

MEDICINA NEI SECOLI  
ARTE E SCIENZA



GIORNALE DI STORIA DELLA MEDICINA  
*JOURNAL OF HISTORY OF MEDICINE*

Fondato da / *Founded by* Luigi Stroppiana

QUADRIMESTRALE / *FOUR-MONTHLY*

NUOVA SERIE / *NEW SERIES*

VOL. 23 - No 3

ANNO / *YEAR* 2011

Articoli/Articles

HOW DOES ONE DO THE HISTORY OF DISABILITY  
IN ANTIQUITY?  
ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF CASE STUDIES

CHRISTIAN LAES  
Free University of Brussels  
University of Antwerp

SUMMARY

*Exploring literary sources from the first century BCE up to the eleventh century CE, this article demonstrates how the history of disabilities in antiquity can go further than just collecting 'interesting case histories'. Using a model developed by Michel Vovelle, the sources are interpreted on different levels, taking into account both the cultural context in which the text arose and the intentions of the author.*

*Introduction*

To date, the study of antiquity has hardly been a flourishing branch of the new and fashionable field of the history of disabilities. In general surveys, ancient Greece and Rome are often treated as societies which would not permit disabled infants to survive. Questions regarding infanticide and child exposure still seem to prevail – not least in the popular perception of antiquity.

There are many reasons for this 'backlog' of classical scholarship on matters of disability history. In fact, scholars' neglect of the subject is largely to be explained by the silence of the ancient authors who have traditionally been considered the main source for our knowledge of the ancient world. It is not only that these writers did not

*Key words:* History of disabilities – Antiquity – Vovelle

bother too much about mentioning the impaired; the absence of a concept of ‘handicap’ or ‘disability’ makes this a subject which was not recognized or problematized as such by the people of the period concerned. Of course, other approaches and sources have yielded interesting results. Comparative anthropology has proved to be a relevant research tool, while osteology and medicine have revealed interesting results and remarkable case histories. Juristic texts occasionally point to the living conditions of handicapped people, mainly the deaf-mute, blind or mentally impaired. And art historians have been occupied with identifying disabilities in depictions on various ancient artefacts<sup>1</sup>.

In this contribution, I will return to the literary sources, by exploring five stories which offer us more than the anecdotal asides which one encounters, on occasion, in ancient texts. At first sight, it may seem as if the passages concerned can offer the material ancient historians have been waiting for for so long, and through the lack of which they felt disadvantaged compared to historians of other periods. We are dealing with about case studies, sometimes produced by eye witnesses, which may give an insight into the psychology of the disabled and into the way witnesses viewed them. However, one should beware of taking these sources at face value. I will demonstrate how they can and should be read on different levels. Furthermore, we must take into account that we are actually transforming or ‘metamorphosizing’ the source evidence: our focus, the history of disability, was certainly not that of the authors. Literary and cultural conventions need to be reckoned with. Nevertheless, these texts were not purely literary games, and on different levels there are links with the societies in which they were written. Ultimately it will be seen, I hope, that an accurate reading of these literary artefacts is very rewarding. As such, these and similar texts will prove to be perhaps the most useful tools for ‘doing’ the history of disability.

*Titus Manlius Torquatus: disability and pietas*

In the year 362 BCE, Lucius Manlius Capitolinus Imperiosus was put on trial by Marcus Pomponius, a tribune of the plebs. One year earlier, he had been the first *dictator clavi figendi causa* of Rome, a function in which he performed the ceremony of driving a nail into the side wall of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Ides of September, as a way of reckoning the year in times when letters were not much in use<sup>2</sup>.

[2] *The people hated him for the severity of his levy, in which they had endured not only fines but bodily distress, some having suffered stripes for failure to respond to their names and others having been dragged off to prison; [3] but more than all else they hated the man's cruel disposition and his surname, Imperiosus, which offended a free state and had been assumed in ostentation of the truculence which he used as freely with his nearest friends and his own family as with strangers. [4] Amongst other charges the tribune cited the man's behaviour to his son: the youth, he said, had been found guilty of no misconduct, yet Manlius had excluded him from the City, from his home and household gods, from the Forum, the light of day, and the fellowship of his young friends, [5] consigning him to slavish drudgery in a kind of gaol or work-house, where a youth of distinguished birth and the son of a dictator might learn by his daily wretchedness how truly "imperious" was the father that had begot him. [6] Yes, but what was the young man's fault? Why, he had been a little slow of speech —unready with his tongue! But ought not his father to have healed and mended this infirmity of nature —if he had a particle of humanity about him —instead of chastising it and by persecution making it conspicuous? Why even the dumb brutes, if one of their young is unfortunate, do none the less cherish it and foster it. [7] But Lucius Manlius was aggravating his son's evil plight by evil treatment, and was doubling the burden on his heavy wits; and any spark of native talent that might be there he was quenching in the rustic life and boorish bringing up amongst the dumb cattle where he kept him.*

*(Livy 7, 4, 2-7, transl. B.O. Foster Loeb Classical Library)*<sup>3</sup>

The young son was undoubtedly a teenager (*filium iuvenem, iuvenis*) when he suffered from this parental maltreatment. Most likely, the

misconduct happened some years before the father's dictatorship in 363 BCE. In any case, the young man began his political career in 361, when he was appointed military tribune, which would probably make him around twenty-five years of age by then. It seems that a speech impediment (*quia infacundior sit et lingua impromptus*) was the cause of his earlier banishment, far away from the city of Rome, in a slaves' environment in the countryside, amid simple folk and cattle (*uita agresti et rustico cultu inter pecudes habendo*). Indeed, throughout human history, people with speech impediments have been associated with the mentally retarded (*tarditatem ingenii*). In the case of noble families, such children might be concealed in order to avoid shame and embarrassment by their public appearance (in the same way as the Julio-Claudian family would do their best to avoid young Claudius' performance in public)<sup>4</sup>. And yes, the clumsy utterances of the mute or the speech-impaired were equated with... cowish bellowing<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, public opinion did not approve of Manlius Imperiosus' behaviour. The way he treated his son is viewed as symptomatic of his lack of respect towards fellow-citizens, friends, and close family. It is not said what the other charges (*inter cetera*) were (though one may safely assume that it was about the "fines and bodily distress" mentioned in 7, 4, 2). Apparently, maltreatment of own offspring could function as the most efficient charge in trial, and therefore it is so explicitly elaborated upon. However, young Titus Manlius did not seem very pleased with the idea of his father being submitted to trial.

*Everyone was incensed by these charges, except the young man himself. He, on the contrary, was vexed to be the cause of additional dislike and accusation of his father; [2] and that all gods and men might know that he had rather help his father than his father's enemies, he conceived a plan, in keeping to be sure with his rude and uncouth spirit, which, though it set no pattern of civic conduct, was yet praiseworthy for its filial piety. [3] Without anybody's knowledge, he girded himself with a knife in the early morning, and*

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

coming to the City, made his way at once from the gate to the house of Marcus Pomponius, the tribune. There he told the porter that he must see his master instantly, and bade him say that it was Titus Manlius, the son of Lucius. [4] Being presently admitted —for it seemed likely that he was moved with wrath against his father, or was bringing some fresh charge or plan of action —he received and returned the salutation of his host, and then announced that there were matters of which he wished to speak to him without witnesses. [5] When they had all been sent away, he drew his knife, and standing over the tribune's couch with his weapon ready, he threatened that unless the man should swear, in the terms he himself should dictate, never to hold a council of the plebs for the purpose of accusing his father, he would immediately stab him. [6] The frightened tribune, seeing the blade flash in his face, and perceiving himself to be alone and unarmed, and the other to be a stalwart youth, and, what was no less terrifying, foolhardy by reason of his strength, took the oath that was required of him, and afterwards publicly declared that he had been compelled by force to relinquish his undertaking. [7] And the plebs, however much they would have liked to be given the opportunity to cast their votes in the case of so cruel and insolent a defendant, were yet not displeased that a son had dared such a deed in defence of his parent; and they praised it all the more, because the father's shocking harshness had made no difference in the son's filial devotion. [8] And so not only was the arraignment of the father dismissed, but the youth himself gained distinction from the affair; [9] for in the election of military tribunes for the legions, which had that year for the first time been resolved upon —until then the generals themselves had nominated them, as they do to-day those who are known as *Rufuli* —he was chosen second of the six, though neither at home nor in the field had he done aught to merit popularity, and no wonder, since his youth had been passed in the country, remote from the gatherings of men.

(Livy 7, 5, 1-9, transl. B.O. Foster Loeb Classical Library)<sup>6</sup>

Here, there is still a trace of the youth's possible mental retardation by long seclusion in the countryside (*consilium rudis quidem atque agrestis animi et quamquam non civilis exempli tamen pietate laudabile*). On the other hand, however, there is no sign of any possible impediment when he addresses the porter, received and returned the salutations of his host, and severely threatens the unfortunate tribune.

Moreover, after his heroic deed, the people of Rome did not hesitate to elect him a military tribune, which would have been very unlikely if they considered him dumb or retarded. The truth of the matter is that neither Livy nor his audience were concerned with questions regarding from which impairment the youth might have suffered or how he somehow coped with it. This is very much a story of piety and filial devotion. Unlike his father, the young man stuck to the virtue of *pietas*, a key-concept to Roman society. As such, he outshone his father by his virtuous behaviour.

Young Titus Manlius became one of the heroes of Republican Rome: three times a consul (in the years 347, 344 and 340 BCE) and three times a dictator (in 353, 349 and 320 BCE). His most well known feat dates from probably 360 BCE when, with the full approval of the dictator Titus Quinctius Poenus, he took up the challenge of fighting a giant Gaul. He decapitated his enemy and put the Celt's *torques* around his own neck, from which he gained his cognomen Torquatus<sup>7</sup>. As consul in 340 BCE, Titus Manlius Torquatus had his own son sentenced to death for insubordination: he fiercely attacked the enemy without the permission of his father. In other words: the reckless young man did exactly the opposite as his father did twenty years earlier, when he fought the giant Gaul with the full approval of his dictator. As a consequence, the harsh sentence uttered by Manlius Torquatus was in no sense a deviation from the pious behaviour he had himself shown towards his father. On the contrary, the act of sentencing his own son was a deed of both *pietas* and *iustitia*: as a bearer of *imperium*, he had to put the state's interests before familial ties or personal feelings<sup>8</sup>. In sum, it seems best to read Livy's narrative as an exemplum on *pietas* outshining personal sentiment or feelings: a son defending his father who had treated him badly, the very same son condemning his offspring to death since *pietas* required him to do so<sup>9</sup>. We also get glimpses of how popular opinion or morals viewed the facts, or at least how Livy imagined people would have reacted. They disapprove of a father

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

removing his seemingly retarded son to the countryside; they would have liked to teach that father a lesson by putting him on trial in court, but they respected the deed of the son in defence of his father; they were horrified at the dictator Manlius Torquatus' severe punishment of his son, but at the same time they respected it as an act of *pietas* par excellence. It would be both pointless and anachronistic to interpret the whole story as a narrative on disability and mental trauma, to explain Manlius' reckless behaviour in fighting the Gaul or his aggression towards his son as signs of the trauma of a neglected youth not being dealt with properly. On the other hand, this story at least reveals something about the history of disabilities: the shame aristocratic people experienced when their son in one way or another did not meet the requirements of the class, the way they tried to hide the shame of having such offspring, and the possibly deteriorating conditions to which such children were subjected in the countryside.

*Marcus Sergius Silus: Stoic virtue overcoming disability*

The remarkable exploits of Marcus Sergius Silus, praetor in 197 BCE, at first sight read as the story of a disabled war veteran overcoming traditional boundaries imposed on people suffering from a similar situation. Apart from some notes in Livy, the only extended literary account on Sergius Silus is to be found in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, more precisely in the middle section of the seventh book, a section dealing with the achievements of human maturity.

*In these cases it is clear that courage played a great part but fortune played a greater still. In my opinion at least, no one could justly rate any man higher than Marcus Sergius, even though his great-grandson Catiline detracts from the honour of the name. In his second campaign, he lost his right hand; in the course of two campaigns he was wounded twenty-three times with the result that he was partially crippled in both hands and both feet, his spirit alone remaining undiminished. Though a disabled soldier, he fought on through many subsequent campaigns. Twice he was captured by Hannibal (for it was*



*with no ordinary enemy that he was engaged), twice he escaped from captivity, although he was kept shackled hand and foot every day for twelve months. He fought four times with his left hand alone, and two horses he was riding were killed under him. [105] He had a right hand made for himself out of iron and, fighting with it tied on, he raised the siege of Cremona, defended Placentia, and captured twenty enemy camps in Gaul. All these incidents appear in the speech he made during his praetorship when his colleagues were trying to debar him from the sacrifices because of his infirmity. What piles of decoration would he have accumulated with a different enemy; [106] for it makes the greatest of differences in what historical circumstances each man's heroism occurs. What crowns did Trebia, Ticinus or Trasimenus bestow? What crown was won at Cannae where flight was the summit of courage? Others certainly have conquered men but Sergius conquered fortune also.*

*(Pliny NH 7, 104-106; transl. M. Beagon)<sup>10</sup>*

For those interested in the factual details of the history of disability, the detail on the artificial hand made out of iron is striking. Literary references to prosthetics in antiquity are very rare, and except for Sergius' case, it is always about wooden prosthetics<sup>11</sup>. Archaeology, ancient textual evidence and surgical practice till the First World War all present amputations in which the cut end of the bone was smoothed and covered as far as possible with skin<sup>12</sup>. Of course, we do not know whether Sergius' hand was amputated after battle, or during the fight itself<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, Sergius' exclusion from the sacrifices is a revealing detail. Note that he is not debarred from holding the praetorship. Restrictions on holding office by reason of disability seem to have been of strictly practical nature. A letter of Cicero from the year 61 BCE even mentions a lame tribune<sup>14</sup>. A passage from Ulpian states that the blind were able to retain their status as senators and that they might act as judges. When one became blind during office, he could keep his position but he was not allowed to proceed to a higher one<sup>15</sup>. For the same practical reasons, the deaf, dumb and mentally impaired were excluded from holding office or acting as judges<sup>16</sup>. Rather, Sergius

was being debarred from taking part in a sacrifice, undoubtedly connected to his office as a praetor. His inclusion would in any case have been in a rather passive role, since priests performed the actual rites. There is relatively little comparative evidence for disabled people being debarred from all participation in ritual. For practical reasons, this would have been difficult, given the fact that the numbers of the public suffering from a more or less disabling disease or injury might have been considerable<sup>17</sup>. Two centuries later, the young Claudius held some minor priesthoods and the augurate. Was it the fact that Sergius was bound to use his left hand that was considered a bad omen? Was there any personal animosity, which compelled his political opponents to discredit him? And was this made easier in an age of anxiety, in times of recent wars which had also introduced special expiatory rites for intersexuals only ten years earlier<sup>18</sup>?

Inevitably, the question of Sergius being debarred from holding offices leads one to read the story about his life on another level, one stage above the practicalities of the daily life of a person who suffered from mobility impairment, namely the level of popular morals and thoughts held by a larger part of the population. After all, some sources at least lead one to suppose that not all war veterans were treated with due respect, and that some of them who led a life of misery were subject to mockery or contempt<sup>19</sup>. In Plautus' *Curculio*, an imposter dishonestly claims respect for an apparent war wound. His listeners react cynically. In Cicero we read about a young man, Spurius Carvilius, who was ashamed to go out because of the crippling effect of a leg wound, whereas his mother exhorted him to remember his own bravery with each single step he took<sup>20</sup>. These popular reactions and conceptions fit very well in a society with a tendency to equate beauty and virtue, a trend already noticeable in classical art from the fifth century BCE on<sup>21</sup>. After all, the art of physiognomics, which claimed to derive people's inner characteristics by studying closely their outward appearances, was a very popular branch of science in the

early Empire. Even philosophers now and then resorted to it, such as Pythagoras who, according to one tradition, only accepted followers after close physiognomical examination, or some Stoics who studied the corporeality of human emotions<sup>22</sup>.

These considerations lead one to yet another level of interpretation of the Sergius story. Philosophically, it is well known that Pliny the Elder was in favour of Stoicism. Sections 100 to 130 of book 7 of his *Naturalis Historia* deal with examples of various kinds of *virtus*; sections 101 to 106 are especially concerned with military bravery or *fortitudo*. Here, the Sergius case acts as a *culmen*: whereas other have indeed been brave, they were also lucky, since fortune played a great part in their victories. Sergius, in fact, was the only one actually to conquer fortune! In Letter 66, the great Stoic philosopher Seneca had tackled the subject of the ugly, deformed or maimed body. According to Stoic thought, such bodies might very well be made beautiful by a virtuous soul. According to Seneca, it is not necessarily the case that virtue is more pleasing in a beautiful body (*Ep.* 66, 1). On the contrary, those who manage to show *virtus* in adversity deserve even more admiration. Quite tellingly, Seneca mentions the famous example of Mucius Scaevola, who deliberately burned his right arm after his failed attempt to assassinate the Etruscan king Lars Porsenna: he thus became a maimed war veteran, but was respected all over Rome for his bravery (*Ep.* 66, 49-53). In this respect, the Sergius example is even more Stoic than the Mucius Scaevola case. It is not just that Sergius compensated for the ugliness of his maimed body by his virtue in war, or that he was brave without being favoured by good fortune. To the ideal Stoic, rewards and ornaments of military and political office were in principle irrelevant to true moral happiness. Contrary to L. Siccus Dentatus and Manlius Capitolinus, Pliny's other examples in the catalogue of sections 101-106, there is no list of decorations Sergius acquired. On the contrary, with Sergius we get a suggestion of decorations he would have won if he would have fought in other wars. In an inconclusive ending,

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

we do not even get to know whether he won his struggle against the possibility of being debarred from political life. In the end, much more than an anecdote which may be relevant to the history of disabilities, this is a philosophical exemplum urging us not to judge a man's moral content by the criteria of worldly success; one may compare the Stoic hero Cato, for whom, according to Pliny's contemporary Lucan, "noble purpose is enough and virtue becomes no more virtuous by success"<sup>23</sup>.

*The monster of Bourges: Christianity and change?*

The next case story brings us to sixth-century Merovingian Gaul, a society with many features of what historians today call the early medieval period. Undoubtedly, writers and intellectuals of that period saw themselves as being part and heirs of the great Roman Empire and traditions, though at the same time they were firmly based in the Christian era. In this sense, these people lived in an important period of transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages. Gregory of Tours (538/9-594) is no doubt the most prolific author of his period, and his extended account of the miracles of Saint Martin contains a classic case which is most important from the point of view of the present article.

*At Bourges a woman gave birth to a son, whose knees were bent up to his stomach; his heels were fastened to his legs, his hands hugged his chest, and 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 mothers usually do. When he got older, 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. This went on for a long time, and when he reached the age of ten years, he arrived at Saint Martin's feast. He was left outdoors and lay in misery before the saint's tomb.*

*(De Virtutibus Sancti Martini 2, 24)<sup>24</sup>*

Once again, this story confronts us with valuable hints on the daily life and reality of a horribly disabled young child, who seems to have been severely crippled and blind. His inability to work did not take away the necessity of bringing in money, a task with which nearly all children of his time, with the exception perhaps of those of the upper classes, had to cope. Begging thus became the only solution. As in other instances with Gregory of Tours, age terminology seems to be flawed. The Latin *adultus* cannot refer to adulthood, since no one would label a child under ten as an “adult”, not even in late antiquity. Nevertheless, late antique evidence suggest that age ten was the age at which children were thought to be able to perform work in a profitable way<sup>25</sup>. The verb *decubabat* may refer to the ancient custom of incubation, where people saw the deity in their dreams and were given advice as to how to be healed, or immediately received healing. The mention of people paying to see the monster and of itinerants making profit from it is revealing of attitudes of derision and mockery, as well as of fascination for the disabled. These are attitudes which were present until well into the twentieth century in the western world (with siamese twins and other *mirabilia* being exposed in fairs), attitudes which have been softened somewhat by present-day political correctness, but by no means eradicated: witness the internet ‘hype’ regarding monsters and freak shows<sup>26</sup>. The text also suggests that it was inconceivable that mothers should kill even deformed children. One wonders whether this should be ascribed to wishful thinking on the part of Gregory of Tours. The Latin at least leaves the possibility of another, far more cruel interpretation<sup>27</sup>. In the whole story, there is no mention at all of the father. Is this omission to be explained by the fact that the father was simply 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 have enhanced her sin further? But then, why is this not mentioned? And might there be stress on “as mothers usually do” (*ut mos matrum est*), thereby deliberately con-

trusting the choices of mothers, who were closer to their offspring, with the decisions of fathers, who would have opted instead for killing the deformed infant? It has been stated 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 relating to *patria potestas*<sup>28</sup>. However, medievalists have depicted abandonment as a resort of the mothers. This passage in Gregory of Tours suggests either the mothers' power in difficult decision-making, or their possible opposition to paternal power.

This passage also shines light on the difficult and vexed question as to what change Christianity made in matters such as infant abandonment, exposure and infanticide. Recent research on the matter has accepted that Christians, at least in theory, recognised the inherent worth of each child as a child of God, and that for this reason they were opposed to abortion, exposure and infanticide, in the same way as the Jews were<sup>29</sup>. Whether this actually resulted in changed practice and the abolition of child abandonment is quite another question, one which has been answered very carefully in modern research. In fact, strong evidence points to child abandonment having been practiced throughout the Middle Ages, and undoubtedly many disabled children were left to die. The condemnation of exposure seems more a product of self-fashioning, opposing Christian practice to pagan custom<sup>30</sup>. In a way, we might also understand Gregory's miracle story of the monster of Bourges on this level: setting the good Christian habit of the mother caring for every single child apart from pagan habits which were still strong in Gregory's time, and against which he fought very often in his pastoral activity as a bishop.

Again, this story is open to other levels of interpretation. Indeed Gregory's 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. This particular

stress on sins committed on Sunday might be a peculiar theological issue of Gregory's era and region. The theme also occurs in Caesarius of Arles, and canonical law of the same period also imposed punishments for working on Sundays. Other ideas seem to have linked deformities with having sex during menstruation<sup>31</sup>.

*The mute boy and bishop John: praise the Lord!*

The Venerable Bede (673-735) is traditionally considered the last writer of antiquity before the beginning of the Carolingian age in Western Europe. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, one finds a case study which appears in every general history of deaf-muteness. It is a miracle story on how, in the year 685, the bishop St. John of Beverley cured a dumb man by blessing him.

*There was, in a village not far off, a certain dumb youth (adolescens mutus), known to the bishop, for he often used to come into his presence to receive alms, and had never been able to speak one word. Besides, he had so much scurf and scabs on his head, that no hair ever grew on the top of it, but only some scattered hairs in a circle round about. The bishop caused this young man to be brought, and a little cottage to be made for him within the enclosure of the dwelling, in which he might reside, and receive a daily allowance from him. When one week of Lent was over, the next Sunday he caused the poor man to come in to him, and ordered him to put his tongue out of his mouth and show it him; then laying hold of his chin, he made the sign of the cross on his tongue, directing him to draw it back into his mouth and to speak. "Pronounce some word," said he; "say yea," which, in the language of the Angles, is the word of affirming and consenting, that is, yes. The youth's tongue was immediately loosed, and he said what he was ordered. The bishop, then pronouncing the names of the letters, directed him to say A; he did so, and afterwards B, which he also did. When he had named all the letters after the bishop, the latter proceeded to put syllables and words to him, which being also repeated by him, he commanded him to utter whole sentences, and he did it. Nor did he cease all that day and the next night, as long as he could keep awake, as those who were present relate, to talk something, and to express his private thoughts and will to others, which he could never do before;*

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

*after the manner of the cripple, who, being healed by the Apostles Peter and John, stood up leaping, and that walked, and went with them into the temple, walking, and skipping, and praising the Lord, rejoicing to have the use of his feet, which he had so long wanted. The bishop, rejoicing at his recovery of speech, ordered the physician to take in hand the cure of his scurfed head. He did so, and with the help of the bishop's blessing and prayers, a good head of hair grew as the flesh was healed. Thus the youth obtained a good aspect, a ready utterance, and a beautiful head of hair, whereas before he had been deformed, poor, and dumb. Thus rejoicing at his recovery, the bishop offered to keep him in his family, but he rather chose to return home.*

*(Beda Venerabilis, Hist. Eccl. 5, 2;  
transl. L.E. King, Loeb Classical Library)<sup>32</sup>*

Once again, this is a fragment which seemingly resolves a lot of 'practical questions' on the existence of the mute in late Antiquity. A life of poverty and begging, often dependent on alms and charity, seems to have been their lot. A disfiguring skin disease undoubtedly enhanced the revulsion people felt towards the young man in question, and reinforced his status as an outcast in society. Note also that the youth seems to have had a home, to which he preferred to return once he was healed. Does this imply that he had been expelled by his relatives because of his horrifying appearance? A variety of other ancient concepts and practices survive in this text. The teaching method (proceeding from knowledge of letters, to syllables and then to words) is typical of ancient schools and instruction. For bishop John, and by extension for Bede and his audience, the cause of the young man's muteness was an obstruction of the tongue. Hearing impairment was not taken into consideration, a clear instance of the ancient tendency to 'privilege' muteness over deafness<sup>33</sup>.

To Bede, who was very much concerned with certifying the credibility of the sources he used, this healing story was obviously 'true'<sup>34</sup>. However, from a modern standpoint, one can question the



historical value of this healing story. It is obviously modelled on the New Testament example on the healing of a deaf-mute. During the healing, Jesus touched the man's tongue with saliva and put his fingers in the man's ears, uttering the word "Effeta". It is said that his ears were opened and that the knot of his tongue was untied<sup>35</sup>. Bede is of course 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<sup>36</sup>. From his point of view, God was undoubtedly able to produce miracles, the miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles in the Gospels were obviously true, and there was no distinction to be made between historiography or hagiography: both referred to what he considered as real facts. Also in his own time, miracles could happen and actually happened<sup>37</sup>. This need not deter us from approaching this particular story from other angles, namely the literary and theological context of Bede's writings. The differences with the parallel Gospel story are telling. While Jesus used earth and saliva and touched the tongue himself, St. John of Beverley makes the sign of the cross. By this sign, as a priest, he symbolizes Christ's presence. This ultimately frees the young man's tongue. After some hours of intensive training, the young lad is already able to express his inner feelings and thoughts (*arcana suae cogitationis ac uoluntatis*), namely his belief in God. Indeed, to Bede's way of thinking, the mute voice is the one that is not able to speak of God! That recovery after some hours is not very likely from a medical standpoint, is beside the point. To Bede, speech was a faculty of the soul: as a priest, St. John was concerned with spiritual healing. This is emphasised even more by the fact that for the dermatological part of the healing, he sends the young man to a physician.

So this story once again turns out not to be what it appears to be at face value, an 'interesting' medical case of disability history. We need to understand it in the theological context of Christ being the one who

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

taught other people to speak rightly, and of the priest doing the same as a symbol of Christ on earth, enabling the man to give utterance to his faith. But this interpretation does not exclude the utility of the story for other levels of interpretation: it does tell us something about the actual social conditions of the disabled, as well as about broad attitudes and reaction towards these people.

*Siamese twins in Constantinople: bodies on display, bodies as a symbol*

While the gradual transition from late Antiquity to the Middle Ages was completed in the West of Europe by about 750, the Byzantine Empire in the East, proudly calling itself the Roman Empire (Ρωμαϊκή ἐπικρατεία), continued till 1453, even after the transformation of the seventh century when the territory dramatically shrank. From tenth-century Constantinople comes a story which will fill with great joy those studying the history of disability<sup>38</sup>. Leo the Deacon (950-992) was an eye-witness to the story he presents, in the process offering picturesque details on the daily lives of the people involved. The story is situated in the year 974.

*About the same time, a male pair of twins, coming from the region of Cappadocia, visited many places in the Roman (i.e. Byzantine) Empire. I myself, the writer of this work, have seen them quite often in Asia. They were surely a monstrous prodigy, never seen before. Their limbs were well-shapen and in good overall condition, but from the armpits down to the hip, their flanks were grown together, so that their two bodies were one and formed one unit. The arm on the side at which they were grown together they laid on each other's neck. In the other hands, they both had a club, on which they leant while walking. They were thirty years old. And their bodies were well shapen, youthful and in good condition. For their long travels, they used a donkey, on which they sat like women on the saddle, a wonder of tenderness and mildness, which can hardly be described in the right words. But enough of this.*

*(Leo Diaconus, Hist. 10, 4)*<sup>39</sup>

This is one of the earliest instances of Siamese twins who are known to have lived in a relatively healthy condition for a considerable period of time. Roman sources from the late Republic now and then mention prodigies which most probably were Siamese twins, mostly bicephalous children. They are always mentioned as a bad omen and presumably shared the fate of other monsters such as hermaphrodites. If reported to the official priests, they were ritually killed and done away with<sup>40</sup>. According to the eighth-century chronicler Theophanes, a child complete in its other parts, but having one eye in the middle of the forehead, four arms, four legs and a beard, was born in 378 CE<sup>41</sup>. Only with Augustine do we read about a “double man” (*duplex homo*) with two heads, two chests, four hands, but just one belly, and two legs. This twin seems to have lived long enough to be looked at by many people, presumably in a public exhibition. It is tempting to attribute the survival of this twin to the influence of Christianity, though a passage in Plutarch suggests that Siamese twins were offered for sale in special markets for human monsters in the first century CE<sup>42</sup>. In this text, the words *τεράστιόν τι θαῦμα* place the twins in the tradition of prodigies and monsters<sup>43</sup>. Details in the Leo the Deacon story suggest that the tenth-century Siamese twins were also put on public display. That was most likely the reason for their many and long travels. Such displays might have earned them quite some money: hence their good shape and condition, as well as the opportunity of traveling in relatively comfortable conditions. The kindness and benevolence with which they seem to have been received on their travels (witness the touching words with which Leo the Deacon describes them) are in stark contrast to the information one reads in the compendium by Johannes Skylitzes (ca. 1040-ca. 1110). This text testifies to a surgery which would be nearly without precedent for antiquity: the separation of Siamese twins.

*In the same period, a prodigy came from Armenia to Constantinople: two boys who had come out of the same womb grown together. They were driven*

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

*out of the city, since they were considered a bad omen. But they came back during the reign of Constantinus. When it happened that one of them died, the best doctors tried to cut off the dead part. This happened; the other twin survived the surgery but died soon after.*

*(Johannes Skylitzes, Synopsis Historion 38)<sup>44</sup>*

The reign of Constantinus refers to the period 945-959, when the Emperor Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus reigned by himself, after having ruled with his co-emperor Romanus I Lecapinus in the years 919-944. For this part of his compendium, Johannes Skylitzes drew heavily on Leo the Grammarian (d. 1013) and Theodorus Daphnopates (ca. 890/900 - after 961), who also mention the event in almost similar terms<sup>45</sup>. In a late thirteenth/early fourteenth century manuscript of Skylitzes' work, the surgery is beautifully depicted in two images which are accompanied by explanations in Greek<sup>46</sup>. Scholars have gone to considerable length to prove the Skylitzes and the Leo the Deacon twins to be one and the same. Therefore, they refer to the extreme rarity of the malformation (1 out of 250,000 births), which would make it quite strange that two of such cases would appear in just fifty years. If there were to have been two such Siamese couples in about the same period, the authors would certainly have mentioned this. Besides, the Byzantine *themai* of Armeniakon and Kappadokia were geographically situated next to each other, so that the contradiction between Leo Diaconus and Skylitzes may easily be understood. That Leo the Deacon does not mention the surgery is not a decisive counter-argument: his *Historiae* end in 976, with the end of the reign of Emperor Johannes I Tzimiskis (969-976). So, if the operation was performed later, there was no possibility for Leo to mention it within the time-frame of his work. If one presumes a date of birth about the year 940, all data could actually match. The two little children (παῖδες) were brought for display to Constantinople somewhere before the

end of 944, but were expelled. They returned to the city sometime in the period 945-959. The surgery took place roughly between 976 and 980: Theodorus Daphnopates still describes the surgery, and by 980 must have been at least eighty years old. Admittedly, the fact that Leo describes the twins as being thirty years of age in the year 974 does not entirely fit with the date of birth in 940; here age rounding may have played a role, as well as the fact that Leo may have seen them for the last time when they were actually thirty in 970, but only mentioned their appearance in the 'crucial' year 974 (I will return to this later).

As it happens, the Skylitzes text is full of interesting details for those interested in the medical details of disability history. Both from the illustrations and from the description of the surgery, it is clear that our Siamese twins were in fact of the dicephalus-dipygus type, an anomaly which is especially compatible with survival. Most likely, the upper parts of their bodies were bound together only by a simple ribbon of flesh, leaving them two intact respiratory systems. The second died due to an infection after the surgery, or due to excessive loss of blood (a haemorrhage) during the surgery, or by being infected by the first one through the blood vessels. In the year 963, a pair of twins, conjoined in the region of the sternum, lived to age twenty-five. When one of them died, the Arab doctors refused to operate<sup>47</sup>. The so-called Biddenden Maids, who lived in England about the year 1100, were connected by the hips and shoulders, and survived till age thirty-four. A case of thoracopagus Siamese twins is mentioned by Benivieni in 1507. In the nineteenth century, the famous Siamese twins Eng and Chang were connected to each other by the thorax: they both married and each had seven children. They lived for one day in the house of the one, and the other day in that of the other<sup>48</sup>. In 1902, Radica and Doudica, Siamese twins of the same type, were successfully separated by Dr. Doyen in Paris.

But once again, accurate reading of these texts can reveal more about attitudes of people towards such prodigies, and even about changing attitudes. It is striking that sometime before the year 944, the twins were driven out of Constantinople as if they were ominous prodigies, but allowed to come back during the reign of Constantinus VII. What caused this change in attitude? As it happens, 944 was a very troublesome year for the capital. On the 16th of December of that year, Constantinus' VII co-emperor and father-in-law Romanus I Lecapinus was exiled by his two sons Stephanus and Constantinus, who crowned themselves as co-emperors to the throne. Lecapinus died soon after his exile. Only with great effort did Constantinus VII manage to save the throne for himself: on the 27th of January 945 he managed to exile his brothers-in-law. From then on, he was the absolute sovereign till his death in 959. So, the expulsion of the Siamese twins might have been connected with troublesome conditions presaging a *coup d'état* and a general atmosphere of insecurity: their return was linked to the reign of an enlightened emperor. This is even more obvious if we take into account that Theodorus Daphnopates, the writer of the *Urtext* on the Siamese twins, was a close ally to Romanus I, who was his patron. From the literary standpoint, there is even more. Why would Skylitzes, following Leo Grammaticus and Theodorus Daphnopates, explicitly mention the fact that they came back during the reign of Constantinus VII, only to link their return with the surgery which - as we may infer from Leo Diaconus - only occurred after 976, that is after the reign of Johannes I Tzimiskis, the third emperor after Constantinus VII? Why so much stress on Constantinus VII? As it happens, Constantinus VII and Romanus I Lecapinus had been reigning together for a period of twenty-five years (919-944). They were like twins: and one was separated violently from the other by the *coup d'état*. Some 150 years after the events, Skylitzes could further elaborate upon the parallel. After the

violent separation, Constantinus VII, the other part of the ‘twins’, did not live much longer (in fact, fifteen years in the total period of 46 years of his reign).<sup>49</sup> And why would Leo Diaconus have been so eager to mention their appearance in the year 974, while he could have inserted them in many other years, since he had seen them quite often before? Again, the year 974 seems to have been a crucial year for Constantinople: the patriarch Basileios was exiled and replaced by Antonius<sup>50</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

Admittedly, none of the texts treated in this essay focuses on the history of disability. But they do inform us about the actual living conditions of the impaired. We read about the maltreatment and exclusion of a possibly retarded child, the whereabouts of a disabled veteran, the tough decision-making of a mother giving birth to a severely disabled child, the harsh, mendicant existence of a young deaf-mute, and the practicalities of traveling as Siamese twins. This is valid and interesting information, which it is useful to read when dealing with the history of disability in the past.

Still, one can and must go further in the research of these texts, to move to another level of interpretation. Indeed, these passages confront us with popular attitudes towards the disabled, possibly shared by a large part of the population. Such attitudes might very well be contradictory. The mentally disabled were concealed and in some respects related to animals. At the same time, however, people felt distress about the way Manlius Imperatorius treated his retarded son. While disabled veterans were praised for their virtue, their malformations could cause them to be debarred from performing religious rites. In a society where beautiful bodies were very much in favour as a sign of righteousness and moral excellence, a conflict could arise between the veteran’s deformed appearance and his inner virtue. Christian ethics had taught people to take care of every

single baby born, but guilt could be placed upon the shoulders of a mother delivering a disabled child. Both fascination and mockery drove people to go and see the prodigy, and pay money to watch it. Both pity and Christian ethics promoted the institution of almsgiving. Hence, a deaf-mute young man, suffering as well from dermatological problems, surrendered to the charity of a saint, although he lived in a family. Undoubtedly, these people sent him away for begging for practical reasons. And Siamese twins in the Byzantine Empire were subject to various reactions according to the unstable conditions of the political climate. Well received and watched as a marvel during their travels, they were driven out Constantinople as a bad omen in times of political troubles, only to return under an enlightened emperor. Later, they were mentioned as products of chirological competence and excellence.

In the Vovellian framework, the historian of mentalities needs to move on to a third level of interpretation, that of theoretical and philosophical/theological discourse<sup>51</sup>. To Livy, the whole story of the Manlii was in fact on the boundaries of paternal *pietas*. To Pliny the Elder, Marcus Sergius Silus served as an example of Stoic virtue, going beyond all indifferent things in human life. With Gregory of Tours, the monster of Bourges served as a tool for Christian self-fashioning, setting itself apart from pagan custom, and as a means to emphasise a particular moral of sexual ethics. The deaf-mute mentioned by Bede served the author's theological discourse of the priest as a spiritual healer, while the Siamese twins from Armenia appeared in chroniclers as symbols of politically troublesome times.

In the end, it is this many-sided or rather many-levelled approach, which gives full credit to the source evidence, serving both modern readers' interest and the actual intention with which the ancient authors wrote their texts. Only in this way will the history of disability become a study of both continuity and change, a thought-provoking business of the mind.



BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTE

(\* ) This publication is part of the research project “Religion and Children. Socialisation in Pre-Modern Europe from the Roman Empire to the Christian World.”, directed by Katariina Mustakallio, University of Tampere. Earlier versions of this paper have been proposed at two international conferences: Society of Biblical Literature conference, section Families and Children in Antiquity, Tartu, 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2010 and The Fall and Rise of the Roman World c. 200-700 CE (XIX Finnish Symposium on Late Antiquity), Tvärminne, 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2010. I am most grateful to attending colleagues who generously offered advice and suggestions in a stimulating atmosphere of collegiality and scholarship. Many thanks also go to Tim Parkin (Manchester) for his first reading of the essay.

1. For an excellent overview, see GARLAND R., *The Eye of the Beholder. Deformity and Disability in Graeco-Roman World*. London, Cornell University Press. 1995, 2010<sup>2</sup>. For recent *status quaestionis* I refer to ROSE M.L., *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece*. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press, 2003. GOUREVITCH D., *L'enfant handicapé à Rome: mise au point et perspectives*. *Medicina nei secoli* 2005; 18, 2: 459-477; and LAES CHR., *Learning from Silence. Disabled Children in Roman Antiquity*. *Arctos* 2008; 42: 85-122. See also COLLARD F., SAMAMA E. (eds.), *Handicaps et sociétés dans l'histoire: l'estropié, l'aveugle et le paralytique de l'Antiquité au temps modernes*. Paris, L'Harmattan. 2010. On juristic texts, see KÜSTER A., *Blinde und Taubstumme im römischen Recht*. Cologne, Böhlau. 1991. On osteology, see SCOTT E., *Unpicking a Mith: the Infanticide of Female and Disabled Children in Antiquity*. In: DAVIES G. et al., *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*. London 2000. Oxford, Oxbow, 2000, pp. 143-151. Depictions of disabilities in: GRMEK M.D., GOUREVITCH D., *Les maladies dans l'art antique*. Paris, Fayard. 1998.
2. Livy 7, 3, 4.
3. *Acerbitas in dilectu, non damno modo ciuium sed etiam laceratione corporum lata, partim uirgis caesis qui ad nomina non respondissent, partim in uincula ductis, inuisa erat, et ante omnia inuisum ipsum ingenium atrox cognomenque Imperiosi, graue liberae ciuitati, ab ostentatione saeuitiae adscitum quam non magis in alienis quam in proximis ac sanguine ipse suo exerceret. Criminique ei tribunus inter cetera dabat quod filium iuuenem nullius probri compertum,*

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

*extorrem urbe, domo, penatibus, foro, luce, congressu aequalium prohibitum, in opus seruile, prope in carcerem atque in ergastulum dederit, ubi summo loco natus dictatorius iuuenis cotidiana miseria disceret uere imperioso patre se natum esse. At quam ob noxam? Quia infacundior sit et lingua impromptus; quod naturae damnum utrum nutriendum patri, si quicquam in eo humani esset, an castigandum ac uexatione insigne faciendum fuisse? Ne mutas quidem bestias minus alere ac fouere si quid ex progenie sua parum prosperum sit; at hercule L. Manlium malum malo augere filii et tarditatem ingenii insuper premere et, si quid in eo exiguum naturalis uigor sit, id extinguere uita agresti et rustico cultu inter pecudes habendo.*

4. Suetonius, *Claudius* 3, 2 (Claudius' mother and Livilla mocking him); 4 (Augustus' letter on how to deal with Claudius); 2, 2 (covered with cloak when attending gladiatorial games as a member of the imperial family; ceremony of the donning of the toga was done at night). See also DUPONT F., *Les plaisirs de Claude*. In: BURAND Y., LE BOHEC Y., MARTIN J. P., *Claude de Lyon, empereur romain: actes du colloque Paris-Nancy-Lyon, novembre 1992*. Paris, PU Paris-Sorbonne, 1998, pp. 59-67, on the nightly donning of the toga.
5. Isidorus of Sevilla, *Etymologiarum libri* 10, 169 (*mutus, quia vox eius non est sermo, sed mugitus: uocalem enim spiritum per nares quasi mugiens emittit*). See also Nonius Marcellus, *De compendiosa doctrina* 14 (ed. Lindsay) (*mutus onomatopoeia est incertae uocis, quasi mugitus. Nam mutus sonus est proprie, qui intellectum non habet*).
6. *Omnium potius his criminationibus quam ipsius iuuenis inritatus est animus; quin contra se quoque parenti causam inuidiae atque criminum esse aegre passus, ut omnes di hominesque scirent se parenti opem latam quam inimicis eius malle, capit consilium rudis quidem atque agrestis animi et quamquam non ciuilis exempli, tamen pietate laudabile. Inscientibus cunctis cultro succinctus mane in urbem atque a porta domum confestim ad M. Pomponium tribunum pergit; ianitori opus esse sibi domino eius conuento extemplo ait; nuntiaret T. Manlium L. Filium esse. Mox introductus —etenim percitum ira in patrem spes erat aut criminis aliquid noui aut consilii ad rem agendam deferre—salute accepta redditaque esse ait quae cum eo agere arbitris remotis uelit. Procul inde omnibus abire iussis cultrum stringit et super lectum stans ferro intento, nisi in quae ipse concepisset uerba iuraret se patris eius accusandi causa concilium plebis nunquam habiturum, se eum extemplo transfixurum minatur. Pavidus tribunus, quippe qui ferrum ante oculos micare, se solum inermem, illum praeualidum iuuenem et, quod haud minus timendum erat, stolide ferocem uiribus suis cerneret, adiurat in quae adactus est uerba;*

*et prae se deinde tulit ea ui subactum se incepto destitisse. Nec, perinde ut maluisset plebes sibi suffragii ferendi de tam crudeli et superbo reo potestatem fieri, ita aegre habuit filium id pro parente ausum; eoque id laudabilius erat quod animum eius tanta acerbitas patria nihil a pietate auertisset. Itaque non patri modo remissa causae dictio est sed ipsi etiam adulescenti ea res honori fuit et, cum eo anno primum placuisset tribunos militum ad legiones suffragio fieri—nam antea, sicut nunc quos Rufulos uocant, imperatores ipsi faciebant—, secundum in sex locis tenuit nullis domi militiaeque ad conciliandam gratiam meritis ut qui rure et procul coetu hominum iuuentam egisset.*

7. Livy 7, 10. Particularly important is the stress on Manlius' obedience to his dictator in 7, 10, 2.
8. Livy 8, 7.
9. NÉRAUDAU J.P., *L'exploit de Titus Manlius Torquatus (Tite Live, VII, 9, 6-10). Réflexion sur la iuventus archaïque chez Tite-Live*. In: *L'Italie préromaine et la Rome républicaine. Mélanges offerts à Jacques Heurgon*. Rome, Ecole française de Rome, 1976, pp. 685-694, has interpreted the story as revealing of the class of *iuventus* in archaic Rome; MARTIN P.M., *Mutation idéologique dans les figures de héros républicains entre 362 et 279 avant J.C.* *Revue des Etudes Latines* 1982; 60: 139-152; interprets it as a story about a real Republican hero, typical of the period after the Sexto-Licinian laws of 367 BCE.
10. *Verum in his sunt quidem virtutis opera magna, sed maiora fortunae. M. Sergio, ut equidem arbitrator, nemo quemquam hominum iure praetulerit, licet pronepos Catilina gratiam nomini derogat. Secundo stipendio dextram manum perdidit; stipendis duobus ter et viciens vulneratus est, ob id neutra manu, neutro pede satis utilis, uno tantum salvus, plurimis postea stipendiis debilis miles. His ab Hannibale captus — neque enim cum quolibet hoste res fuit —, his vinculorum eius profugus, in viginti mensibus nullo non die in catenis aut compedibus custoditus. [105] Sinistra manu sola quater pugnavit, uno die duobus equis insidente eo suffossis. Dextram sibi ferream fecit eaque religata proeliatu Cremonam obsidione exemit, Placentiam tutatus est, duodena castra hostium in Gallia cepit, quae omnia ex oratione eius apparent habita cum in praetura sacris arceretur a collegis ut debilis, quos hinc coronarum acervos constructurus hoste mutato! [106] Etenim plurimum refert, in quae cuiusque virtus tempora inciderit. quas Trebia Ticinusve aut Trasimennus civicas dedere? quae Cannis corona merita, unde fugisse virtutis summum opus fuit? ceteri profecto victores hominum fuere, Sergius vicit etiam fortunam.*
11. See Herodotus, *Historiae* 9, 36-3; Plutarch, *Moralia* 479 b (both on Hegistratus of Elis, who procured for himself a wooden foot); Martial, *Ep.* 10, 100

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

- (wooden leg); Lucian, *Adversus indoctum et libros multos eminentem* 6 (man suffered from frostbite and procured two wooden feet). For a thorough collection of all ancient evidence on prosthetics, see BLIQUEZ L.J., *Prosthetics in Classical Antiquity: Greek, Etruscan, and Roman Prosthetics*. In: HAASE W., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II*, 37, 2. Berlin, New York, de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 2641-2675; SAMAMA E., “*Bons pour le service*”: *les invalides au combat dans le monde grec*. In: COLLARD F., SAMAMA E., *Handicaps et sociétés dans l'histoire. l'estropié, l'aveugle et le paralytique de l'Antiquité au temps modernes*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, pp. 27-48, in part. pp. 43-45.
12. BEAGON M., *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal. Natural History Book 7*. (Translated with Introduction and Commentary), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005. Literary testimonies in Celsus 5, 26, 34 D and 7, 33.
  13. An instance of amputation during battle is described in Livy 4, 28, 8, though it is uncertain whether this happened during surgery or was due to a hostile sword.
  14. Cicero, *ad Atticum* 1, 16, 13.
  15. *Digesta* 3, 1, 1, 5.
  16. *Codex Justiniani* 6, 22, 10 pr (not entitled to make legal wills); *Digesta* 50, 2, 7, 1 (excluded from holding office, though not from obligatory *munera*); *Digesta* 5, 1, 12, 2 (excluded from acting as judges). See KÜSTER A., *Blinde und Taubstumme im römischen Recht*. Cologne, Böhlau, 1991. DUCOS M., *Penser et surmonter le handicap: les écrits des juristes romains*. In: COLLARD F., SAMAMA E., *Handicaps et sociétés dans l'histoire: l'estropié, l'aveugle et le paralytique de l'Antiquité au temps modernes*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, pp. 85-100. LAES CHR., *Silent Witnesses. Deaf-Mutes in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. *Classical World* 2011; 104, 4: 451-473.
  17. BAROIN C., *Intégrité du corps, maladie, mutilation et exclusion chez les magistrats et les sénateurs romains*. In: COLLARD F., SAMAMA E., *Handicaps et sociétés dans l'histoire: l'estropié, l'aveugle et le paralytique de l'Antiquité au temps modernes*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, pp. 49-68, in part. pp. 60-63.
  18. See Livy 27, 11, 4-6. For these possibilities and suggestions, see BEAGON M., *Beyond Comparison: M. Sergius, Fortunae Victor*. In: CLARK G., RAJAK T., *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World*. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 111-132, in part. pp. 113-120.
  19. On war wounds, SALAZAR C., *The Treatment of War Wounds in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. Leiden, Brill, 2000.
  20. Plautus, *Curculio* 392-403; Cicero, *De Oratore* 2, 249. See BEAGON M., *Beyond Comparison: M. Sergius, Fortunae Victor*. In: CLARK G., RAJAK T.,

- Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World*. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 111-132, in part. p. 120.
21. COHEN B. (ed.), *Not the Classical Ideal. Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*. Leiden, Brill, 2000.
  22. Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1, 9, 1-3 (on Pythagoras and physiognomics). On physiognomics, see the very useful survey by EVANS C., *Physiognomics in the Ancient World*. Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Association, 1969.
  23. Lucanus, *Pharsalia* 9, 569-571 (*laudandaque velle/ sit satis et numquam successu crescat honestum*). See BEAGON M., *Beyond Comparison: M. Sergius, Fortunae Victor*. In: CLARK G., RAJAK T., *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World*. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 111-132, in part. pp. 120-126.
  24. *In Biturigo quoque fuit quaedam mulier, quae concipiens peperit filium, cuius poplites ad stomachum, calcanei ad crura contraxerant: manus vero eius erant adhaerentes pectori, sed et oculi clausi erant. Qui magis monstrum aliquod quam hominis speciem simulabat. Qui cum non sine derisione multorum aspiceretur, et mater argueretur cur talis ex ea processerit filius, confitebatur cum lacrimis nocte illum Dominica generatum. Quem interimere non audens, ut mos matrum est, tamquam sanum puerum nutriebat. Adultum vero tradidit mendicis, qui eum accipientes posuerunt in carrucam, et trahentes ostendebant populis, multum per eum stipendii merentes. Dum haec per longa tempora gererentur, anno aetatis suae undecimo ad festivitatem beati Martini, proiectusque a foris ante sepulcrum miserabiliter decubabat.*
  25. Age ten is mentioned in fifth-century Syria (*Sententiae Syriacae* 77 and 98), sixth-century Spain (*Lex Visigothorum* 4, 4, 3) and East-Roman legislation of the sixth century (*Codex Justiniani* 7, 7, 1, 5 and 6, 43, 3). See VUOLANTO V., *Selling a Freeborn Child*. Rhetoric and Social Realities in the Late Roman World. *Ancient Society* 2003; 33: 169-207, in part. 198.
  26. GARLAND R., *The Mockery of the Deformed and Disabled in Graeco-Roman Culture*. In: JÄKEL S., TIMONEN A., *Laughter down the Centuries*. Turku, Turun Yliopisto, 1994, pp. 71-84. GARLAND R., *The Eye of the Beholder*. Deformity and Disability in Graeco-Roman World. London, Cornell University Press, 1995.
  27. The interpretation that mothers were not likely to kill their babies is offered by BOSWELL J., *The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, New York, Pantheon. 1988, p. 212 and VAN DAM R., *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*. Princeton, New York, Princeton University Press. 1993, p. 240.

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

It is not impossible that *ut mos matrum est* should be connected with *intere-mere*. The text would then indicate that in normal cases, mothers would have got rid of such monsters – quite the contrary of what many scholars have indicated before.

28. HARRIS W.V., *The Roman Father's Power of Life and Death*. In: BAGNAL R., HARRIS W.V., *Studies in Roman Law in Memory of Arthur Schiller*. Leiden, Brill, 1986, pp. 81-95; SHAW B., *Raising and Killing Children: Two Roman Myths*. *Mnemosyne* 2001; 54,1: 31-77.
29. HORN C.B., MARTENS J. W., "Let the Little Children Come to me." *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*. Washington D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2009, pp. 18-21 (pagan custom); pp. 214-217 (Jewish concepts and practice); 222-225 (Christians' concepts and practice); VUOLANTO V., *Infant Abandonment and the Christianization of Medieval Europe*. In: MUSTAKALLIO K., LAES CHR., *The Dark Sides of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Abandoned, Disabled or Lost*. Oxford, Oxbow, 2011.
30. VUOLANTO V., *Infant Abandonment and the Christianization of Medieval Europe*. In: MUSTAKALLIO K., LAES CHR., *Dark Sides of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Abandoned, Disabled or Lost*. Oxford, Oxbow, 2011.
31. *Vita Martini* 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*. See Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 44, 7 and Council of Orléans III 31; Council of Chalon 18. BOSWELL J., *The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*. New York, Pantheon. 1988, p. 260 on deformities and sex during menstruation. See also METZLER I., *Disability in Medieval Europe. Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 89.
32. *Erat autem in uilla non longe posita quidam adulescens mutus, episcopo notus, nam saepius ante illum percipiendae elemosynae gratia uenire consueuerat, qui ne unum quidem sermonem umquam profari poterat; sed et scabiem tantam ac furfures habebat in capite, ut nil umquam capillorum ei in superiore parte capitis nasci ualeret, tantum in circuitu horridi crines stare uidebantur. Hunc ergo adduci praecipit episcopus, et ei in conseptis eiusdem mansionis paruum tugurium fieri, in quo manens cotidianam ab eis stipem acciperet. Cumque una quadragesimae esset impleta septimana, sequente dominica iussit ad se intrare pauperem, ingresso linguam proferre ex ore, ac sibi ostendere*

*iussit; et adprehendens eum de mento, signum sanctae crucis linguae eius inpresit, quam signatam reuocare in os, et loqui illum praecepit: 'Dicito,' inquit, 'aliquod uerbum, dicito gae,' quod est lingua Anglorum uerbum adfirmandi et consentiendi, id est, etiam. Dixit ille statim, soluto uinculo linguae, quod iussus erat. Addidit episcopus nomina litterarum: 'Dicito A'; dixit ille A. 'Dicito B'; dixit ille et hoc. Cumque singula litterarum nomina dicente episcopo responderet, addidit et syllabas ac uerba dicenda illi proponere. Et cum in omnibus consequenter responderet, praecepit eum sententias longiores dicere, et fecit; neque ultra cessauit tota die illa et nocte sequente, quantum uigilare potuit, ut ferunt, qui praesentes fuere, loqui aliquid, et arcana suae cogitationis ac uoluntatis, quod numquam antea potuit, aliis ostendere; in similitudinem illius diu claudi, qui curatus ab apostolis Petro et Iohanne, exiliens stetit, et ambulabat; et intrauit cum illis in templum, ambulans, et exiliens, et laudans Dominum; gaudens nimirum uti officio pedum, quo tanto erat tempore destitutus. Cuius sanitati congaudens episcopus praecepit medico etiam sanandae scabredini capitis eius curam adhibere. Fecit, ut iusserat, et iuuante benedictione ac precibus antistitis, nata est cum sanitate cutis uenusta species capillorum, factusque est iuuenis limpidus uultu et loquella promptus, capillis pulcherrime crispis, qui ante fuerat deformis, pauper, et mutus. Sicque de percepta laetatus sospitate, offerente etiam ei episcopo, ut in sua familia manendi locum acciperet, magis domum reuersus est.*

33. On this tendency, LAES CHR., *Silent Witnesses. Deaf-Mutes in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. *Classical World* 2011, 104, 4: 451-473.
34. See ALBERT S., *De Beda Venerabili*. *Vox Latina* 2010; 46, 181: 331-332, in part. 331-332.
35. Mark 7:31-37. See 7:35 *et apertae sunt aures eius et solutum est vinculum linguae*. The Vulgate version has the Latin words *surdus et mutus*.
36. WARD B., *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215*. Aldershot, Wildwood House, 1987; pp. 34-35 and METZLER I., *Disability in Medieval Europe. Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London, New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 133-134 point to the mixture of medical diagnosis and literary examples in the Gospels.
37. KING L.A., *Surditas: the Understanding of the Deaf and Deafness in the Writings of Augustine, Jerome, and Bede*. Boston, unpublished Ph.D. 1996, pp. 206-207.
38. PENTOGALOS G.E., LASCARATOS J.G., *A Surgical Operation Performed on Siamese Twins During the Tenth Century in Byzantium*. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 1984; 58,1: 99-102. GEROULANOS S., JAGGI F., WYDLER J., LACHAT M., CAKMAKCI M., *Thoracopagus Symmetricus. Zur Trennung von*

*How does one do the History of Disability in Antiquity?*

- siamesischen Zwillingen im 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. durch byzantinische Ärzte.* Gesnerus 1993; 50: 179-200. DASEN V., *Jumeaux, jumelles dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine.* Zürich, Akanthus. 2005, pp. 39-40. DASEN V., *Les siamois de Constantinople.* Pour la Science 2006; 350: 150-151.
39. Κατὰ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν καιρὸν καὶ δίδυμοι ἄνδρες, ἐκ τῆς τῶν Καππαδοκῶν χώρας ὀρμώμενοι, πολλαχοῦ τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς χώρας ἐπικρατείας ἐφοίτων, οὓς καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ταῦτα ξυγγράφων πολλάκις κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν τεθέαμαι, τεράστιόν τι θαῦμα πέλοντας καὶ καινόν. Ἄρτια γὰρ αὐτοῖς καὶ ὀλότητα περισώζοντα τὰ τοῦ σώματος καθίσταντο μύρια, ἀπὸ δὲ μάλης καὶ μέχρι λαγῶνος αἱ πλευραὶ τούτοις ἐκεκόλλητο, ἐνοῦσαι τὰ σωματῖα καὶ εἰς ἓν συναρμολοῦσαι. Καὶ ταῖς μὲν ψαυούσαις ἀλλήλων τῶν χειρῶν τοὺς σφῶν περιέπλεκον τένοντας, θατέραις δὲ βακτηρίας ἔφερον, αἷς βαδίζοντες ἐσκηρίπτοντο, τριακοστὸν τῆς ἡλικίας ἔτος ἄγοντῆ. Καὶ σῶματα τούτοις εὖς ἐπέφυκει, ἀνθηρὰ πεφηνότα καὶ νεανικά. Ἡμιόνῳ δὲ κατὰ τὰς μακρας ἀποδημίας ὠχούντο, θηλυπρεπῶς παρὰ τὴν ἀστράβην ἔζομενοι, ἄλεκτόν τι χρῆμα γλυκυθυμίας καὶ ἐπιεικειάς τυγχάνοντες. Ἄλλὰ περὶ τούτων μὲν ἄλλις.
40. DASEN V., *Jumeaux, jumelles dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine.* Zürich, Akanthus, 2005, pp. 275-277. See e.g. Livy 41, 21, 12 on a *puer biceps* in Veii, 174 BCE.
41. Theophanes, *Chronographia* 65.
42. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 16, 8; *Enchiridion* 23, 87; Plutarch, *Moralia* 520 c.
43. ALLÉLLELY A., *Les enfants malformés et considérés comme prodigia à Rome et en Italie sous la République.* Revue des Etudes Anciennes 2003; 105,1: 127-156. ALLÉLLELY A., *Les enfants malformés et handicapés à Rome sous le Principat.* Revue des Etudes Anciennes 2004; 106,1: 73-101, on prodigious births; CUNY-LE CALLET B., *Rome et ses monstres. 1, Naissance d'un concept philosophique et rhétorique.* Grenoble, Editions Jérôme Millon, 2005, on the broad meaning of Latin and Greek words for “monster” in the context of rhetoric and philosophy.
44. Κατὰ ταύτας τὰς ἡμέρας ἐξ Ἀρμενίας ἐφοίτησε τέρας ἐν τῇ βασιλευούσῃ, παῖδες ἄρρενες συμφυεῖς ἐκ μιᾶς προελθόντες γαστρός. Ἐξηλάθησαν δὲ τῆς πόλεως ὡς πονηρὸς οἰωνός. Ἐπὶ δὲ Κωνσταντίνου πάλιν εἰσήλθον. Ἐπεὶ δὲ συνέβη τὸν ἕνα τελευτῆσαι, ἐπειράθησαν οἱ ἐμπειρότεροι τῶν ἰατρῶν τὸ νεκρωθὲν ἀποτεμεῖν μέρος. Οὐ τμηθέντος τὸ ζῶν ἐπιβεβιωκὸς μικρὸν ἐτελεύτησεν.
45. Leo Grammaticus, *Chronographia* 124 (PG 108, 1160-1161); Theodorus Daphnopates, *Theophanes continuatus* 6, 49. Both Greek texts are conveniently cited



- and translated in GEROULANOS S., JAGGI F., WYDLER J., LACHAT M., CAKMAKCI M., *Thoracopagus Symmetricus. Zur Trennung von siamesischen Zwillingen im 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. durch byzantinische Ärzte*. Gesnerus 1993; 50: 179-200 in part. 188-189. Editions of these historiographers are to be found in the *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae*: Theophanes Continuatus, Iohannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister and Georgius Monachus (ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1838) p. 433 (Theophanes Continuatus); Leonis Grammatici Chronographia (ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1842) pp. 326-327.
46. Madrid, Bibl. Nat., Codex Skylitzes Matritensis, fol. 131 b and 131 c. See DASEN V., *Les siamois de Constantinople*. Pour la Science 2006; 350: 150-151, for excellent illustrations.
47. PENTOGALOS G.E., LASCARATOS J.G., *A Surgical Operation Performed on Siamese Twins During the Tenth Century in Byzantium*. Bulletin of the History of Medicine 1984; 58, 1: 99-102. The case is described in the chronography of Dhahabi by Cadi Tanuchi.
48. GEROULANOS S., JAGGI F., WYDLER J., LACHAT M., CAKMAKCI M., *Thoracopagus Symmetricus. Zur Trennung von siamesischen Zwillingen im 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. durch byzantinische Ärzte*. Gesnerus 1993; 50: 179-200. The internet exhibits abundant iconography of Eng and Chang.
49. Note that Skylitzes writes ἐπιβεβιωκόσ' μικρόν, while both Daphnopates and Leo mention three days (τρεις ἡμέρας). Note also that both Daphopates and Leo stress the fact that the Siamese twins returned during the sovereign reign of Constantinus VII: ἐπὶ μονοκρατορίας βασιλείας.
50. WARD B., *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215*. Aldershot, Wildwood House. 1987<sup>2</sup>. GEROULANOS S., JAGGI F., WYDLER J., LACHAT M., CAKMAKCI M., *Thoracopagus Symmetricus. Zur Trennung von siamesischen Zwillingen im 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. durch byzantinische Ärzte*. Gesnerus 1993; 50: 179-200, in particular pp. 193-194.
51. The model of the “house of the history of mentalities”, consisting of three levels (factual evidence-popular mentality-ideology) was developed by VOVELLE M., *Idéologies et mentalités*. Paris, Maspero, 1982.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

Prof. dr. Christian Laes, Universiteit Antwerpen, dept. Geschiedenis, Grote Kauenberg 18 (D 320) B-2000 Antwerpen (christian.laes@ua.ac.be)

or:

Prof. dr. Christian Laes, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Taal-en Letterkunde, Latijn, Pleinlaan 2 (B 5-445) B-1050 Brussel (christian.laes@vub.ac.be)