreted the *strix* through the terrible image of the 'bad nurse' – an evil, supernatural creature held to be capable of laying for newborn babies the trap of an abnormal womanhood, more specifically understood as a treacherous, ambivalent and inverted motherhood.[52] In this maternal image of the *strix*, the mother's milk (that is, the organic liquid on which the child's life depends in the very first, and most difficult, stage of his existence) reverses its function; unexpectedly, it turns into a poison that can compromise the baby's health.

It seems, then, that the ancients established a relationship between the image of child-killing demons like the *striges* and, on the other side, the universe of inverted womanhood/motherwhood.[53] In this respect, the Roman *strix* may be compared to certain monstrous beings of the Greek popular tradition, such as Lamia, Gello and Mormo, with which people used to scare children.[54] In the myths concerning these infamous creatures Sarah I. Johnston has identified an interesting pattern: apparently, the scholar states, at the base of their existence as child-killing demons there is always a story of unrealized womanhood and, more precisely, of unrealized motherhood. A part of the ancient tradition referring to them, in fact, interprets these monsters as unfulfilled women who did not realize their 'goal in life' (that is, motherhood), turning then into sort of ghosts characterised by an inverted femininity, taking revenge on successful mothers and their babies. According to Zenobius, Gello was a virgin who died prematurely, whose ghost haunted children, causing them to die young.[55] Lamia is described by Diodorus Siculus as a beautiful Libyan queen. Upset by the death of all her children, she turned into a monster and persecuted other women's newborn babies.[56] As for Mormo, she was a Corinthian woman who ate her children and flew away.[57] In such uncanny stories, this kind of demon could then play a normative role, effectively representing the inversion of the normal feminine model in Greek culture. Elsewhere, I discussed how this ancient pattern identified by Johnston, which links the image of the child-killing demon to that of the unrealized or distorted motherhood, is possibly present in the Greek myth of Poliphonte[58] as narrated by Antoninus Liberalis in his *Metamorphoses*, a collection of prose summaries apparently written during the second or early third century CE that seems to preserve the works of some Hellenistic authors.[59] According to this myth, that Antoninus acquired from Boio's *Ornithogoniae*, the girl Poliphonte rejects the goddess Aphrodite and becomes a follower of Artemis, following her through the mountains. Offended by the girl's rejection (that is, by her insistence on remaining a virgin), Aphrodite condemnes her to a beastly marriage by making her fall in love with a bear.[60] From the sexual union between the girl and the

animal (an action which is shameful to Artemis, who subsequently causes wild animals to pursue her), two wild, giants-sized sons were born. Their cannibalistic and abominable behaviour was finally punished by Zeus, so that they turned into birds of ill-omen; as for Poliphonte, she too became a gloomy, nocturnal *strix*, adopting a bizarre upside-down position. In short, the story concerns a girl whose normal path to womanhood was inverted and who, as a consequence, was forced into a beastly marriage as well as into a degenerate motherhood. Finally, her inverted, lost womanhood possibly corresponds to the metamorphosis into the upside-down *strix* – a creature which is clearly characterised too, as we know from the popular ancient tradition that interpret her as a child-killing demon, by a disturbing femininity and maternity.[61]

Some Conclusions

Let us go back to the hunger of witches in order to summarize this argument. To the fear of losing children, deep-seated in a society in which infantile mortality was so high and the first days after birth were extremely uncertain, Roman culture responded with the image of the *strix*, a sort of a monster or demon, generally associated with the fearful qualities of a strigiform bird of prey, that is able to come and *take away the life* of babies. So if a child is losing his vigour, if suddenly he gets sick, if he dies, it was the *strix* that came and robbed him of his vitality. As we already know, the legendary baby Proca was saved from the dreadful action of the *striges* by the exorcism performed by the goddess-nymph Crane. As for its influence on Roman everyday life, the Titinian sentence tells us about the use of remedies and spells in order to protect newborn babies from the incursions of the *strix*.[62] In addition, a passage in Festus' *De verborum significatu*, a compendium of the well known lexicon compiled during the Augustan age by Verrius Flaccus, informs us that the name *strix* was attributed 'to malefic women (*maleficis mulieribus*), also called 'those who fly' (*volaticas*), and that the Greeks used to chase them away with these words: 'go away *strix* screaming at night, go away *strix* from the peoples, bird that cannot be named, on the fast ships going far away'.[63]

What is more interesting is the peculiar way in which Romans represented the *striges*' uncanny method of taking away children's lives, which deserves to be better defined here with a few remarks on the terminology we found in the Latin sources mentioned above. As we have seen, the things that actually seem to really matter to witches, already in their ancient history as *striges*/*strigae*, are specifically the 'blood' (*sanguis*) and the 'entrails' (*viscera*) of their victims:[64] that is, critical elements of their vitality that the creatures, by sucking and eating, usually pull out from human bodies. It is known that Romans represented *sanguis* as an essential substance that had a direct correspondence to the vital vigour of human beings.[65] As to what they called *viscera*, they were the 'entrails', understood as all the digestive organs and also noble vital organs like the heart, lungs and liver. The term is very similar to *fibrae* or to *exta*, which in the augural language indicates the entrails of the sacrificial victims; or to *intestina*, to point to 'the internal parts' of the body; and all of them correspond also to the term *vitalia*, which means properly the 'vital parts' of a body.[66] In Roman culture, therefore, the presence of the witch seems to imply the handling, adulteration or deprivation of the victim's vital elements. What is more, the image of the *strix* that devours the *vitalia* by stealing and

corrupting them, translates in Roman imagery the idea of the life physically removed from a body or spoiled inside of it.

This review of the child-killing *striges* and other Roman witches – as well as of their hungry passion for human *vitalia* and particularly for those of babies – helps us understand the anthropophagous vocation of later witches, who in some way continue the tradition of these ancient supernatural creatures, most obviously in their predilection for draining the life from people: that is, the vital material which is housed in human bodies, and that witches have a special ability to eat from the inside. From this point of view, not only are we better able to see the voracity of medieval witches as a survival of Roman Antiquity, as the hunger in the ancient *strix*'s motif that remains strong throughout the centuries; but also, more generally, we expect witches to be seen as greedy for the life-giving internal organs and liquids of the human body'. From ancient *striges* to other witches, in different cultures and historical eras, and with many variations that the general term *witch* unfortunately conceals, we are dealing with traditional images of creatures held to be, or represented as, capable of stealing *life* by eating it physically. The life they are hungry for, beginning from Antiquity and the Roman *strix*, is most of all the succulent life of children – the youngest, the most vital, though the most fragile members of the family.

Abbreviations

CIL	Mommsen, T. 1863 (ed.). *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 16 vols. Berlin: Reimer.
DELL	Ernout, A., Meillet, A. 2001. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine, nouveau format augmenté d'additions et de corrections par J. André*. Paris: Klincksieck.
FGrHist	Jacoby, F. 1961–69 (ed.). *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (reprint of the 1923–58 German edition), 3 vols. Leiden: Brill.
MGH	1826 – . *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Leipzig, Hannover and Berlin: var. ed.
PL	Migne, J.-P. 1841–1880 (ed.). *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, 221 vols. Paris: Migne and Garnier.
PMG	Page, D. L. 1962 (ed.). *Poetae Melici Graeci*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
TGF	Nauck, A. 1889[2] (ed.). *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Leipzig: Teubner.

Notes

[1] These forms are both borrowings from the Greek στρίγξ, -γγός, an onomatopoeic term that contains the same root of τρίζω, corresponding to the Latin verb *strideo/strido*. The popular form *striga*, attested for the first time in Petr. 63, seems to be built directly on the Greek accusative στρίγγα and moved to the first inflection, see DELL, s.v. II *striga*; Väänänen 1971, 189-90 and 232; on the linguistic history of the term, see Cherubini 2008 2009, 25 ff. The Latin term *striga* has continued with an uninterrupted tradition in some Romance languages, with the meaning of 'witch': for example the Romanian *strigă*, Italian *strega*, Portuguese *estria* and old French estrie; with the same meaning. It is recognizable in borrowings like the modern Greek στρίγα, perhaps taken from a Latin diminutive **strigula*, the Slovenian *štrija*, the Polish *strzyga* and Albanian *shtrigë*: see Väänänen 1971, 118 and 107; Buck 1949, 1497; Meyer-Lübke 1935, 686; *cf.* Cherubini 2010, 14-16.

[2] This term names the order of birds that includes the owls.

[3] So thinks Capponi 1979, 467 and 1981, 302, who identifies the Ovidian *striges* of *Fast.* 6, 131–34 (with their *grande caput*, 'big head', *stantes oculi*, 'fixed eyes', *rostra apta rapinis*, 'rapacious beaks', *canities pennis*, 'white

feathers' and *hamus,* 'hook' of the claws) as a *Tyto alba alba*, commonly called 'Barn Owl'. Nonetheless, as Capponi shows, *ibid.*, we may consider the word *strix* as a general name used to indicate various kinds of owls; for example, the *strix* found in Ov. *Am.* 1. 12. 17–20 may be seen as one of the *Striginae*, that is a 'Tawny Owl'. See also André 1967, 146 s.v *strix* ('chouette effraie').

[4] Ov. *Am.* 1. 12. 19–20; Sen. *Herc. F.* 686–88; *Med.* 733; Luc. 6. 689; Serv. *Verg. Georg.* 1. 470. See also Hsc. *Lex.* s.v. στὺξ· ὁ σκὼψ τὸ ὄρνεον, '*strix*, the owl, the bird'; Cherubini 2010, 157. A different opinion was expressed, as is well known, by Oliphant 1913, 147, according to whom the physical features with which the ancients invested the *strix* 'were those of a bat and not those of an owl, as so generally supposed'. See also McDonough 1997, 326 endnote 39, to whom Oliphant's identification of the *strix* with the bat seemed to be unlikely.

[5] Plin. *Nat*. 11.232. Also, in light of this, McDonough 1997, 236, invites us to consider the Roman *strix* as a multifarious image 'composed of the parts of many fearful animals but identified with no particular one: (...) a creature "betwixt and between" '.

[6] See Pl. *Ps.* 819–20; Hor. *Epod.* 5. 20; Tib. 1. 5. 52; Prop. 4. 5. 17; Ov. *Am.* 1. 12. 17–20, *Fast.* 6. 131–68; Petr. 63 and 134, 1; Luc. 6. 689; Sen. *Herc. F.* 686–88; Plin. *Nat.* 11. 232; Quint. Ser. *Lib. Med.* 57; Isid. *Orig*. 11. 4. 2. Apparently, the popular beliefs on the *strix* were well-known in Greece too, as we understand from Fest., pp. 414–415 L. As for some studies that handle or mention this issue, see Oliphant 1913, 1914; Schuster 1930, 173–78; Scobie 1978, 74–83; Stramaglia 1987, pp. 164–68; Curletto 1987, pp. 150–52; Danese 1995, pp. 427–30; Mencacci 1995, 230–31; McDonough 1997; Bettini 1998, 274, 373; Johnston 1999, 164–67; Cherubini 2008, 2009a, 2009b and 2010.

[7] The existence of such a continuity has been recently well pointed out by Touati 2003.

[8] It is worth mentioning that Ov. *Fast.* 6, 131–32, assimilates the *striges* with the mythical Harpies, disgusting and supernatural feminine birds marked by an insatiable hunger, and linked to the Graeco-Roman tradition about Phineus (Apoll. Rhod. 2. 230 ff.; Apollod. 1. 9. 21; Hes. frr. 76. 18, 151, 155 and 156 ed. Merkelbach – West 1967; Epimenid. Cret. *FGrHist* 3 B 457 F 6; Ibic. *PMG* fr. 292; Ferecid. Athen. *FGrHist* 1 A F 28–29; Aesch. *TGF* fr. 260; Soph. *TGF* fr. 704–717. See Ar. *Pax* 810–811; Plut. *Lucull.* 7. 6, *Vitand. aer. alien.*, 831 F; Athen. *Deipn.* 13, 558 a; Verg. *A.* 3, 212 ff.; Val. Fl. 4. 428 ff.; Ov. *Met.* 7. 4; Sen. *Med.* 781–782; Petr. 136. 6; Apul. *Met.* 10. 15; Ig. *Fab.* 14 e 19). On the voracious nature of the Harpies, and in for a general comparison with the Roman *striges*, see Cherubini 2010, 53–75.

[9] Pl. *Ps.* 820–21. See Danese 2002, 46.

[10] Petr. 134.

[11] Ov. Fast. 6, 131–45: *sunt avidae volucres, non quae Phineia mensis /guttura fraudabant, sed genus inde trahunt: / grande caput, stantes oculi, rostra apta rapinis; / canities pennis, unguibus hamus inest; / nocte volant puerosue petunt nutricis egentes, / et vitiant cunis corpora rapta suis; / carpere dicuntur lactentia viscera rostris, / et plenum poto sanguine guttur habent. / Est illis strigibus nomen (…) / in thalamos venere Procae: Proca natus in illis / praeda recens avium quinque diebus erat, / pectoraque exsorbent avidis infantia linguis*, 'there are greedy birds, not those that cheated Phineus' maw of its repast, though from those they are descended. Big is their head, goggle their eyes, their beaks are formed for rapine, their feathers blotched with grey, their claws fitted with hooks. They fly by night and attack nurseless children, and defile their bodies, snatched from their cradles. They are said to rend the flesh of sucklings with their beaks, and their throats are full of the blood which they have drunk. Screech-owl is their name (...) they came into the chambers of Proca. In the chambers Proca, a child five days old, was a fresh prey for the birds. They sucked his infant breast with greedy tongues' (transl. Frazer).

[12] Ov. *Fast.* 6. 147.

[13] See McDonough 1997, 317–18; Johnston 1999, 162.

[14] Graf 2003, 46–49; see also Bettini 1998, 298.

[15] See Graf 2007, and Graf (forthcoming). I express my gratitude to Professor Graf for allowing me to read the final drafts of this essay. Of the many Latin inscriptions, see for example *CIL* VI 3, 19747, dedicated to a three year old boy killed by a *saga manus*; *CIL* III 2197, about a young woman killed by *veneficae*; *CIL* VIII 2756, about another woman *carminibus defixa*; or *CIL* IX 3030, in memory of a boy of three years, *veneno ereptus*.

[16] Evans-Pritchard 2002, 21–22. See McDonough 1997, 317.

[17] Ov. *Fast.* 6. 159–61. For a comment of the episode, see McDonough 1997; Cherubini 2010, 25–26; 42–43

[18] The occasion for telling of this misadventure was the kalends of June, consecrated by the Romans to the goddess Carna, to whom they offered a sort of broad bean porridge (Ov. *Fast.* 6, 101–82). For the identification of Carna with Crane, see Ov. *Fast.* 6, 101–30.

[19] Macr. *Sat.* 1. 12. 32–33: *hanc deam* (sc. *Carnam*) *vitalibus humanis preesse credunt. Ab ea denique petitur ut iecinora et corda quaeque sunt intrinsecus viscera salva conservet. (...) Cui pulte fabacia et larido sacrificatur, quod his maxime*

rebus vires corporis roborentur, 'people believe that this goddess (*sc.* Carna) presides over the vital organs of humans. She is then asked to keep the liver, heart, and entrails healthy. (...) To her, people sacrifice the broad bean porridge and lard, because the body's strength is reinforced most of all by this food'.

[20] Ov. *Fast.* 6. 136.

[21] I discuss this topic, with special regard to the uncanny effects produced by the witches' touch in Petr. 63, cited below, in Cherubini 2009 a.

[22] Ov. *Fast.* 6. 149–50.

[23] Petr. 63. 8: *dum mater amplexaret corpus filii sui, tangit et videt manuciolum de stramentis factum. Non cor habebat, non intestina, non quicquam: scilicet iam puerum strigae involaverant et supposuerant stramentitius vavatonem*, 'when the mother put her arms round the body of her son, she felt it and saw that it was a little bundle of straw. It had no heart, no inside or anything: of course the witches had carried off the boy and put a straw squaller in his place.' (transl. Rouse, rev. by Warmington).

[24] Petr. 63, 5–10.

[25] Schuster 1930, 174–78.

[26] See Bettini 1998, 299–300; and the contribution by Jenni Kuuliala in this volume.

[27] See Schmitt 1983, 5–7.

[28] See Pitrè 1978, 4, 169–70.

[29] Luc. 6. 554 and 557.

[30] Hor. *Epod.* 5.32–40. It is worth noting that also in Apul. *Met.* 1.6 a man called Socrates, after having been seduced by the sorceress Meroe, is reduced to a 'ghostly image' (*larvale simulacrum*), 'disfigured by pallor (*luror*) and thinness (*ad miseram maciem deformatus*)': the witch will then cut his throat in order to pull out his heart, and then dress the wound with a sponge that will let him still live for a while.

[31] Plin. NH 28. 4–6: *at, Hercule, illi ex homine ipso sorbere efficacissimum putant calidum spirantemque et vivam ipsam animam ex osculo vulnerum (...). Alii medullas crurum quaerunt et cerebrum infantium. Nec pauci apud Graecos singulorum viscerum membrorumque etiam sapores dixere (...). Aspici humana exta nefas habetur: quid mandi?*, 'and yet these persons (sc. patients), forsooth, consider it a most effectual cure for their disease, to quaff the warm, breathing, blood from man himself, and, as they apply their mouth to the wound, to draw forth his very life. (…) Others there are, again, who make the marrow of the leg-bones, and the brains of infants, the objects of their research! Among the Greek writers, too, there are not a few who have enlarged upon the distinctive flavours of each one of the viscera and members of the human body (…) To examine human entrails is deemed an act of impiety; what then must it be to devour them?' (transl. Bostock and Riley). On this text, see Bettini 1998, 290.

[32] *Pactus Legis Salicae* (507), MGH *Leges Nationum Germanicarum*, 4. 1. 64. 1–3.

[33] *Edictus Rothari* (643), 198, *MGH* 4.

[34] Carolus Magnus, *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, 6, PL 97.145: *si quis a diabolo deceptus crediderit, secundum morem paganorum, virum aliquem, aut feminam strigam esse, et homines commedere, et propter hoc ipsam incenderit, vel carnem eius ad commedendum dederit, vel ipsam commederit, capitis sententia punietur,* 'if someone who has been deceived by the devil, according to pagan belief, will have retained some man or woman to be a *striga* and devour humans, and for this reason will have burnt or given her flesh to be eaten, or eaten it himself, then he will be punished with the capital punishment'. On the anthropophagous flight of the witch in Middle Ages, see Bellini 1998.

[35] Burcardus Wormaciensis, *Decretorum libri*, 19, PL 140: *credidisti quod multae mulieres retro Satanam conversae credunt et affirmant verum esse, ut credas inquietae noctis silentio cum te collocaveris in lecto tuo, et marito tuo in sinu tuo jacente, te dum corporea sis in januis clausis exire posse, et terrarum spacia cum aliis simili errore deceptis pertransire valere, et homines baptizatos, et Christi sanguine redemptos, sine armis visibilibus et interficere, et decoctis carnibus eorum vos comedere, et in loco cordis eorum stramen aut lignum, aut aliquod hujusmodi ponere, et commestis, iterum vivos facere, et inducias vivendi dare? Si credidisti, quadraginta dies, id est carinam in pane et aqua cum septem sequentibus annis poeniteas*, 'have you ever believed what many women, converted to Satan, believe and affirm to be true, that is that in the silence of a restless night, while in bed with your husband in your arms, with you being corporal and the doors closed, you are able to go out, and that together with other deceived women you can cover huge spaces and kill with invisible arms the baptized people and those redeemed in the blood of Christ, and eat them after having cooked their flesh, and put straw or wood or something similar in place of their heart, after having eaten them, bring them again into life for a short period of time? If so, you will do penance with bread and water for forty days, for seven consecutive years'.

[36] See Daxelmüller 1997, 117.

[37] *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, MGH 2.1.108: *de eo quod credunt quia femine lunam comendet, quod possint corda hominum tollere iuxta paganos*, 'about the fact that people believe that some women are able to comand the moon and to pull out the heart of men, in the pagan way'; see Daxelmüller 1997, 112–17.

[38] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, 2.14. The nocturnal infanticides are also present, this time as *lamiae* that dismember and devour babies with a voracious greed (*infantes ... discerptos edaci ingluvie in ventrem traiectos congeri*), in certain nocturnal assemblies which are presided over by a lady called *Nocticula* or *Erodiade* and described by Johannes Saresberiensis in terms of diabolic beliefs, *Policraticus*, *PL* 199. 436. See Touati 2003, 45–46.

[39] See Latella 1990, 7–9.

[40] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, 2.14: *cum planctu et eiulatu maximo*. The terms *planctus* can be referred to the voice of owls, see Isid. Or., s.v. *ulula*.

[41] Johannes Saresberiensis, *Policraticus*, PL 199. 436. See Touati 2003, 45–46.

[42] Gervasius Tilburiensis, *Otia imperialia*, 3. 85–86: *ut autem moribus ac auribus hominum satisfaciamus, constituamus hec esse feminarum ac virorum quorundam infortunia, quod de nocte celerrimo volatu regiones transcurrunt, domos intrant, dormientes opprimunt, ingerunt sompnia gravia, quibus planctus excitant. Sed et comedere videntur et lucernas accendere, ossa hominum dissolvere, dissolutaque nonnumquam cum ordinis'turbatione compaginare, sanguinem humanum bibere, et infantes de loco ad locum mutare*, 'but to gratify popular belief and my listeners' ears, let us allow that is the wretched lot of some men and women to cover great distances in a swift nocturnal flight; they enter houses, torment people in their sleep, and inflict distressing dreams on them, so causing them to cry out. Apparently they also eat, and light lamps, take people's bones apart, and sometimes, when they have dismembered them, put them back together again in the wrong order; they drink human blood, and move babies from place to place' (transl. Banks and Binns).

[43] Evans-Pritchard 2002, 13–16.

[44] This kind of metamorphosis is particularly significant in Sardinia, a land that has been plagued by malaria since antiquity, and where a wide range of tales testify to the terror concerning the so-called *musca macedda*, probably the same kind of mosquito that Sardinian people fear so much with relation to this illness; see Turchi 1984, 21–22.

[45] See Turchi 1984, 33–45; Marras 2001, 126–29.

[46] See *DELL* s.v. *sorbeō*.

[47] See Riegler 1999, 203, according to whom the grub appears in the form of a witch in England, where the *gooseberrywife* takes care of the gooseberry grapes in form of a grub; in Ukraine too, a kind of shuggy grub is called *jazibaba*, which means 'witch'. In some areas of northern Italy this animal is called *stria* 'witch' and *burdeloc* 'garden witch', while the Catalan *bruixa* 'grub' may mean also 'barn owl', a creature traditionally identified with the witch: see Caprini 1999, 219; Alinei 1999, 226–29. Alinei attributes the Spanish term *bruja* 'witch' to the grub's name, from a form **brūcu* / **brūca* which is supposed to have continued the Latin *erūca* / *urūca*, see Alinei 1999, 228–29.

[48] In Southern France, people think that the grub wraps around a man's finger, sucking the blood, and that it is able to mutilate human feet, teeth and noses; in Portugal, if someone touches the grub he will be castrated; see Riegler 1999, 205–208; Caprini 1999, 217; Alinei 1999, 227.

[49] See Caprini 1999, 210–211. The Latin term *eruca* 'grub' means at the same time the animal, hungry for crops, and the vegetables which it eats; in some Provencal areas the grub is called by the names of the cow and of the goat, known for grazing grass; see Caprini 1999, 215–16.

[50] Plin. *Nat.* 11.232.

[51] Quint. Ser. *Lib. Med.* 57. See also Isid. *Orig.* 12.7.42, who describes the *strix* with the term *amma*, probably a word from baby talk that means 'mother, nurse'; see *DELL* s.v.; Meyer-Lübke 1935, 425 .29.

[52] On the *strix* as a 'bad nurse', see Mencacci 1995, 230–31.

[53] See Cherubini 2009 b, 89–94.

[54] In making such a comparison, however, we would like to follow the methodological advice of Jean-Pierre Vernant, who taught us that, in comparing similar patterns and characters of ancient tradition, it is important to highlight their mutual similarities as well as their differences. Any effort at rigid classification (or mutual identification) of the various feminine demons of ancient imagination, in the scholar's opinion, will have the final result that their distinctive character is obscured within weak figurative categories: see Vernant 1987, 39.

[55] Zen. *Prov.* 3. 3; *cf.* Hsc. *Lex. s.v.* λάμια; and *cf.* also Aur. *Med.* 11. 23; *Suda s.v.* λάμια. In Greek tradition, not only are the *lamiai* a sort of bugbear for babies; as we know from Philostr. *V. A.* 4. 25, but this name could also indicate a metamorphic and ghostly being that was able to take the form of an attractive *femme fatale*,

avid for erotic pleasures as well as for human flesh. In Rome, the term *lamia* is attested in literature since Lucil. *Frag.* ed. Warmington 30. 1028–29; see also the child-killing *lamia* in Hor. *Ars poet.* 340 and Isid. *Or.* 8. 11. 102. In Apul. *Met.* 1. 17. 16 and 5. 11. 5 the term indicates evil women expert in the most terrible magic practices, used in contrast to the term *saga*, whichwe may define as 'witch'. For a comparison between the Greek λάμιαι and the Roman *striges*, see Danese 1995, 427. On these kind of child-killing creatures of ancient popular belief see Scobie 1977, 7–10 and 1979, 245–52; Pellizer 1982, 147–59; Leinweber 1994, 77–78; Johnston 1995, 365–70 and 1999, 161–99; Stramaglia 1995, 221–23 and 1999, 18, 33, 83 and 225; Mainoldi 1995, 83; Dasen 2003, 277; Mancini 2005, 167–70; Laes 2006, 59–60.

[56] D.S. 20. 41. 3–5; *cf. Schol. in Ar. Pac.* 758d ed. Holwerda.

[57] Arist. ed. Dindorf 41; *cf.* Theoc. *Id.*15. 40. See Patera 2005.

[58] See Cherubini 2009 b, 89–91.

[59] Ant. Lib. 21. On Antoninus Liberalis, see Papathomopoulos 1968, ix–xxix and 1962; see Cherubini 2009 b, 78.

[60] See Cherubini 2009 b, 81–89.

[61] See Cherubini 2009 b, 89–94, for an analysis of the myth with an anthropological approach. On the relationship between the *strix* and the imagery of inversion, see McDonough 1997, 320–21.

[62] Quint. Ser. *Lib. Med.* 57.

[63] Fest. 414.24–31, as reconstructed by Lindsay in his edition of the text. On similar spells against Gello in the *Kyranides*, see Johnston 1995, 384–87 and 1999, 166. See also the amulet against the birds called '*nyctalopas*, that is nocturnal birds like *striges* or owls', *Damigéron-Évax* 28.1 in Halleux and Schamp 1985, 266–67.

[64] As pointed out by Stramaglia 1987, 165–66, the *strix* is a vampire and a devourer of human entrails like other similar beings, as *lamiae* and *empousae*, and like Hecate; on the anthropophagous nature of the goddess, see p. 159.

[65] See Guastella 1985, 65–75.

[66] See *DELL s.vv. vivo, viscus, exta, fibra and intus.*

5

Sons of Demons? Children's Impairments and the Belief in Changelings in Medieval Europe (*c.* 1150–1400)

Jenni Kuuliala

Introduction

One day in the twelfth century, a Derbyshire priest called Radulf and his wife had a baby boy. When the child was six months old his appearance started to change drastically. The child became thin and miserable, and the joints of his spine openly jutted out so that in the end only his upright head and wailing indicated that he was of human origin. According to William of Canterbury, the scribe who recorded the incident in the 1170's, all that happened because of a defect in the boy's lungs or some other disease known to doctors, as no one among the sane believes in the foolish fables of the common people (*vulgi fabulosa*) about children being transformed or substituted. The parents were ashamed of their own illegal marriage, which had, they believed, resulted in the illness of the child, but eventually a *votum* to St Thomas Becket cured the boy.[1]

The miracle account cited above depicts several aspects important to the study of physically ill and disabled children in medieval society. The reason behind the child's ailment has different kinds of explanations: the parents blame their illegal marriage,[2] the doctors are able to identify a disease or an injury, and the explanation of the so called common people appears to have been that the child was changed into another. The scribe depicts the child's appearance as no longer entirely human; in fact, he even uses the term *genius*, which can be translated as a spirit or a prodigy, and states that the parents were ashamed of producing such a child.

What makes this miracle special is the fact that while describing the beliefs about changed or transformed children as well as parental sins resulting in children's ailments, it is an extremely rare example of such ideas. Of all the miracles in the major collections of the late twelfth century, as well as the canonisation processes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it is the only one even hinting at the belief in changelings – that is, children of supernatural beings substituted for human children. Moreover, the idea that parental sins could cause children's physical impairments or diseases appears very seldom, the miracle collection of St Thomas Becket being one of the few where the conception is frequently expressed.[3]

The belief in changelings is a well-known folkloric motif, and in medieval writings it appears every now and then in texts of different kinds.[4] What is typical of most of

them is the physical or behavioural anomaly of the changeling, who is always somehow different from human children. The same also holds true for later sources about the belief, and this has led many historians, as well as folklorists, to connect the belief with children's diseases and impairments, though not unanimously.[5]

If indeed physically disabled children were thought to be of non-human origin, it most likely led to their marginalisation and in some cases even to abandonment. However, as the medieval sources regarding the belief are rather varying and fragmentary, such a conclusion cannot be made without caution. In this paper my aim is thus to examine the medieval texts regarding changelings from the point of view of physically disabled children, focusing on the era before the writings of Martin Luther and the influence early modern ideas of witches and demons had on the belief. I will ask if children who had physical impairments were connected with changelings, and if the changeling lore for its part had any effect on how these children were regarded in medieval society. In this context physical impairment is loosely defined as including all deformations and maladies which affected children's appearance.

A Folk Belief?

Folklore as a concept typically preserves certain ideas and motifs during the course of time, but their meanings and contexts change, depending on time and place. Thus, medieval folklore must not be confused with later folkloric evidence collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries though the temptation to do so is understandable, considering the fragmentary nature of medieval sources about many folk motifs.[6] Yet, despite this many studies concentrating on the Middle Ages which touch the belief in changelings are strongly influenced by the folkloric material collected later. While these texts clearly show that the belief survived through centuries and several characteristics remained the same, they cannot be interpreted as the evidence of the survival of the meanings and connotations it had in medieval Europe.

When studying medieval belief systems, one of the most prevalent problems or challenges is *who* actually is the one who believes. When it comes to matters strongly connected with the so called folk culture, the question becomes even more acute. Medieval culture was in many respects oral, and when some aspects of it were written down, it always happened for a purpose. Those who produced the written evidence of the beliefs always came from among the educated, and yet they were not entirely separated from the laity, as the parish priests, for instance, had varying levels of education. As a result of these problems, it is reasonable to ask if we can even use a term 'folk belief' or 'folklore'.[7]

According to Carl Watkins, the temptation to categorise beliefs as belonging to various groups such as clergy and laity or elite and masses derives from the type of sources historians have utilised when studying the topic. Sermon stories, penitentials, clerical manuals and *exempla* contain much evidence of various beliefs, but are, at the same time, didactic by nature, and make 'a sharp contrastive distinction between the Church ideals and malpractices of wider society'. Thus, they do not give us direct insights into the actual beliefs of their writers, but rather depict conceptions on a more general level.[8]

The belief in changelings is a motif whose origins are repeatedly said to be in prehistoric, oral tradition regarding fairies.[9] Yet, the written texts pertaining to the topic are very fragmentary before the early modern era: in England, for instance, early medieval, Anglo-Saxon sources make no remarks about the belief in changelings as malformed children of supernatural beings. In fact, the association of elves with changelings only verifiably began when they were associated with *lamiae* in the fifteenth century.[10] It is usually thought that the churchmen transformed old, pagan creatures such as elves and fairies into demons, and thus the deeds that had originally been done by the former group were turned into the misdeeds of the latter.[11] This was not done invariably, however, but on a selective basis, and hence cannot be taken as a norm regarding all folk beliefs.[12] However, with changelings the influence of the discussion regarding demons and the devil is so fundamental that it cannot be automatically assumed that the pagan creatures and beliefs came first.

Possibly the earliest European narrative portraying the changeling theme is the *Vita fabulosa* of St Stephen. The first manuscript portraying the legend is from the tenth or eleventh century and preserved in Monte Cassino, and the second one is from the fourteenth century, held at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. Later the *Life* also found its way into a painting attributed to Martino di Bartolomeo (1389–1434). According to the text, when Stephen was born, the devil stole him from his parents, replacing the child with a wooden statuette (*idolum*). The devil took Stephen across the sea, where he was brought up by a bishop, and later he returned to his parents to reveal the impostor.[13]

St Stephen was a well-known and widely venerated saint and Christian protomartyr, and so there was also a strong oral tradition connected to him. Because of this, the story of his early life in the *Vita fabulosa* is also very likely to have circulated widely, and not only had an effect on some later hagiographic narratives, but possibly on the belief in changelings on a wider scale as well. However, its connection to sickly or disabled children is at the very least arguable. The being left behind by the devil is actually inanimate, and the purpose of the *Vita* is to express St Stephen's holiness and his miraculous deeds, contrasting them with the devil's maliciousness.

Of the other medieval texts mentioning changelings, a large proportion belongs to the abovementioned didactic genre. In his work *De Universo*, the French theologian and later bishop of Paris Guillaume d'Auvergne (d. 1249) writes that these little children are called changelings among the common people (*vulgus*), and that old women never stop talking about them. They say that changelings are sons of demons, whom they have substituted for human children, so that women would feed them as if they were their own. According to Guillaume, the children are thin, they cry incessantly and they are so greedy for milk that four wet-nurses cannot keep one happy. After staying with the women for a few years, they vanish.[14]

Another famous theologian of the same period, Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), uses changeling as an allegory of a certain type of Christian, writing that they are like the children the French call *chamium*, who are never satisfied by food, but whose stomachs will harden when they are fed, their hunger continuing unabated.[15] This particular *exemplum* originally belongs to a sermon addressed to those taking care of the sick and its aim is to bring the terminally ill closer to the actuality of religion, and, thereby, the reality of God and the devil.[16]

Despite commenting on demons and the devil, the accounts of Guillaume d'Auvergne and Jacques de Vitry have several differences. For Guillaume d'Auvergne, the changeling is something demons want people to believe in and he criticizes them for trusting in demonic visions. In d'Auvergne's thinking demons could not procreate,[17] and thus these 'sons of demons' are actually an illusion created by them. For Jacques de Vitry, the changeling is real – that is, not an apparition – which proves the existence of the devil and demons. He does not tell anything about the substitution process, but it is implicit in the word he uses, *chamium*.[18] According to C. F. Goodey and Tim Stainton, the context of the sermon, the intention of which is to demonstrate the existence of the devil, suggests that these children are indeed demonic creations.[19]

The third account of changelings, which was written in the same period and is connected with the theological discussion about demons, is the *exemplum* of the Dominican preacher and inquisitor Étienne de Bourbon (*d.* 1261), addressing the legend and rite pertaining to Guinefort the greyhound. According to the text, in a village in the diocese of Lyons, people honoured a dead greyhound as a saint. The women of the village followed the instructions of an old woman, *vetula*, who lived nearby, and took their sick and feeble infants, believed by them to be offsprings of fauns, to the dog's grave. There they performed various rites, including, among others, leaving children in the forest for a night, in order to make the fauns feel sorry for their children and reverse the substitution.[20]

This narrative can be viewed as a part of the ongoing fight the Church had against idolatry, superstitions and pagan beliefs. Étienne de Bourbon himself worked as an inquisitor fighting heresies in the area of Rhône-Alps, and many of the stories in his work *De septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, also known as *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, are based on the material he collected there. The *exemplum* about Guinefort the greyhound belongs to the section where he talks about superstitions. The story has a moral basis, demonstrating how the devil makes people believe in his machinations and exhorting them to combat his misdeeds and react against idolatry, this time in the form of worshipping a dog as a saint. It seems clear from this that Étienne de Bourbon himself did not believe that changelings were real.[21]

When it comes to popular beliefs, the *exemplum* as such is multi-layered, as many of the beliefs and motifs also appear elsewhere.[22] As an example of those concerning children, the tradition of seeking help from a witch-like old woman in questions regarding the health of small children is seen in much earlier writings, being mentioned already by Caesarius of Arles in the early sixth century. In his sermon he talks about women who do not ask for the church's medicine to get help for their ill sons or abortions. Instead, they consult soothsayers, seers, oracles or witches, and sacrifice a garment of a sick person, a girdle that can be seen and measured.[23]

Given the motif behind the story, as well as Étienne de Bourbon's position, it is clear that he did not believe that fauns stole children. Jean-Claude Schmitt has shown that the legend, and thus most likely also the rite, have peasant origins, albeit presumably as a result of a popularisation of a learned narrative. Schmitt demonstrates that there are differences between the legend of Guinefort and the other eleven known versions of the legend of a dog. Space, for instance, is treated in a different manner in this narrative, which is untypical of the literary genre of the *exempla*, and the locations given are exact. Étienne also ends his account by telling how they preached against everything they

had heard about the legend and the rite, and destroyed the cult site and the remains of the dog. Eight of the eleven known versions of the legend date to the Middle Ages, but Étienne de Bourbon's narrative is the only one including the rite, which also suggests that he did indeed hear about it from the peasants of the area.[24]

Hence the *exemplum* of Étienne de Bourbon shows that the belief in changelings existed in peasant culture of the thirteenth century. Yet the account comes from a very restricted geographical area, and thus it cannot be used as a proof that such a belief was widespread among the laity. The writings of Jacques de Vitry and Guillaume d'Auvergne, however, suggest that the belief may have had a wider geographical basis. The same goes for the miracle of Thomas Becket cited at the beginning of this article. It is, in fact, the earliest written European source I have come across, which connects children's ill health to fables about them being changed or substituted. All of these four examples come from the areas of present-day England and France, which connects them to the beliefs and conceptions of a certain part of Europe.

Anomalous Beings

It is no mere coincidence that the number of written accounts of changelings increases at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. By that time, the idea that demons had the ability to act upon living human beings,[25] for example by seducing them, had started to develop. Usually demons that seduced people appeared in the form of a handsome young man (*incubus)* or a beautiful young woman (*succubus*). Whether or not these seducing demons were real aroused some discussion. We have several accounts where the incubus appears as 'real', but in many cases they were seen as nightmares or mental disturbances.[26]

Some authors also loosely combine demonic sexual relationships with bestiality, as in medieval thinking the latter behaviour was often a 'transition towards the supernatural world'. Bears especially are occasionally described as begetting with women, and the children born of these relationships usually have some bear-like physical characteristics. These narratives seem to be strictly connected to sin, however, and do not have much to do with real-life children who had physical malformations, as the anomalies described are always by nature rather fantastic. In addition, they never appear in the medical treatises of the time.[27]

In the thirteenth century several writers, among them Thomas Aquinas, tried to rationalise the discussion about demons' ability to procreate. According to them, *incubi* could produce offsprings with women by first appearing as a *succubus* and obtaining semen from a man, and then transforming into an *incubus*, thus being able to transmit it into a woman.[28] Despite the on-going discussion, in the sources there are very few examples of offspring of this kind of relationship. Merlin the wizard was reported as being a son of an *incubus* and a woman of a gothic tribe.[29] In his *Chronica majora* Matthew Paris writes about a child who was allegedly a son of a female *incuba*. At the age of six months he was fully toothed and had the appearance of a boy of around seventeen years. After the childbirth, the boy's mother suffered from feebleness and pined away.[30]

The anomaly of a child not completely human also appears in the medieval fairy legends and romances. The most famous one of them is perhaps the legend of Mélusine

from the late thirteenth century. Mélusine was a fairy, who married a mortal man. During their marriage the couple had ten sons, eight of which appeared abnormal in some way. One of them, for instance, had an exceptionally large tooth and another one had only one big eye placed in the middle of his forehead.[31] While these French romances cannot be seen as reflecting the popular beliefs, but rather the literate ideals and tastes of the elite, they still act as examples of the supposition that children of supernatural or non-human beings appear somehow abnormal. Even though fairies are later typically the ones stealing children, in medieval sources such a concept does not usually appear. Fairy legends such as the one about Mélusine were connected to questions regarding lineage, which is one of the reasons why changelings do not appear in literary romances.[32] This idea also shows the ambivalence in attitudes towards fairies. Although they could cause trouble, there was also mythical power in them, and to have a fairy ancestor surely did not lower a family's status.

As seen in the examples cited above, most medieval writers who mentioned changelings were commenting on demons and their misdeeds. However, the connection between demons procreating with humans and changeling stories is not unequivocal. There is congruence between changelings as demonic apparitions, as they are interpreted by Guillaume d'Auvergne, and the fantastic nature of *incubi*, but the changelings are always children who do not have a human parent. Another difference, which is essential to note when thinking of disabled human children, is that the physical anomalies of the offspring of human-demon relations are always rather fantastic by nature, and they are never connected with mundane children's diseases or impairments, such as blindness, deaf-muteness or mobility disabilities.

As remarked earlier, writers who mention changelings often attach certain characteristics to them. Guillaume d'Auvergne mentions these children's insatiable hunger, thinness and endless crying, thus combining changelings with physical symptoms, while Jacques de Vitry writes about the changeling's endless hunger as well, adding that its stomach remains hard and distended and its body does not grow.

Thinness can be a symptom of many illnesses, and insatiable hunger can be explained to have medical causes as well,[33] but in the medieval context especially the latter had more literate meanings, and it became virtually a standard characteristic of a changeling. It appeared in the writings of Martin Luther, as well as in several other writings of the early modern era and the folk tales collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which is one reason for the interpretation that mentally disabled children were seen as changelings.[34] The concept of demonic, insatiable hunger found its way into hagiographic writing as well. In addition to the *Vita fabulosa* of St Stephen, the theme was later attached also to some other saints. According to the fourteenth-century *Gesta Romanorum*, the devil stole the future St Lawrence and took his place in the cradle and appeared as a very ill-behaving child.[35] Similarly, in a somewhat later legend, which is portrayed in a fifteenth-century altarpiece of the cathedral of Tarragona, St Bartholomew is also stolen by the devil, who takes the form of a child and causes four nurses to die of exhaustion without growing at all.[36] Just like St Stephen, both saints expose the fraud when they come of age.

In medieval sources insatiable hunger is thus always attached to changelings in texts, where the devil's doings take centre stage, or where he acts as an opponent of a saint. The devil or the demon literally wears a wet-nurse or a mother out, which can

be seen as a metaphor of his misdeeds inflicted upon people's souls rather than as a proof that all children who had such symptoms due to an illness were thought to be changelings.

Even if we interpret the insatiable hunger as a literary metaphor, we still have the accounts of William of Canterbury and Étienne de Bourbon, which do not make any mentions of it, but specifically attach the belief in changelings to a child's illness or impairment. In the *exemplum* about the greyhound and the rite, Étienne de Bourbon specifically mentions that the children the women thought to be offsprings of fauns were 'infirm and sick' (*infirmos et morbidos*), and that they hoped the fauns would return the human children 'alive and healthy' (*vivum et sanum*), as well as 'fat and strong' (*pinguem et grossum*).[37] In the miracle of Thomas Becket, reported by William of Canterbury, the child's appearance changed dramatically, making him look very miserable and deformed.[38] Of the medieval texts, the Becket miracle is the easiest to interpret as a description of what we might nowadays diagnose as a congenital disorder, for the symptoms are most elaborate

There has been some discussion among folklorists about whether it is possible to identify the actual diseases behind the changeling stories.[39] In the medieval context it is ultimately fruitless to speculate what the precise sicknesses or disorders of those children thought to be changelings were. The examples are few and the symptoms are portrayed very superficially, and, as already noted, often mixed with literary motifs and metaphors. Nevertheless, it still seems clear, on the basis of the accounts of Étienne de Bourbon and William of Canterbury, that at least in some cases a mere physical illness was explained by the changeling lore.

Fantastic Spirits

In addition to the accounts cited in previous chapters, there are one or two narratives in which neither changelings nor fairy children seem to have much to do with either the demons' ability to procreate or the devil as such. These examples come from the early thirteenth century *Chronicum Anglicum* by Ralph of Coggeshall (d. *c.* 1227) and the late twelfth century *Historia rerum Anglicarum* by William of Newburgh (d. *c.* 1198), the latter evincing the complexity of the origins of the changeling lore.

Ralph of Coggeshall tells a story about a girl called Malekin, calling her a 'fantastic spirit,' who appeared to the family of a *miles*. She was invisible but once showed herself to a maid, appearing as a small child in a white tunic, after making her promise that she would not touch or hold her. She also consumed food left outside for her,[40] and talked the local dialect to the servants and Latin to the chaplain. Malekin explained that she was a human child who was stolen from her mother in a field, and had lived as a spirit for about seven years. After another period of seven years she could return to the human world.[41]

Another peculiar story with a somewhat similar theme, reported by both Ralph of Coggeshall and William of Newburgh, is the one of the Green Children of Suffolk. They were two small children, a boy and a girl, who were found in a forest. Their skin had a greenish pallor, and they were frightened and unable to understand what was said to them. At first they refused to eat anything except broad beans, but learned to

eat normal food later. Both children were baptised, but the boy died. The girl, who lived, lost her green colour and after learning to speak the local language, William of Newburgh, mentions that she said they were from an underground Christian country called St Martin's land. According to William of Newburgh, the girl was later married to a local man, and according to Ralph of Coggeshall, she worked for the knight who had first found her.[42]

These two accounts are unique in many ways. The first one tells about a girl, though usually the changeling stories which reveal the child's sex are about boys, especially in later accounts.[43] The story about Malekin also makes no remarks about the nature of the beings who stole her and with whom she had been living. Especially considering that Ralph of Coggeshall was a member of the clergy, it is also striking that he makes no mention of anything demonic having a role in the abduction of the girl. In fact, he does not identify the creatures at all.[44] However, it is very plausible that he is indeed talking about what we consider fairies or fay-folk, because he calls Malekin a *fantasticus spiritus*.[45]

In both stories we see the other side of changeling lore; the children belonging to the fairy land. It is true that the Green Children are not particularly connected to the belief in changelings, since no substitution has occurred, but they are still fairy children living in the human world. Malekin, on the other hand, seems to live somewhere in between the two worlds: she visits humans and eats food left for her, so she can clearly be seen to live on the margins of society, not being a complete fairy, though called one by the chronicler, and yet belonging to their world.

In Malekin's story the focus is not on demons or their misdeeds, but it is rather a record of a story Ralph of Coggeshall had either heard from someone or had invented by himself. Yet, the fact that he wrote it at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when the changeling stories started generally to emerge, is unlikely to be a coincidence. If Malekin's story was something that was current among people of the era, it is always possible that it was inspired by the Church's teachings regarding demons. In addition to demons, the interest in nature and, in consequence, the parallel worlds inhabited by supernatural beings, emerged in the twelfth century. This is clearly discernible in the chronicles of the time, which include a large number of stories about people encountering these otherworldly creatures, while at the same time churchmen had great difficulty in interpreting these wonders.[46]

It is natural that Malekin does not have any physical anomalies, given that she is originally a human child. The Green Children, on the other hand, have an exceptional skin colour. This is a clear sign of their non-human origin, and connects them more strongly with, for example, the children of Mélusine. As the story of Malekin tells us nothing about the possible changeling left in her place, we do not know if the child appeared abnormal. However, these two accounts again show that a physical anomaly in a child whose heritage is not entirely human does not necessarily mean a physical impairment. Furthermore, the green girl was very much included in human society, both as a servant and as a wife.

Parental Grief

One of the aspects very typical of the changeling-lore is the parents' urge to try to make the changeling's original parents reverse the substitution by various rites. Traditionally, these rites include making the child suffer so that the parents would feel sorry for it, and because of that the belief has been interpreted as an excuse to get rid of sick or disabled children.[47] On a wider scale, the changeling-lore can also be seen as a parental coping mechanism. Susan Schoon Eberly, for one, has interpreted it through the model of a three phased grieving process following the birth of a defective child, known to modern clinical practise. The first part of the process is rejection, which conforms with the idea that the child is someone else's. The second phase is guilt, often mingling with anger, which results in trying to get rid of the changeling. The third phase, acceptance, does not appear in the changeling stories – it is absent not only from the medieval ones, but from the post-medieval sources regarding the belief as well.[48]

The model is based on modern observations, and must therefore be used with caution when interpreting historical sources. The first phase, grieving the loss of a 'dream child', can be traced also in medieval sources. Among those dealing with changelings the Becket miracle is the only one that describes parental emotions in any way, which, according to the scribe, amount to shame at causing the child's illness by their marriage. This suggests that the parents themselves did not believe that their child was a changeling, but rather other people, who were telling the tales the scribe criticises.

Among other miracles from the late twelfth to the late fourteenth century, parental grief appears quite often, either when a child is born disabled or acquires some kind of impairment later.[49] Yet, shame or any other negative parental feelings appear very rarely. Only occasionally do the parents or other family members express the wish that their disabled child were dead rather than alive in such a state.[50] The miracles very rarely give hints about the way the parents explain their children's ailments, though. When they do, the reasons are usually rather mundane, such as accidents or illnesses. Only in two miracle accounts, unidentified visitors, which can be interpreted as some kind of evil spirits, are thought to be the reason for a small child's physical impairment.[51] Supernatural explanations for impairments and sicknesses are generally mostly absent in miracles. It is possible that when giving testimonials people mentioned such reasons more often, but the scribes left them out as nonsense.[52]

Given the purpose and character of the miracle accounts, it is only natural that the testifying parents would not say that they believed the child was a changeling, even if they had believed this to be so. However, saying that someone else had thought so, and thus regarding the changeling stories as old wives' tales in the style of William of Canterbury and Guillaume d'Auvergne, would not have been so unlikely. Moreover, the motif of changeling as a purely demonic being was not totally missing from hagiographic genre, as the legends of St Stephen, St Lawrence and St Bartholomew show, and hence such accounts were not entirely unrelated. While one explanation for the lack of such remarks may be the above-mentioned possibility that the scribes did not write them down, it may also simply reflect the unusualness of the belief.

In post-medieval changeling stories the methods to make the original parents reverse the substitution appear frequently.[53] Among medieval sources, the *exemplum* of Étienne de Bourbon is the only mention of such a rite. Following the instructions of the *vetula*,

the mothers brought salt and other things to the cult site as offerings, hung their infants' clothes in the bushes around the place and hammered nails into the trees. In addition to these things, they passed naked babies between the trunks of two trees, calling upon the fauns to reverse the substitution. Then the mothers, whom Étienne de Bourbon calls infanticidal (*matricidi*), put their children at the foot of a tree and lit two candles on both sides of them, and stayed away until the candles had burnt out in order not to hear the children cry. Étienne de Bourbon writes that several people told how the candles burnt and killed many babies. One woman also related that she had just invoked the fauns when a wolf entered from the forest,[54] and if maternal love had not made her feel pity, the animal would have devoured the child. When returning, if the mothers found their children still alive, they plunged them nine times into the river Chalaronne nearby. If the child still lived after this, it was considered to have a very strong constitution, thus apparently being human born.[55]

There are hints of the tradition in some of the early penitentials. First, the Confessional of Egbert from around year 1000 orders a fast of seven years for a woman who, in order to cure her daughter of fever sickness, places her on the house roof or in the oven.[56] Bartholomew of Exeter gives similar orders in his late twelfth-century penitentials, writing that in addition to some other magic tricks, 'whosoever shall have set his child on the house-roof or in an oven or furnace to recover its health' must do penance for forty days.[57] It appears that this was also considered a problem later, because the diocesan synod of Canterbury in 1236 advised local priests to remind the women of their parishes not to place their children too close to the fire.[58] The legal sources do not make any remarks about the substitution process typical of changeling-lore, and thus their connection to the belief remains vague. It is conceivable that the legal texts in the first place derive from people's urge to heal their children by whatever method they could think of, and that this urge was sometimes, though not invariably, connected to the belief in changelings. The synodal text from Canterbury could also derive not from the healing tradition, but from the fact that a large number of accidental infant deaths were caused by fire.[59]

The means of recovery described by Étienne de Bourbon and possibly in the legal sources could be considered harsh, which has made some historians combine the rites with infanticide or abandonment of impaired or sick children. In his study *The Kindness of Strangers* John Boswell discusses the possibility that the rite described by Étienne involved or disguised abandonment in several forms. Children could be left in the forest to die and it could be explained by saying that they simply did not survive the ritual, and he also suggests that unwanted, healthy babies could thus be exchanged for sickly children, who were then left to perish in the forest.[60]

Intriguing as this kind of approach may be, it has it dangers. Étienne de Bourbon calls the mothers infanticidal, but none of the other writers say anything about the death of the children being the result of the belief in changelings, even though they were all churchmen and the Church generally showed great concern about infanticide.[61] The possible explanations for this are either that the other writers did not know anything about the rites related to the belief, or that the belief simply was not used as an excuse for infanticide or abandonment. In Guillaume d'Auvergne's case, this is only natural, as for him the changelings were creatures which vanished after some time, and thus there was no need to try to expel them. Besides, the aim of parents who tried to get rid

of a changeling was hardly to kill their own child. If they seriously believed that the child in their hands was a changeling, whatever they did was done to a being that was not human. Obviously the result was no different from the child's point of view, but at least the rites pertaining to changelings cannot be construed as a folk excuse for killing sick or impaired children, although it seems evident that in some cases the result of a rite was indeed the child's death.

As mentioned above, Étienne de Bourbon's exemplum concerns a very restricted geographical area, and that naturally holds true also for the rite. It seems evident that in that particular area sickly infants had to suffer as a result of the belief, but it cannot be said that by extension the same held true for all or even most such children. Moreover, due to the lack of reliable data, there has been no way of proving whether or not infanticide was a prevalent custom in the Middle Ages, though the topic has been discussed by many scholars.[62] In the known infanticide cases, the reasons most generally expressed are shame caused by giving birth to an illegitimate child and extreme poverty,[63] but how often a child's physical impairment played any role is not known. Considering that the symptoms of many congenital defects appear months after the birth, by which time parents had had time to form an emotional bond with the child, and that the medieval ecclesiastical law and later also the secular law ordered severe punishments for the crime,[64] it was presumably not the most probable way of handling the situation. Having said this, infanticide and abandonment (*expositio*) are in many cases difficult to distinguish, and with severely disabled children either intentional or unintentional lack of proper care could also easily lead to the child's death, so there were other means to get rid of an unwanted child than killing it. It is also worth noting that the motive of parents for not letting their seriously disabled infant live could be the knowledge that its survival would be unlikely in any case.

However, if we again return to the miracle accounts, they show us that even very seriously disabled children were often carefully looked after, sometimes in circumstances where it must have been a challenge to the family's economic situation. Moreover, even though the miracle accounts are reticent about the causes of children's illnesses and disabilities, at the same time they show that there were specified, named reasons for them, such as accidents and illnesses like *gutta* or *hernia*.[65] While it is possible that the parents may have believed there was some supernatural influence behind these ailments, it is clear that a child who had a named illness remained a human child. Disabilities were not exceptional in medieval Europe, as The World Health Organization has suggested that even as much as ten per cent of the world's population has either physical or mental impairment at a given time.[66] While the estimation very much depends on how 'impairment' or 'disability' are defined, and must thus be used with caution when thinking about past societies, which did not share the current view[67] on the matter, it is well-grounded to assume that impairment was not rare in the Middle Ages, partly because many accidents and illnesses led to permanent injury due to the lack of proper medical care.[68] Thus, even though children with severe disabilities and illnesses did not survive as often as today, an impaired child was not an extraordinary or alien thing which required a supernatural explanation.

Conclusions

The belief in changelings illustrates several aspects and problems regarding the study of folk beliefs in the Middle Ages. Whether the belief originated in folk culture or in learned circles can be speculated on endlessly, but given the significance of oral culture and the vagueness of the boundaries between these two categories, the question must remain unanswered. It is clear that the clerical writings regarding the matter strongly influenced folk ideas, as hagiographic legends and the *exempla* circulated widely. As the writings of William of Canterbury and Étienne de Bourbon show, in the late twelfth and the early thirteenth century the belief already existed among the laity, but possibly only in rather restricted geographical areas.

The writings which clearly make changelings only demonic apparitions or the devil's misdeed exposed by a saint strongly suggest that at least a part of the significance of the belief lies solely in the theology about demons. Demons were omnipresent and their nature varied a lot, but the writers make it clear that they are distinct from humans. This is the aspect of the belief where the distinction between the clerics and the laity is most clearly visible, as William of Canterbury, Étienne de Bourbon and Guillaume d'Auvergne criticise the *vulgi* for believing in these demonic things. However, even among laity in the areas where the belief existed, not everyone shared it. The parents of the Becket miracle, for instance, are reported to have a different explanation for their son's ailment.

The belief in changelings can be partly connected with the discussion regarding demons' ability to procreate, as well as the growing interest in nature and the supernatural world. Quite likely these tendencies increased the significance of the belief and the amount of writing pertaining to it, which is also seen in its influence on the writers of the early modern era. Similarly, certain ideas connected to the belief were transferred to become integral parts of the later tradition regarding changelings.

The most obvious example of this transformation of ideas is the insatiable hunger, which was originally a literate metaphor strictly connected to demons, but later became a typical characteristic of a changeling. However, in those medieval texts which relate to more specific, individual cases, it is missing. In them the belief is very much connected to children's physical diseases or impairments, but as the symptoms given are vague and the cases few, it is not possible to draw conclusions about what kinds of ailments might be explained by the substitution of a child, or whether the belief was attached to all kinds of maladies and impairments.

Despite the clear connection between children's ailments and medieval changeling lore, its significance does not appear to have been very high. While the belief can be interpreted as a parental coping mechanism, especially the rite traditionally attached to it implies that sickly or disabled children were not accepted as members of human society, and that they were automatically marginalised as belonging to 'the others'. Other sources describing the lives of even very seriously impaired children, however, show that this was not the case, at least not invariably. There must have been differences in communities' attitudes, dependent upon various factors, but there is no reason to assume that the discarding of children impaired either mentally or physically was prevalent.

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Notes

[1] Graigie Robertson 1875, 202–3 (see printed sources).

[2] The campaign for clerical celibacy had started after the papal reform of the mid-eleventh century, before which many of the clergy had lived in marriage-like relationships. Even after the reform and the campaign of Gregory VII, the practice continued to be common, and in some places celibacy did not take hold until the late twelfth century, as can be seen in the miracle cited. See d'Avray 2005, 89–91. For further discussion on the miracle see also Lett 1997, 71–3

[3] The Church had an ambiguous attitude towards the possible connection between sin and physical defects. The concept of parental sins leading to children's impairments existed, but was not unanimously accepted, in the theological writings of the time, especially in clerics' manuals. See *e.g.* Metzler 2006, 38–48; 87–90. In medieval miracle accounts, and among them especially in the canonisation processes, the notion that parental sin would result in a child's physical impairment is expressed very rarely, especially compared to earlier *miracula*, which are discussed in Christian Laes' article included in this volume, pp. 44–5, 50–1. Sometimes a child's ailment such as possession could be a punishment for the parents' failure to fulfil a promise made for a saint. On examples of such cases, see Sari Katajala-Peltomaa's article, pp. 99–100.

[4] On changelings as a longer tradition, see Doulet 2002. The most extensive existing study concentrating only on the Middle Ages is Schmitt 1983.

[5] See *e.g.* Ashliman 1997; Bolstad Skjellbred 1997, 220–1; Boswell 1989, 337–8; Goodey & Stainton 2001, 223–40.; Schmitt 1983, 74–5; Schoon Eberly 1997, 227–50.

[6] Lindahl, MacNamara and Lindow 2002, ix–x.
[7] On an overview of this problem, see Watkins 2004, 140–50.
[8] *Ibid*., 142–3.
[9] Schoon Eberly 1997, 227. Shahar 1990, 132. It has been suggested that the belief might also have its roots elsewhere, for John Boswell mentions a text from the Qur'an, where a stranger kills a troublesome youth so that the Lord could replace him with a better one, as a possible early version of the changeling idea. Boswell 1988, 187; Hall 2007, 117–18. On *lamiae* and other such creatures, see Laura Cherubini's article in this volume, pp. 65–77.
[10] Hall 2007, 117–18.
[11] Lecouteux 1988, 152; Thomas 1971, 610.
[12] See Watkins 2007, 64–5.
[13] Schmitt 1983, 77–8, 194–5.
[14] d'Auvergne 1764, 1072–1073 (see also printed sources). See also Alexandre-Bidon and Lett 1997, 12.
[15] Crane 1971, 129 (see printed sources).
[16] See Goodey and Stainton 2001, 228.
[17] Trachtenberg 2004, 282–3.
[18] On the 'reality' of changelings in de Vitry's thinking, see Schmitt 1983, 75.
[19] See Goodey and Stainton 2001, 228.
[20] Lecoy de la Marche 1878, 325–328. Various versions of the legend of Guinefort existed in several other countries, and in the international classification of motifs it is indexed as B524ff in Thompson 1955–58. The *exemplum* has been extensively studied in Schmitt 1983.
[21] Schmitt 1983, 14–24.
[22] Schmitt 1983, 22–3.
[23] Mueller 2004, 262 (see printed sources).. On Caesarius of Arles and pagan customs, see Delage 1971, 138–42 (see printed sources). Examples include Caesarius of Arles, Serm.33, 4 (bathing in the river on St-John's feast); 50, 1 (amulets); 53, 1 (holy trees); 54, 2 (Evil Eye); 54, 6 (meals and banquets at pagan shrines).
[24] Schmitt 1983, 39–67. Goodey and Stainton 2001, 223–40 question whether the whole idea of changelings originated in folk culture in the first place, because the first medieval text, written by Labeo Notker (d. 1022) uses the term *Wechselbalg* when talking about Jews, and because the point of issue in both Guillaume d'Auvergne's text and later writings is the way these children are conceived. Coodey and Stainton do not, however, take Étienne de Bourbon's text into account, though they strongly criticize Schmitt, nor do they make any mention of the miracle in the Becket collection, which clearly suggests that the belief was a part of the thinking of common people. Moreover, the said miracle was recorded in the late twelfth century, when the texts by Guillaume d'Auvergne and Jacques de Vitry did not yet exist, therefore it obviously could not have been influenced by them.
[25] See Sari Katajala-Peltomaa's article in this volume.
[26] Jacquart and Thomasset 1988, 163–6; Muchembled 2003, 29.
[27] Jacquart and Thomasset 1988, 163–6.
[28] Kieckhefer 2003, 197.
[29] Strange 1851, III: 12 (see printed sources).
[30] Luard 1874, 82 (see printed sources). The story would be more straightforward to interpret if the child was a son of an incubus who would thus have had sexual intercourse with the mother, creating a monstrous offspring and leaving her to wither away.
[31] Classen 2004, 189.
[32] Doulet 2002, 18. For example, Mélusine is said to be the progenetrix of the French house of Lusignan. Lindahl *et al*. 2002, 129.
[33] Schoon Eberly 1997, 235–9.
[34] Schmitt 1983, 76; Schoon Eberly 1997, 227–50. On Luther's views and for a criticism of how they have been interpreted to mean that he advocated the infanticide of [mentally] disabled children, see Goodey and Stainton 2001, 229–31.
[35] Oesterley 1872, 612–14 (see printed sources).
[36] Schmitt 1983, 76–80. The cited legends of St Lawrence and St Bartholomew are from the fourteenth century, and the story about St Stephen and Satan is depicted in a painting probably painted by Martino di Bartolomeo (1389 – 1434).
[37] Lecoy de la Marche 1878, 327 (see printed sources).

[38] Graigie Robertson 1875, 203 (see printed sources) : *minus habens carnositatis in toto corpore quam validus aliquia in uno digitorum suorum.*'
[39] See *e.g.* Bolstad Skjelbred 1991, 220–1; Goodey and Stainton 2001, 224–5; Schoon Eberly 1997, 234–47.
[40] The habit of leaving food or other gifts for fairies appears in some other writings as well. For instance, Burchard von Worms orders penance for those who make bows of little boys' size and boys' shoes, and leave them in storerooms or barns so that satyrs or goblins (*pilosi*, the hairy ones) might make sport with them and bring richness to the house. McNeill and Gamer 1990, 335 (see printed sources). See also Thomas 1971, 610. As Briggs 2002, 8, and 13 points out, Malekin's behaviour resembles in many ways that of brownies or hobgoblins, who are common in later folklore. Briggs describes a brownie as 'a spirit very like the Roman Lar. Like the Lar he was almost invariably singular, devoted to the service of the house, hairy or clad in rags and ready to receive offerings of meal and milk.'
[41] Stevenson 1875, 120–21 (see printed sources).
[42] Stevenson 1875, 120–21 (see printed sources); *Guillelmi Neubrigensis Historia*, Lib I, 90–3.
[43] See *e.g.* Doulet 2002, 317. It must be noted, though, that except for the Becket miracle and the saint legends, the medieval accounts of changelings do not make distinguish between female and male children. The difference becomes more visible only in later centuries, when the number of changeling tales grows.
[44] Stevenson 1875, 121 (see printed sources): *et solam eam relinqueret in parte agri, a quadam alia rapta est et transposita, et jam vii. annis cum eadem manserat; et dicebat quod post alios vii. annos reverteretur ad pristinam hominun cohabitationem*.
[45] On terminology regarding fairies, see Lecouteux 2003, 66.
[46] Watkins 2007, 61–4.
[47] Boswell 1988, 337–8; Thomas 1971, 612.
[48] Schoon Eberly 1997, 231–3.
[49] The tears parents shed when making a *votum* to the saint can, in addition to an expression of emotions, also be seen as a ritualistic act which manifests piety and invocation. Katajala-Peltomaa 2009, 87–9.
[50] See *e.g.* AASS Oct IX, 827–8; Finucane 1995, 106.
[51] Delaborde 1896, 46–9 (see printed sources). Seppelt 1921, 315–16 (see printed sources). See also Lett 1997, 69.
[52] Finucane 1995, 72–3.
[53] For instance, in sixteenth-century England, a wizard was reported as having told to a woman whose four-year old son could not walk nor talk, that the child was a changeling. He instructed the woman to put the child on a chair on a dunghill for an hour on a sunny day, in the hope that the fairies would come to fetch him and bring back the child they had stolen. Thomas 1971, 612–13.
[54] The wolf can be interpreted as an incarnation of the devil. It is worth mentioning here that in Celtic and Germanic literature faeries were known to be zoomorphic, often becoming bears, horses, swans – and wolves. Lecouteux 2003, 67 n. Here again we see the multilayered character of the traditions: clerics turned faeries into the creations of the devil, and the devil could take the same form as faeries had for centuries.
[55] Lecoy de la Marche 1878, 326–8 (see printed sources).
[56] McNeill and Gamer 1990, 246–7.
[57] *Ibid*., 350.
[58] Mansi 1692–1769, cols. 420–1 (see printed sources).
[59] Hanawalt 1979, 156.
[60] Boswell 1998, 337–8.
[61] See *e.g.* Orme 2001, 95; Sandidge 2005, 292.
[62] On an overview of the discussion, see Finucane 2000, 47–8.
[63] *Ibid*., 48.
[64] Orme 2001, 95; Sandidge 2005, 292–4.
[65] See *e.g.* Finucane 2000, 25, 55–100.
[66] See Metzler 2006, 3–4.
[67] According to the World Health Organization (http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/), disability 'is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.'
[68] On disability as a cultural conception, see Metzler 2006, 9–10.

6

Socialization Gone Astray? Children and Demonic Possession in the Later Middle Ages

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Introduction

While watching his five-year-old daughter drinking milk, an irritated father said: 'With all that drinking you are going to end up with the Devil in your belly.' And indeed, after a while the girl felt a demon enter her body and she was possessed for years.[1]

This story is told by Caesar of Heisterbach in his Dialogue on Miracles, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, which was written around the year 1220. According to the medieval mode of thought, the Devil and demons were part of God's creation and active participants in the course of events in this world. Demonic activity was used as an explanation for various problems, including those that occurred within family life and parent-child relations. The aim of this paper is to scrutinize explanations of why 'something goes wrong' in child-rearing. In what kind of situations were malign spirits used as an explanation for unwanted behaviour in children? What do cases of demonic possession tell us about late medieval childhood and the socialization processes of this era?

Demons in the medieval world

Demonic possession was a known feature of Christianity even in its earliest stage. The prototype of an exorcism miracle can be found in the Bible, in which Christ cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalen (Luke 8:2).[2] Examples of possessed children can also be found in the Bible (Matt 5: 25–28; Matt. 17: 14–18). After biblical times the heavenly intercessors, the saints, had the same exorcising ability. The holy power of their relics was thought to force the malevolent spirit out of the possessed. The exorcising powers of saints' relics were acknowledged already in late Antiquity and the custom of bringing possessed persons to their shrines continued during the Middle Ages.[3]

The polarity of good and evil was an essential element of the medieval mode of thought. In the miracles of demonic possession both saints and demons were present, representing the two opposite poles among the supernatural forces that constructed the unseen world of medieval Christians.[4] The focus on the Devil and demons became more intense in the Central Middle Ages. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council defined the role, position and powers of the Devil and the demons, the fallen angels.[5] The dualistic beliefs of Cathars and the way this heresy confronted the Catholic Church undoubtedly

affected the outcome of the council. After the Fourth Lateran council didactic stories of the Devil and demons multiplied. They were also a common theme in miracle and exempla stories, sermons and more philosophical tractates.

Caesar of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles was an example of the religious didactic material written after the Fourth Lateran Council. The Devil and demons were an important topic for Caesar and his treatise includes numerous stories of demons. According to Caesar, 'demons exist, they are multiple, they are evil, and they infest people.'[6] Caesar defines the possessed as innocent victims, like the girl in the above-mentioned case. The possessing spirit was not in the soul but in the body, staying amidst the entrails. The tormenting spirit could fool the senses of the victim and affect his or her behaviour, yet the soul remained blameless.[7] The innocence of the victim is stated emphatically in Caesar's text. According to him, in this above-mentioned case the possessing spirit claimed that those who suffered demonic possession in this life did not suffer in purgatory in the next one.[8]

During the last centuries of the Middle Ages demoniacs were more easily seen as having willingly submitted to the Devil. The essence of the phenomenon changed from an unexpected tragedy to personal culpability and stigma. At the beginning of the Early Modern Era the reason for possession may have been interpreted as a personal sin. Possessed children were still regularly considered to be innocent victims, but often victims of malevolent bewitchment by another person, quite often a parent.[9]

During the Middle Ages, there were no generally accepted symptoms for demonic possession. Some demoniacs were out of their mind: they ripped their clothes and hair and were violent and aggressive, while examples of demoniacs with calm, rational and knowledgeable behaviour are also known. According to medieval definitions, demons were spiritual creatures and they had once been angels. Therefore they had better knowledge of many religious matters than humans did. Occasionally they also had the gift of prophesy, of clairvoyance or of speaking in tongues.[10]

However, demonic possession was a violation of accepted patterns of behaviour. Therefore the diagnosis was always a question of evaluation and opinion of family and community. It was hard to define when the reason for amending one's conduct was divine intervention; such definitions requiring pondering of the surrounding community.

Here, the phenomenon of demonic possession is analysed using the evidence of canonization processes. These inquiries into a putative saint's life, merits and miracles were held according to the regulations of canon law. Definitions of a miracle as well as a person's sainthood were conceptualised by theologians. However, at the same time it was thought that these qualities could be scrutinised in judicial inquiries. The recognition of official sainthood, the right to canonise, became a papal prerogative in 1234.[11] After this, all new cults and intercessors were expected to be approved by the pope. Nevertheless, many intercessors were venerated without papal confirmation of the cult.[12]

The pope sent three commissioners, usually of high clerical rank, to carry out the actual interrogation of the witnesses.[13] Devotees, people who had experienced or witnessed a miracle performed by the putative saint, or persons who had known the candidate during his or her lifetime, were chosen to give their testimony in front of the commissioners.[14] The depositions consisted of personal experiences of the everyday life

of the witnesses. All the essential elements – the desperate situation before the cure, proper invocation, the cure or rescue and rituals of thanksgiving – should have been mentioned in the deposition since they were key elements in a miracle narration. The list of questions as well as the general patterns of hagiographic genre affected the result even though the witnesses were fairly free to recount their experiences.[15]

Children as 'the Other'

Socialization can be deemed to be a process during which cultural expectations are passed to the next generation, a process when social personhood is constructed and negotiated. It is not an automatic development, nor are children passive objects adjusting themselves to the community's norms: the internalisation of values and patterns of thought requires individual pondering and evaluating as well. Moreover, during this procedure children alter and modify norms as well as the culture of the surrounding community.[16] Religious enculturation to community's values and ideals as well as socialization to rituals and practices has not aroused keen scholarly interest, even though education has been of key interest among scholars studying medieval childhood. Recently, negative aspects like problems within the family life have also been of secondary interest.[17]

Demonic possession was in many ways interlinked with the lives of medieval children, although it was not necessarily a permanent tragedy for a child. From the theological perspective, it arouses questions of allegedly innocent children's sins and parents' accountability. In the social context, gendered and age-related patterns of proper conduct as well as the evaluation of these things by family and wider community are at stake. In cases of demonic possession the process of internalizing the community's norms was jeopardized.

In medieval culture spirit possession was not particularly age-related, but it was a rather gender specific phenomenon. Especially in the treatises of educated clerics, it was interconnected with female sex, women's roles and feminine spirituality. Women's bodies were considered to be more open and vulnerable, thus more prone to spirit possession. Feminine spirituality and women's religious practices became suspect from time to time. From the perspective of the clerical elite, who recorded and scrutinised miracles at saints' shrines, wrote treatises like *Dialogus Miraculorum* and formed the inquisitorial committees in canonization hearings, women were often deemed to be in a marginal position, to be the 'religious other'.[18]

Children, too, can be deemed to be 'the cultural Other'. From the adults' perspective, children were and are different from them. They are quite often something a little less than adults, with a little less physical strength or lower mental capacity. Some medieval authors even claimed that children were not completely human, since they lacked reason and discernment up to the point that foolishness was considered to be part of childhood.[19] In the medieval context especially, the neonates were considered to be in a liminal state: they were between two worlds. They had just arrived into this world and were quite often quick to return to the other side. The newly born were torn between benevolent and malevolent forces, especially before their baptism. Because of their

position between the worlds small children could also be considered as intercessors between heaven and earth.[20]

On the other hand, children could also be seen to be a little more than adults. Baptised children were free from original sin and protected by the virtue of the sacrament. Moreover, they were innocent, pure and thus morally superior. According to some definitions, at the age of five children gained enough sense and rationale to be held responsible for their actions. Thus, children younger than this were not capable of sinning and were all to be saved.[21]

Childhood is not only a biological fact. The concept 'child' is a cultural construct and childhood a social process. It is constructed differently in each society.[22] The aim here is to scrutinise how these different concepts of 'the Other' intermingled in possessed children. The question of children's agency is also posed. Demoniac is an identity given by others; it is not a definition chosen by the victim him – or herself. Moreover, control, autonomy and social franchise are elements connected with good social position – and regularly denied from children.[23] Childhood was not a marginal phenomenon in medieval society, even though children were considered to be different from adults. Childhood was not something that separated children from other people since, after all, it was something all adult beings had experienced.

Parental anxiety

A two-year-old girl, named Cristina was suddenly and without warning possessed by a demon. She was severely infected, her stomach swollen and her whole body stiff and curved around her back. Her parents were frightened by the great pain she was in and they decided to vow her to Saint Bridget and accordingly sent an oblation to the shrine. The pain was relieved but the child was not completely cured. After seven weeks, the pain started to increase again and the mother vowed to carry her daughter to the shrine in her arms. Once again the pain eased up, but the mother did not care to fulfil her promise for another seven weeks, as the bishop of Linköping estimated in his letter.[24] In Christian symbolism the number seven symbolizes virginity,[25] thus this detail may have been a way to further emphasize the innocence of the infant Cristina. As a result of this parental negligence, she had to suffer longer before the cure. This case was registered at the shrine of Saint Bridget and written down in a letter by the bishop of Linköping, the letter later being included in the canonization proceedings of Bridget.

Most likely these kinds of stories and especially their interpretation as demonic possession reflect parental anxiety. Children's lives were fragile and child mortality was high.[26] Undoubtedly many mothers and fathers had fears for the survival of their children. To interpret infant Cristina's infection as spirit possession also reflects parental affection, even though the parents were not too keen to fulfil their promise. To lose an infant unexpectedly was a tragedy. Since the reason for this affliction was not known and parents apparently helpless in facing it, it was interpreted as the work of the Devil, so evil a deed it was.

Parents had great power over their children's faith and could risk their children's lives and salvation by their own actions. In this case, the parents were apparently to

blame only for the prolonged distress of their child. Nevertheless, the power of parents and the responsibilities inherent may have been frightening, not only for the children, but to the parents themselves as well. Caesar's story at the beginning of this article can also be seen an example of this mode of thought: wrong actions or words could risk the future of a child. This message is encapsulated in another didactic story, when a father, angry with his son, snapped, 'Go to the Devil'. The Devil took the son and he was never seen again. According to Caesar, the reason was to teach the father and others to amend their temper and language.[27] Children's lives could be endangered in many ways by their parents. After all, the idea that the sins of the parents could be avenged upon their children was stated in the Bible (Exodus 20: 4–6).

This mode of thought can also be found in the case of infant Guillameta who was hit by a sudden seizure. While giving their depositions in front of the inquisitorial committee, the parents pondered the reasons behind the illness. Even though they held contrasting views, they were both willing to give some kind of theological explanation for the convulsion.

According to their testimonies, Petrus Girardi, a citizen of Angers and his wife, Mathea Speciaria, were discussing the sanctity of Charles of Blois. Many people, like Mathea, believed and called Charles a saint. Petrus, however, cautioned his wife not to do that in public until he was officially canonized. According to him, the possession took place two years after that conversation.[28] However, the mother, Mathea, gives a different picture. According to her testimony, Petrus explicitly claimed that he did not believe in the sanctity of Charles of Blois and the seizure took place the very night after the conversation.[29]

The parents agreed on the symptoms. Both of them stated that Guillameta was suddenly in pain and stricken by terror, calling for her mother and saying that she did not know what was trying to capture her. The girl was violent and aggressive. She recovered next morning, after an invocation to heavenly intercessors. According to Petrus, in his mind he silently invoked Virgin Mary and Saint Charles, if he was indeed a saint in paradise, to cure his daughter.

The intercessor of first choice for the mother was not, however, the offended local saint, Charles of Blois, but Virgin Mary. She promised to donate a candle in front of an image of Virgin Mary in a local church. Only when the little victim herself urged it did the parents decide to invoke Saint Charles. According to Mathea, the possessed girl insisted that she was to be vowed to Saint Charles saying 'A Charles, a Charles, madame, a Charles, ad Carolum, domina mea, ad Carolum, ad Carolum.'

Quotations of invocations and cries for help are often found in the records in the form of a direct quotation.[30] However, they are rather rarely written down in both Latin and vernacular. The reason for the use of French in this particular case may have been an intent to emphasise the authenticity of the quotation. Moreover, the commissioners considered the activity and words of the little victim significant. They were also keen to know who had been present and had heard the urging. Guillameta is depicted as an innocent victim of her father's erroneous words. She was a vessel of Divine punishment, but her role was prominent in the cure. She was the one who insisted on being vowed to Saint Charles when the parents invoked Virgin Mary.

This case illuminates in many interesting ways the religious pondering of the laity. Apparently, the father was well aware of the requirements of official sanctity. One

of the paradoxes of the medieval church was that for official canonization an official investigation was required; to proclaim a candidate a saint was a papal prerogative and all new saints and cults needed papal approval, yet in order to become a candidate for canonization a putative saint needed to have an established cult and a firm group of devotees.[31]

Similarly, both parents seem to have been familiar with the hagiographical topos of the punishing miracle. Saints were eager to avenge the belittling words. The ability to punish such offenders was one aspect of sainthood.[32] Both Petrus and Mathea seem to have been aware of such elements in sainthood, since both of them interpreted the affliction of Guillameta as such.

The parents did not identify the torment as possession. Both of them described Guillameta as *furiosa* or *demens*. According to the mother, the father was very disturbed about the seizure, saying that if the girl was of sensible age he would define her as raving mad and out of her mind.[33] No further definition or explanation was given of the age when a child could *sensu perservari*. The title of the miracle is added in the margin of the records. Despite the definitions of the parents, the notaries or commissioners labelled this case as delivery from possession, *de demoniaco reducto ad sanitatem*.[34] Nevertheless, the commissioners apparently agreed with the parents that the case manifested the saintly powers of Charles of Blois, since it was added to the canonization hearing.

Guillameta's torments may have been a tool to amend her father's erroneous opinions. Yet, whatever harm Petrus may have caused to his daughter, he did it unintentionally and took part in the search for a remedy. Parent-child relations were not always so harmonious and cases of demonic possession may have been a way to interpret tense familial relations.

In a case recorded in the canonization hearing of Yves Treguer, a mother cursed her own son. According to Yvo Yvonis, a youth of nineteen years, his mother came to him asking if he had been defaming her. Then she revealed her breasts and on her knees cursed her son saying: 'I curse you by these breasts which you have sucked and by this stomach which has carried you. Whatever right I have on you, whatever I have given you by giving birth to you, I command to the Devil.'[35]

The maternal curse was a very effective one. Yvo fell immediately to the ground, and was vexed in his heart and body. The seizure was so strong that four could hardy hold him. The following night, two horrible black demons with horns tried to capture him saying 'You are ours, you are ours since your mother gave you to us.' Then, in his vision Saint Yves Treguer appeared saying 'Do not fear, you were in my shrine last Friday calling my name and now I have come to rescue you. You mother could not give you to the Devil since she has no rights over you, just as the sack has no rights on the grain which it had carried to the mill.' This said, the demons disappeared. Next morning, Yvo asked his father to take him to the shrine of Saint Yves, where he was cured.

Yvo was not a young child anymore; he was a youth of nineteen years, probably on the verge of an independent life. The depositions do not reveal whether he still lived in the parental home. Apparently he had started an independent life of some sort, since he was considered to be an autonomous agent by his mother. The defamation he had allegedly committed was considered harmful, not simply a matter of childish talk. The mother was not interrogated in the hearing, but according to the testimonies of other witnesses, she apparently considered that her son had defamed her and demeaned her

position within the community. In medieval hierarchies, parents were positioned above their offspring and it was the duty of a child to be obedient. When children matured, the negotiations of authority became more complex, but this basic structure was not replaced.[36]

Yvo himself, as well as other witnesses in this canonization process, seem to have disagreed with the rather misogynistic opinions of Saint Yves. After all, he was firmly possessed and was tormented again when his mother followed him and the group travelling to the shrine. Moreover, we find other, positive examples of maternal power. A mother of a dead boy vowed her son, referring to the power she had over him due to the fact that she had given birth to him: 'Just as I gave birth to you, I command you to Saint Yves.' The boy was revived.[37]

The cursed Yvo stayed at the shrine for over a week for the miracle to be properly published. Probably he had discussed the case with the clergy who asked him to stay. Possibly, the interpretation of lesser maternal powers came from the clergy. In addition to Yvo himself, only one eyewitness mentions the cursing, yet his account agrees almost verbatim with Yvo's.[38] The father and the rest of the witnesses do not mention the curse and Yvo is the only witness to mention the appearance of Saint Yves.[39]

This case reveals a tense familial relationship and apparent problems in adjusting to the surrounding values of household hierarchies and intra-familial interaction. In the medieval world, the power of the spoken word was strong. It was disgraceful to defame one's parents and especially disreputable, not to mention dangerous, to give a malediction to one's own child. In such a case, parents could be considered responsible if something bad happened to the child.[40] However, the effectiveness of the curse testifies that Yvo had internalised the ideal hierarchies: his mother's words could truly render him to the Devil. When things went wrong in parent-child relations defamations and maledictions were a way to resolve conflicts, to gain or maintain authority. Demonic possession was a way to interpret such a situation. This case illuminates other kinds of hierarchies as well. No matter what kind of power the parents may have held over their children, the heavenly intercessor's power also ruled over them.

Children's fears, children's agency

Christina, a daughter or Laurencius Coppirin or Topperin was possessed already in her early years. In addition to possession, she often saw different kinds of demons. They frightened her, appearing in the forms of a horse, dog, wolf, and a snake and also in the form of a twelve-year old boy.[41] Apparently, these were the fears of a young girl, which were later interpreted to be appearances of demons. Big animals like a horse or a dog, even when domesticated, may have been frightening for a little girl. Warnings about the dangers to be found in the wild, such as beasts like wolves and snakes, were undoubtedly uttered to children for their safety's sake. Moreover, experiences of older, envious and teasing children may have been rather common for medieval children.

Similarly, six-year old Helena was tormented by a horrible black chicken lying in an oven of her parents' house. Whenever she went by the oven, she was terribly anguished.[42] It is possible that the Devil in a form of a chicken sitting in the oven reflects the fears a young child had of a burning oven, which may have been aggravated by

the repeated warnings of her parents. Nonetheless, according to the depositions, the seizures shook her in church and in public places as well. According to a priest called Laurencius, Helena was vowed by friends to Saint Katherine of Sweden. Then she was cured.

The torments of Christina Topperin were not over so quickly. Her parents tried to cure her, but apparently resorted to the use of a bad medicine. They called in sorcerers (*incantatrix* and *incantator*) yet her situation only became worse. After their first try at curing her, Christina started to see animal-shaped demons and a demon in a form of a boy appeared after the incantations were performed a second time. She was tormented in her childhood, but became even more fiercely possessed just after her wedding. Eventually, after a year of torment, she was cured with the help of her husband at the shrine of Saint Bridget. This case too was recorded by the local clergy at the shrine of Bridget and later added to the canonization process.

In these cases parental influence turned out to be harmful. Despite their apparent good intentions, the result was damaging. The parents may have brought about the possession either by not instructing their children properly or by giving bad advice. To have a demon in the body of one's child undoubtedly caused moments of confusion and great fear. Moreover, the situation and daily life may have been intolerable within the household. Children who were raving mad could be a danger to themselves as well as to their family. Thus Guenureta became furious and mad when she was twelve and had to be tied up. However, her parents did not abandon their child. Her father led her to the shrine of Saint Yves where she recovered.[43]

We encounter an even more violent child-demoniac at the shrine of William of Norwich in the latter half of the twelfth century. The son of Richard of Nedham was tied down, but the possessing demon tormented him so badly that seven men could hardly hold him. His parents tried to take him to the shrine but the malevolent spirit resisted forcefully and ripped off the ties. The boy was so violent that he pushed his mother to the ground and sunk his teeth into her throat nearly killing her. The crowd of spectators managed to rescue the mother at the last moment.[44]

Even though some of the possessed children that we have encountered were small infants, all of them were baptised, thus protected against the evil by a sacrament, although there is no mention of rite of confirmation.[45] The majority of children seem to have been of 'rational age'. However, no direct accusations against children can be found, despite the fact that the child's own agency played a significant role in some of the proceedings.

Complexity of religious pondering and positioning oneself within the society can be found in the miraculous delivery of Ponce, a girl of ten years. She was possessed while playing with other girls, when she found a rag covered with blood. She insisted that it was the blood of Jesus, despite her mother's denial. She took the rag to the local church. The same day she went out of her mind, speaking foolish words that were not worth listening to, according to her father. She claimed that she was not the daughter of her mother and father, but of royal lineage. Not only did she deride her own domestic background in words, but she also ripped her clothes and damaged things in the house of her family.[46]

In the church Ponce wanted to sit with the priests, claiming authority within the religious sphere too. She had to be tied down. Her father made vows to saints, but in

vain, and her condition lasted for three years. Then the mother and father took Ponce to the shrine of Saint Louis and prayed there humbly and devotedly. Finally, she was cured. However, subsequently her behaviour and social position remained somewhat unusual. After her torment she was so pious that she did not eat meat on Wednesdays and fasted on Fridays, while on Saturdays she ate only bread and water; in addition, she frequented the church and masses and did not want to hear anything about getting married.

The miracle collection that includes the case of Ponce is based on the lost canonization records. The case was apparently based on the father's deposition, so it is his point of view that is seen. Ponce is not labelled demoniac as such, nor is there any mention of possessing spirits, even though her father mentions delivery and protection against evil, *Die le defendist de mal*. The father talks about malady and Ponce is depicted as mentally ill rather than possessed.

Sharon Farmer reads the case of Ponce as an example a mental crisis hitting a girl coming of age but refusing to accept her future role as a wife. Sylvia Huot, on the other hand, argues that Ponce 'rejects the basis of her socially constructed identity.' According to her, Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, the compiler of the miracle collection, was using the figure of Ponce to construct a portrait of madness as a confusion of identity, a failure to respect the categories of difference. Likewise, Sharon Farmer interprets the bloody rag as a symbol of sexuality while Sylvia Huot reads it in a religious context, as an obsession with the Eucharist.[47] The whole episode began when the rag was found between Easter and Pentecost.

Sylvia Huot sees the case of Ponce as a literary construction and Ponce herself as a constructed protagonist used by the compiler of the miracle collection to serve other ends and messages. Sharon Farmer, on the other hand, is more interested in finding the lived experiences of poor people to be found in miracle collections and canonization records. Yet she does not belittle the impact of the clerical author, but sees the case as representing clerical views on the sexuality of lower class women. Indeed, the case of Ponce is not merely a construction of Guillaume, the compiler of the miracle collection, since the perspective of the father is clearly stated. Nevertheless, requirements of the hagiographic genre and clerical authorities investigating and recording miracles have undoubtedly had an effect on the way the case is told and written down.

This case can also be analysed in the context of family relations and the socialization processes of a child. The child's activity is not seen in a positive light: Ponce's actions were disruptive and she threatened the functionality of the household. Ponce's own actions led to the illness, at least according to the father's explanation. Her mother tried to protect her, instructing her to forget about the rag and not carry it to the church. The problems started when Ponce did not obey maternal authority. Even though Ponce stated that she was protesting against her social position, the actual deeds were done against her own family.

However, this case cannot be seen as a failure in the socialization process: quite the contrary. The parents' efforts and devotion finally brought delivery at the shrine of Saint Louis. Moreover, Ponce's actions may have been brought upon by her father's acts and wishes. At the end of the narrative Guiarz, the father, explained how he had always wanted to be something else: he felt that his social position was not good enough, his house was small and he had always wanted to be rich. While at the tomb of Saint Louis

he prayed that the saint would free him from these desires. Guiarz, too was liberated at the shrine just as Ponce was. Thus, even though Ponce's actions created a serious problem within the household and they did not fit with the accustomed modes of behaviour, she may have internalised the wishes and values of her father. She belittled her social position, like her father, but found a personal way to express similar wishes – wishes that were not approved by the surrounding community. She was not a passive object but evaluated the values and performances of others. In the end, she seems to have adjusted herself to another kind of social role, that of a pious and devoted virgin, which was a position highly appreciated in the medieval world.

Earthly hierarchies and the combat of cosmological powers

Demonic possessions of children were closely interlinked to problems and social processes within the family. Similarly, these problems were regularly solved by parental intervention. This was not the case always, however. For example, Petrus Gedde, a boy of ten from the diocese of Lincopensis, Linköping, had been tormented by a demon for six years. He sought relief at the shrine of Saint Bridget, apparently on his own initiative, as no parental activity is mentioned. There, however, the possessing demon made him suffer even more. It made him prostrate on the ground before the chapel. He was lying on his back, staring at the sky with eyes that could not see anything. He stretched his arms and legs out in the form of a cross, pushing them firmly to the ground. His stomach was so swollen that it seemed to have risen up to his chest and even to the chin. The stomach was also so big that it seemed as if it was full of muscle, but occasionally it was so withdrawn that it looked as if he had no intestines at all. Often the middle of the body was raised up and they boy remained with back arched, *stetit incurvatus*, resting upon his head and heels.[48]

A very down to earth explanation of these symptoms is that it may actually have been tetanus, a bacterial infection that is quite common in unhygienic environments. It is dangerous but not always fatal. It causes muscular spasms and the arching of the body, as described above, is a typical symptom in severe cases. Lack of medical knowledge may have been the reason to interpret such cases as demonic possession. In medieval Scandinavia there were not very many university students focusing on medicine. *Doctor* or *cirurgicus* are very rarely mentioned in the Scandinavian sources, by contrast with the depositions collected in Italian cities, for example. Many people living in the countryside did not have access to university-trained physicians.[49]

When Petrus had lain outside the chapel for a week, one night a demon in a form of a black dog appeared, touched him and said, 'come out, dear friend, otherwise we will soon make a scandal.' Then a huge snake exited from the boy's mouth, transmuted into a goat and sped to the well of the monastery. These may well be the products of a child's imagination, but the origin of these interpretations fitted into the more general cultural assumptions about demonic transmutations.[50] Moreover, these proceedings were investigated and approved by the clergy. Petrus's case was also recorded by a local priest and later added to the actual canonization process. According to the record, priests, nobility and *multiis alijs personis fidedignis* testified in this case, but we do not know whether they claimed to be eyewitnesses to the delivery. This demonstrates that

even if the snake and demonic transmutations could have been invented by the ten-year-old boy, they and the message they conveyed were considered appropriate and important. Apparently the participants, including the local clergy, approved the details described above: after all, they accorded to the culturally held assumptions of demonic powers and testified to the triumph of divine powers and the position of Saint Bridget in the celestial hierarchy.

The approach of the inquisitorial committee affected the outcome of the canonization proceedings. In canonization hearings under tight clerical control, cases of demonic possession seem to be lacking. For example, there were no cases of delivered demoniacs in the canonization process of Thomas Cantilupe. In this hearing the commissioners were highly educated in canon law. For example, in the case of Editha, the wife of Robertus, a clear separation between mental illness and demonic possession was made. The majority of the witnesses stated that they did not know whether Editha was possessed or raving mad, while Gilbertus, the official of Hereford cathedral, assumed that possession was the reason for her fury.[51] Editha's husband also thought that she was possessed by a spirit, yet he did not report seeing her doing anything under the power of malevolent spirits.[52]

The above kind of distinction cannot be found in other processes consulted here. Labels like *demens*, *amens* and *demoniacus/a* were used interchangeably, also in cases of children.[53] Generally, raving madness, demonic possession and occasionally even epilepsy were overlapping, if not synonymous, categories during the Middle Ages. In the miracle collections they were often collected under the same heading, even though these phenomena were not (completely) interchangeable.[54]

The need to separate these occurrences from each other was evident and 'fury' became more clearly a medical condition in the later Middle Ages. Simultaneously, the number of possession cases decreased in the canonization records. The reason for the decrease may have been the clerical authorities' intention to clarify the distinction between demonic possession and mental disturbance. Demonic possession and exorcism miracles were difficult to define and such cases were omitted. Thus possessions are absent, especially in processes under strict clerical control.[55]

Possession cases reflect the vulnerability of children. The majority, if not all, the child-victims were considered to be innocent victims. The possession took place suddenly without evident personal guilt and children needed the help of their parents and a heavenly intercessor.[56] Obviously, all the victims – whether children or adults, men or women – were in a submissive position in relation to the tormenting spirit and, more importantly, to the divine power. Yet there were differences among the victims, too. The innocence of the victim seems to have been a clear distinguishing element when comparing adult and child victims in cases of spirit possession. Even though the majority of adults were no more directly to blame for the possession than the children, there are exceptions to this. Blaspheming against the saintly candidate was quite often the cause of subsequent possession in cases of adults. This was typical for adults with some kind of elevated position in society.

An example of the above is Johannes Karoli, a vicar of Skänninge, who became mad and saw a multitude of big black dogs after blaspheming against all saints and especially Nicolaus of Linköping. A noble man Hans Smek was possessed after defiling Saint Bridget, while a citizen Katherina was possessed after taking part in dances, *chorea*,

during lent.[57] The case of Katherina is clearly linked with personal sin and quilt. The cases of Johannes Karoli and Hans Smek can be categorized as punishing miracles: the possessed offended the saint and thus brought about their own torment.

Demons were active participants in this world and dangerous and powerful adversaries to Christians. Saints, however, also held power over them. In the theological context, possession miracles manifested the eternal struggle of good and evil, and the victory of the divine powers. The heavenly intercessors had the ability to command malevolent spirits to punish offenders, yet their *virtus* also expelled the demons from humble and devoted petitioners. The bodies of the possessed, children and adults alike, were battlefields of the cosmic powers. From this perspective possessed children were not on the margins but at the centre of surrounding society. They were not 'lesser adults' but full Christians helping to establish the hierarchy of cosmological powers.

Conclusions

Miracles were essential elements in medieval culture and principal manifestations of the relationship between heaven and earth. The exorcism miracles were classical elements in manifesting charisma. Nevertheless, they are not among the most typical, and cases of child victims are rare. The paucity of child demoniacs testifies to the fact the children only rarely caused such anxiety and disruption in the community that their activities were labelled as spirit possession.

The category 'demonic possession' was value-laden and interlinked with interpretations of inexplicable conduct. It reflects the standards of proper behaviour. Demonic possession was a disruption and a moment of great stress and fear within the household. Therefore, these cases also enlighten the processes of socialization and especially the problems within the household. However, only rarely were the children themselves, their agency or their independence to blame. More often cases of demonic possession reveal parental anxiety: their helplessness when trying to protect their children and their fears about their own power in relation to their children's wellbeing and future. Parents were considered active agents in the process of socialization, and as a result they also bore the responsibility to accomplish it and took the blame for its failure.

Among possessed demoniacs we find small infants and adolescents about to start their independent adult life. Similarly, both girls and boys could be possessed by a malign spirit. Yet in the majority of the cases consulted here the victim was a girl. Nevertheless, it would be too hasty to define demonic possession as a feminine phenomenon, since all the collections contain examples of possessed adult males as well. This may simply mean that parents were less tolerant of unsuitable behaviour in their daughters than in their sons. The proper conduct was important – and gendered. Docility was part of idealized femininity.[58] Apparently aggression and violence was a bigger violation of norms for girls than for boys.

Some cases of demonic possession reflect tense familial relationships as well as attempts to explain and solve them. Similarly, they may illuminate parental frustration when facing a failed socialization process. Occasionally, as in Yvo's and Ponce's cases, the parents may have failed at some level in the duty of enculturation to the generally accepted norms. However, both of these cases testify to adapted and accepted norms as

well. Ponce was actually very active in adapting and modifying her father's wishes. In a way Yvo was rebelling against maternal authority, yet he had internalized it as well. After all, it was the power of maternal words that rendered him to the Devil. Thus: hierarchies of both secular society and the supernatural world are emphasised in the cases of demonic possession.

Children's position within those hierarchies could vary. In cases consulted here, children were innocent victims. They did not make the possession happen by blaspheming, for example. From this perspective, children can be deemed to be morally superior to adults. However, the possessed children were adult-like in their vulnerability. Their innocence did not protect them from this kind of spiritual torment. Researchers, both historians and anthropologists, claim that demonic possession is a phenomenon more likely to happen to the more marginal members of society. The social background of these children is not always clearly stated. They did not belong to the nobility, but they were not utterly poor either, with the possible exception of Petrus Gedde, in which case the possessed children could not be deemed to belong to the cultural or social margins in terms of their origin.

What of the future of the possessed. Did the demonic possession create a new, permanent and marginal identity for them? Were they Devil children for the rest of their lives? Apparently, spirit possession did not affect their identities permanently. For example, the parents of little Cristina hesitated quite a while before they made a vow to Saint Bridget, and again before they fulfilled it. Demonic possession was not so dangerous a condition that it completely interrupted everyday life or put aside the requirements of daily living. The possessed child was not abandoned either. After the cure at the time of the hearing little Cristina was shown to the commissioners and was recorded to be in good physical and mental health. Similarly, Petrus Gedde and the cursed Yvo regained their senses so that they could be personally interrogated about their torments.

We do not know very much of the future engagements and positions of the children that had once been possessed. Yet the little we know indicates that after successful exorcism by the heavenly intercessor they returned to their former lives. The stigma of association with an unclean spirit did not follow them for the rest of their lives. The problems in the process of socialization were correctable. However, the possessed were in a liminal state, since possession was obviously not a normal condition. But precisely because of this liminality they were at the focus of their society. The exorcism by divine powers at the shrine of a saint was in the interest of the community. From the theological perspective they fulfilled the role intended for them: they, as devout Christians, helped to maintain the proper order of the world and manifest God's grace. In the social context their experiences delineated the community's considerations of proper conduct and marked out social order: the process of socialization had not gone astray for good.

Abbreviations

Acta et processus	*Acta et processus canonizacionis Beate Birgitte,* 1924–1931. Collijn, I. (ed.) (Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet ser 2. Latinska Skrifter, Band 1) Uppsala : Almqvist & Wiksells boktryckeri Ab.
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
Con. Lat. IV	Concilium Lateranense IV, 1962. In Alberigo, J., Joannou, P., Leonardi, C., Prodi, P. (eds.) *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum decreta*. Freiburg: Herder.
DM	Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, 1966 (1851). Strange, J. (ed.). Ridgewood: The Gregg Press Inc.
Nicholas	*Il processo per la canonizzazione di s. Nicola da Tolentino,* 1984. N. Occhioni O.S.A. (ed.) Roma: Padri Agostiniani di Tolentino, École française de Rome.
MEFRM	Mélanges de l'École française de Rome
Processus canonizacionis	*Processus canonizacionis beati Nicolai Lincopensis*. 1963. Lundén, T. (ed.). Stockholm: Bonniers boktryckeri.
Processus seu negocium	*Processus seu negocium canonizacionis B. Katerine de Vadstenis,* 1942–46. Collijn, I. (ed.) (Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet ser 2. Latinska Skrifter, Band III) Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells boktryckeri Ab.
Saint Louis	Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Les miracles de Saint Louis*, 1931. Fay, P. (ed.) Paris: Libraire ancienne honoré champion.
SRS II	Vita s. Brynolphi Episc. Scarensis cum processu eius canonizationis, 138–185, 1876. *Scriptores rerum Svecicarum medii aevii* II:2. Uppsala: Zeipel et Palmblad.
William	Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*, 1896. Jessopp A. and James M. R. (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Yves	Enquête pour la canonisation de saint Yves (édifié à Tréguer en l'an 1330) 1887. In de la Borderie, A. J. D., Perquis, R. F. and Temper, D. (eds.) *Monuments originaux de l'histoire de Saint Yves.* Saint Brieuc : L. Prud'homme.

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Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

MS Vat. Lat. 4015	*Inquisitio de fide, vita et moribus et fama et miraculis recolende memorie domine Thome de Cantilupo quondam episcope dicte ecclesie Herefordensis*
MS Vat. Lat. 4025	*Liber canonizationis domini Karoli ducis Britannie*
MS Vat. Lat. 4027	*Rubrice examinaciones er recollectiones sumpte de processu inquisitione miraculis*

Printed sources

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Notes

[1] *Mulier quaedam in Briseke satis crudeliter hoc angore vexabatur. Hanc diabolus cum esset quinquennis hoc ordine intravit. Die quadam cum lac manducaret pater eius iratus dixit : diabolum comedas in ventrem tuum. Mox puellula sensit eius ingressum et usque at maturam aetatem ab illo vexata*. DM, V, 26.

[2] Jansen 2000, 22–3.

[3] Brown 1982, 106–13; Sigal 1985, 238 and Finucane 1995, 107–8. The cure could also be sought by exorcism done by the priest or by the laity. See Krötzl 1994, 257–8.

[4] On demons and popular religion in the Middle Ages in general, see Gurevich 1988.

[5] Lucifer had been an angel but was cast out of heaven due to the sin of pride. Therefore demons were part of the spiritual realm and possessed knowledge of spiritual things. *Con. Lat. IV, cons 1.*

[6] *De eo quod demones sint, quod multi sint, quod mali sint et hominibus infesti.* DM V, 1. Caesar was a monk and later a prior of the monastery of Heisterbach. He compiled altogether thirty–seven books; 'Dialogues on miracles' was written around 1219–1223. It was primarily intended to be a guidebook for the novices of the Cistercian order. However, it became quite popular and spread widely in circles outside the order, including among the laity. In the 15th century it was translated into German. In his treatise Caesar combined learned perspectives with more popular notions of religion. *Dialogus Miraculorum* is assumed to reflect quite uncritically the general perceptions of the era and it is also called 'a treasure-chest of medieval folklore'. Langosch 1955, 6, McGuire 1982, 34–7 and Finucane 1995, 51.

[7] *Non potest esse diabolus in anima humana... Cum diabolus dicitur esse in hominem, non intelligendum est de anima, sed de corpore, quia de concavitatibus eius et in visceribus ubi stercora continentur, et ipse esse potest.* DM V, 15. On other examples of tormenting spirit being in the body see Nicholas, testis XXII, 141–2. See also Nicholas testis XX, XXI, CXXIII, CXXIV, CXXV and CXXVI.

[8] *Me egresso, nunquan aliud post hanc vitam sentiet purgatorium.* DM V, 26. Nevertheless, opposing views were known already in late Antiquity. For example, Origen claims that excessive joy, sorrow or love opened minds of people for demons to gain lodgement; intemperance being an important element in this process. Kelly 1968, 35.

[9] Almond 2004, 43–5 and 71–4. The categorisation in general became stricter and the importance of discerning the possessing spirit as either good, *i.e.* divine inspiration, or bad, *i.e.* demonic possession, became more important during the fifteenth century. Caciola 2003, 79–129. See also Fraioli 2000 and Ferber 2004, 116–7. *Cf.* Bailey 2001, 960–90.

[10] On contrasting views on the community's considerations of female demoniacs' positions and opportunities, see Newman 1998, 753–62 and Caciola 2000, 268–306. *Cf.* Kieckhefer 1996, 318.
[11] On the evolution of canonization practices, see Kemp 1948. Papal prerogative was first announced by the Pope Alexander III in 1171 while the *Liber Extra* of Pope Gregory IX in 1234 further determined canonization as papal privilege. Paciocco 2006. On historiography of the study of canonization processes, see Katajala-Peltomaa 2010.
[12] However, even the opening of a canonization inquiry required, in addition to proof of an impeccable life and posthumous miracles by the candidate, a lot of time, money, effort and promotion, as well as support from allies. As a result, the communities and devotees might well be unable to pursue canonization. On costs and efforts, see Finucane 1995, 36–8. Kleinberg 2004, 7–18.
[13] Other officials active in the interrogation were local proctors. Their task was to co-operate with the commissioners, to open the process, and to gather the witnesses at a suitable time and place to testify. The notaries were similarly important figures in the formation of canonization records. Their task was to write the testimonies down. They translated the vernacular oral testimony of the witnesses to the written Latin deposition found in the records. Notaries guaranteed for their part the judicial reliability of the process. On the practicalities of hearings, see Vauchez 1988, 39–67; also Krötzl 1998, 119–40.
[14] Canon law was not explicit concerning the organising of canonization hearings. No clear rules or norms for the practicalities of them were given in the major compilations. Considerations of gender, age and reputation were important aspects in the process of validation of witnesses. The mentally ill were forbidden to give testimony and preference was supposed to be given to the wealthy rather than the poor in the selection. Wetzstein 2004, 64–8 and Krötzl 1998, 119–40.
[15] On methodological aspects in reading canonization processes, see Andrić 2000, 228–34, Smoller 1998, 429–54 and Mariani 1996, 259–319, Lett 2008, 234–5. On hagiography as source material and the requirements of this genre, see Clark 2004, 156–85, Lett 2001, 201–16 and Lifshitz 1994, 96–113.
[16] On socialization, see Handel 2006. On children's agency and activity in this process, James, Jenks and Prout 2001 and Corsaro and Molinari 2001, especially 197.
[17] Relationships within the family, genealogies and education, among other matters, have been the key themes of scholars of the 'post-Ariès era'.See, for example, Ariès 1960, Hanawalt 1986, Krötzl 1989, Krötzl 1994, Goodich 1995, Lett 1997, Finucane 2000, Orme 2001, Classen 2005, Mustakallio, Hanska, Sainio, and Vuolanto 2005, Rosenthal 2007 and Katajala-Peltomaa 2009. On historiography, see Dasen, Lett, Morel and Rollet 2001, Hanawalt 2002, Haas and Rosenthal 2007, Hanawalt 2009 and Katajala-Peltomaa and Vuolanto 2009.
[18] On feminine spirituality and the community's response, see for example Mooney 1999 and Elliott 2004. On female physiology and spirit possession, see Elliot 1999, 37–45. Anthropologists have recently shown a keen interest in themes like spirit possession, see for example Keller 2002. At the beginning of the Early Modern Era spirit possession was considered to be a particularly feminine phenomenon. Caciola 2003, 79–129, Fraioli 2000 and Ferber 2004.
[19] Lett 1997, 100. Also Proverbs XXII: *"Stultitia conligata est in corde pueri"*, folly is bound up in the heart of a child. On negative Christian views on childhood, see MacLehose 2006, chapter 2.
[20] Lett 1997, 66 and 83.
[21] Lett 1997, 88–9, 100–1 and 114. *Cf.* Orme 2001, 217–20. On children and original sin, see especially MacLehose 2006, chapter 2.
[22] *Cf.* Holloway and Valentine 2000, 1–26
[23] *Cf.* Rosenthal 2007, 1–11.
[24] Acta et processus, 176–7.
[25] Gurevich 1988, 22.
[26] According to some estimates, infant mortality varied between 30 and 50 percent in the Middle Ages, see Hanawalt 2002, 440–60.
[27] *Homo quidam iratus, sicut audivi a quodam Abbate, dixit filio suo: Vade diabolo. Quem mox diabolus rapuit, et nusquam comparuit. .. Utrumque fieri permisit Deus propter exemplum, .. et in raptu filii, patris dolores, animi sui furorem cohibeant et a stultiloquio linguas compescant.* DM V, 12.
[28] *dictamque uxor sua dicit se credere ipsum esse sanctum, et ipsam vocabat sanctum carolum, testis iste dictam suam uxorem, Matheam nomine, increpavit, dicendo predicte uxori sue ista verba, Mathea vos potestis habere devotionem apud ipsum dominum Carolum, et eumdem orare in secreto. Sed cautatis ne ipsum in publico vocetis sanctum Carolum, donec canonizatus fuit, quia per hec postmodum multum dampnisicari, et per officialis reprehendi, et forsan non est sanctus, nec credere debemus quod sit sanctus quosque per ecclesiam fuit approbatus. Iuratus quod huiusmodi infirmitas*

accidit dicte filie pro eo quod increpavatur dictam uxorem suam ut supra deposuit, et eciam pro eo quod pluros alios, qui vocabant dictum dominum carolum sanctum. BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4025, ff. 99r.

[29] *Accidit quod quodam die mensis ottobris anno domini millesimo ccclxviii ulterio preterito de qua non recolit, dicta deponens .. crediderat, et dixerat, et quod ipsum sanctum credebat, et crederet in futura. Super quo dictus maritus ipsam increpavit non credens quod ipse dominus Carolus sanctus existeret, ut dicebat. Et eadem die in sero dum dicti coniuges vellent intrare lectum, .. et statim dicta filia ingenti apprehensa dolore quasi magnum timore, perterrita incepit clamare fortiter .. dicens domina mea domina mea nescio quis vult me capire gallico: madame, madame, ne say qui me veult prendre, et gemebat grossiorem anelitum et velociorem emittens quam solita erat facere, et ad instar furiose insurgebat adversuss matre suam predictam, que ipsam acceperat et tenebat inter brachia sua et insiliebat contra eam quasi demens timore et morbo validis exacta et compulsa ut modus et gestas ipsius demostrabant.* BAV MS: Vat. Lat. 4025 ff. 99v.

[30] See Katajala-Peltomaa 2009, 247–56.

[31] Vauchez 1988, 39–67.

[32] Klaniczay 2000, 109–35.

[33] *..dolore commota vocavit dictum maritum suum qui viso modo dicte iuventule dixit valde turbatus quod si dicta iuventula esset talis etatis quod posset sensu perservari ipsam vesandam et dementem iudicarent.* BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4025 f. 99v. Some Christian authors claimed that the years of discretion began at the age of seven while others argued for puberty. Mac Lehose 2006, chapter 2.

[34] BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4025 f. 99v.

[35] *Es tu ille qui diffamasti me et debuisses dimittere alios prius loqui? Deinde dicta mater, flexis genibus et extractis mamillis suis de sinu, dixit hec verba Ego do tibi maledicciones meam, et maledicciones mamillarum istarum quas suxisti, et maledicciones viscerum meorum que te portaverunt, et quicquid juris habeo in te et habere possum, et quicquid peperi de te totum trado et concedo dyabolo. . . Et iterum sanctus Yvo dixit : « Ne timeas, quia tu fuistis in lunedi preterita ad sepulchrum meum et vocaris nomine meo ; et ideo veni ad salvandum te ; nam mater tua non poterat te dare dyabolo, quia nichil juris habebat in te plus quam habet saccus in frumento quod portatur in eo ad moledinum. »Et hiis dictis predicti demonis disparuerunt. »* Yves, testis CXC, 257–8. *Cf.* Boureau 2004a, 159–61 who argues for the judicial preciseness of the malediction. In Early Modern France possessed children were typically cursed by their parents, thus blameless. See Ferber 2004, 116–7. The phenomenon of parents cursing their children was well enough known for stories to have been written as warnings during the Middle Ages. Orme 2001, 83.

[36] Orme 2001, 83–5 and Lett 1997, 172–8 and 219–22. *Cf.* Kline 2007, 108–23.

[37] *Sicut proprie peperi te, sic vooveo te sancto Yvoni*. Yves testis LXXIII, 143–4. *Proprie* meaning in its proper sense, 'exclusively'.

[38] Yves, testis CXCI, 259–60.

[39] Typically, those who knew of apparitions within miraculous cures were those closest to the beneficiaries who took an interest in the case, see Katajala-Peltomaa 2009, 256–62 and 267–70. Presumably Yvo had not discussed the matter with his father, or they disagreed on the mother's role in the affliction.

[40] Lett 1997, 68–9, where there is also an example of continuous crying as a reason for a parent's anger and malediction of an infant. *Cf.* Boureau 2004a, 159–62.

[41] *..postea vidit eum in teterrimis formis diversorum animalium se terrencium, videlicet equorum, luporum, canum et serpentum et huiusmodi. .. tunc aperuit ei ut puer teterrimus duodecim annorum et percuciebat eam sine misericordia eo, quod plenus sit invidia.* Acta et processus, 120.

[42] *Sed cum ab eo et multis aliis interrogata fuisset, cur taliter cruciaretur, tunc ipsarespondit, quod in fornace parentum suorum sedet una nigra gallina horribilis et quociens ipsa de fornace egreditur, tociens dixit se ab eadem terribiliter cruciari.* Processus seu Negocium, 196–7.

[43] Yves, testis LXI, 131–2.

[44] William, 203–4.

[45] Lett 1997, 88–9, 100–1 and 114. Sacrament of confirmation was literally confirmation of baptism and thus a reinforcement against malign powers. The age at the time of the rite varied greatly according to time and place during the Middle Ages. *Cf.* Orme 2001, 217–20 on contrasting views on children's innocence, and on age of rite of confirmation, 123–4.

[46] Saint Louis, 94–6.

[47] Farmer 2002, 132–3 and Huot 2003, 23–6. *Cf.* Lett 1997, 240–1.

[48] Acta et Processus, 142.

[49] For similar symptoms in other victims defined as possessed, see Acta et Processus, 130 (*puella adolescente*) and 176–7 (*Cristina infans duorum annorum*), SRS II, 144 (*quidam infans quatuor annorum etatem habens*). Finucane 2000, 95–6 argues that a doctor's care was sought for children twice as often in the southern parts of Europe

than in the north. Moreover popular, ecclesiastical and medical modes of healing were to some extent linked and occasionally hardly distinguishable from each other. See, for example Park 1998, 129–49. See also McVaughn 1993, 46–8, Nuorteva 1997 and Katajala-Peltomaa 2009, 119–22.

[50] See for example DM V. Caesar of Heisterbach had dedicated a whole chapter in his treatise to demons and their activities and performances.

[51] *Item requisitus si dicta mulier erat arepticia sive demoniaca dixit se nescire nec ex qua causa paciebatur furorem* BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4015 f. 214^{r}. Others assumed that Editha was not possessed *…nec erat arepticia sed frenetica.* F. 216^{v}. Gilbertus: *…sed credit quod esset arepticia*. BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4015 f. 212^{v}. He also uses the word *furia*.

[52] *…credit quod fuit arepticia sed tamen non vidit quod portaretur nec mutaretur de loco ad locum nec quod fecerit aliquem actum ex potencia malignorum spirituum*. BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4015 f. 215^{v}.

[53] Processus canonizacionis, 294, 366; Acta et Processus, 110, 138; SRS II, 169, Yves, testis CXC–CXCI, 258–60; BAV MS. Vat. Lat. 4025 ff 98^{v}–99^{v}, and Processus seu negocium, 113–14, 196–7.

[54] *de demoniacis invasacis seu evanitis et adrabicis liberatis* BAV MS Vat. Lat. 4027 ff. 27^{r}–29^{r}. *Cf.* Sigal 1985, 236–7.

[55] Vauchez 1988, 547–8. Boureau 2004b, 203–9 and 220–1.

[56] See, however, Lett 1997, 123–4 for examples of youths blaspheming and punishment miracles, albeit here without examples of demonic possession.

[57] Processus canonizacionis, 364 and Acta et Processus, 109–10 and 124–5.

[58] *Cf.* Philips 2003.

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