



Dysfunctional and Pitied? Multiple Experiences of Being 'Disabled' in Ostia Antica and Environs

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Laes, C. (2021). Dysfunctional and Pitied? Multiple Experiences of Being 'Disabled' in Ostia Antica and Environs. *Medicina nei Secoli: Arte e Scienza*, 33(1), 199-216.

Published in:

Medicina nei Secoli: Arte e Scienza

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester's Takedown Procedures [<http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo>] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.



Articoli/Articles

DYSFUNCTIONAL AND PITIED? MULTIPLE EXPERIENCES
OF BEING 'DISABLED' IN OSTIA ANTICA AND ENVIRONS

CHRISTIAN LAES

University of Manchester, UK

Corresponding Author: christian.laes@uantwerpen.be

SUMMARY

DYSFUNCTIONAL AND PITIED?

This essay fits in the tradition of writing fictional life stories according to the bioarchaeology of personhood model, with much attention for objects, care and anthropological comparison. As a starting point, it takes recent excavations at Ostia and environs. Ever since the nineteenth century, both writers and historians have tried to come closer to the voices of the past by writing fiction. This is, however, the first attempt to bring disabled persons from the Roman period to life. The essay tries to do justice to the multifaceted experiences of disabled people, who were never categorized as such in the ancient world.

As the years passed, Thais understood, every day, what was meant by the proverbial *molesta senectus*. But today, standing at the burial of her one and only son Diogenes, she felt physical pain and emotional grief as she had never experienced before. Few people attended the funeral, sober but fitting. Most of her neighbours were there, people she met almost daily, and who had become accustomed to the little household in the village of Castel Malnome, consisting of an elderly mother living with her hardworking yet strange looking adult son. She only wished her husband Claudius could have been here, but he

Key words: Disability history - Ancient Rome - Bioarchaeology - Fictional stories

had died when Diogenes was only a teenager. At times, it seemed as if the memory of Claudius' image had completely faded away, to make room for that of her son, with whom she had been living and sharing her life for almost thirty years. There was one consolation, though: when he heard about Diogenes' illness and fever, his long-time friend Nanus had made the journey from Collatina. He arrived too late to say the last farewell to Diogenes in person, but he would at least stay with Thais for a few days after the funeral. And during these long days and evenings, they would share, with hope and friendship, memories of a past which had not always been easy¹. Diogenes was Thais' fourth delivery. The other babies had died only a few days after birth, and in her dreams Thais every now and then relived not only the sharp and gruesome pain she had withstood, but also her huge sadness and disappointment when the baby was discretely carried away from her, with only an empty cradle left². At Diogenes' birth, both parents rejoiced: not only did the delivery go smoothly, but he was also a boy, and it seemed as if his shape and physical condition would guarantee his survival. Yet this initial joy gave way to new sorrow and distress. Breastfeeding did not go well. Calliste, a professional wet-nurse who lived next door, was called in for advice (not that Claudius and Thais could ever afford her services, but as a neighbour and friend her occasional help was welcomed). She did not bring good news. Something seemed awfully wrong with the boy's jaw, as it appeared almost totally immobilised³. She wondered if it might be useful to feed the baby with wheat and barley porridge by means of a feeding bottle made out of glass and having the shape of a female breast⁴. She added with a groan that she had never seen such condition of the jaw, and suggested that in such a case, only the gods might be of some help. This was an option Claudius and Thais resorted to only once, when, for Diogenes' third birthday, they made the strenuous journey of about thirty kilometers via the Via Portuense to Ostia, where the sanctuary of Magna Mater was their last hope. By then, Diogenes' condition had

gotten worse. In their little house, both mother and father had spent sleepless nights trying to calm the endlessly crying baby. In later life, Diogenes would constantly complain of headaches, but as an infant, there was simply no other way than crying to express his feelings of pain and distress. Feeding the baby proved to be a constant worry, and the feeding bottle was hardly a solution. When the front teeth appeared, things only got worse, as they stood in the way of pouring the food into the ill-shaped mouth that persisted in being almost entirely immobilised. It was the barber who proposed the radical solution of extracting the front teeth - the boy's cries pierced his parents' bones, but the extraction brought a temporary solution. With little hope, Claudius and Thais arrived at Ostia, and with no hope they left the next day. They knew stories about people recovering from bad eyesight, regaining the use of their limbs, and they had once heard the old schoolteacher telling the story of king Ariston's third wife, who was the ugliest of babies, but thanks to the insistence of her nurse and continuous visits to a sanctuary, became the most beautiful of women (Hdt. 6.61). Yet, their common sense told them that once you were born with a defect, you would have it for the rest of your life - no divine power would change this, and Magna Mater was, alas, no exception to this⁵.

Just after Diogenes turned seven, the barber repeated his gruesome surgery, extracting the new front teeth. Again, the young boy screamed, and he would now live with five missing front teeth, but at least this allowed him to take the liquids his mother carefully and diligently prepared for him. Porridge with honey was among his favourite dishes; cereals and bread were possible, though they had to be soaked; meat and fish (exceptional dishes for most of the population in the outskirts of Castel Malnome) caused severe difficulties⁶. Despite his parents' greatest efforts, Diogenes learned to speak but with difficulty. This did not make communication impossible, though. With the passage of time, Thais and Claudius became accustomed to their son's groans and noises, among which they gradually

recognised words and sentences that made sense. No, their boy was not dumb, as cruel jokes about *muti* (those speaking inarticulately) resembling mooing cows (*mugere* is Latin for ‘to moo’) suggested⁷. But how to make this clear to his playmates in the streets, who regularly called him names, bullying and deriding him in cruel ways? There wasn’t really a way in which Diogenes could escape his tormentors. Children regularly played in the streets, the only place where amusement could actually take place. And as “a real man” - his father stressed this almost every single evening - he just had to learn to stand up for himself. For this, Diogenes’ strength was of some help. Quite regularly, he got the upper hand in a fight, and more than one of his bullies paid for their arrogance with blows and smacks. His physical strength also earned him the eternal gratitude of Nanus, who became his longtime friend. Nanus was small, but not in the way sturdy Diogenes was. His limbs were disproportionate, and so was his head. People called him ‘a dwarf’ and jocularly remarked that his place ought to be at Rome, where the Emperor or rich aristocrats were said to fancy people of his stature⁸.

Neither Diogenes’ nor Nanus’ parents could write their own names. Yet they considered it important that their children acquired at least some basic skills of reading, writing, and calculating. One never knows what life brings, and one gets cheated so easily without any such knowledge. The old schoolmaster Nicetas (the one who told the story about Ariston’s wife) was a kind man, and he did not charge the parents of his pupils very much. No one in this outskirt could afford a high fee for school, but Nicetas somehow found it more comfortable to teach here than in the bustling city of Ostia, where competition was strong⁹. So, Diogenes and Nanus joined the score of children who spent their mornings sitting in the only covered gallery in the village of Castel Malnome, endlessly reciting sums, letters, syllables, and occasionally trying to decipher the text of an odd fable. By then, the boys and girls of the neighbourhood had gotten

Dysfunctional and pitied?

used to Nanus' and Diogenes' strange appearances. And schoolmaster Nicetas helped: when on market day, the occasional visiting merchant passed by and stared at the two odd kids who were sitting in the gallery next to the market, Nicetas ignored the staring faces, the open mouths, and the provocative insults. One day, he went further. He climbed on a little bench, and eloquently addressed the disrespectful passersby. Diogenes and Nanus were his pupils like all the rest. As their teacher, he would not tolerate any staring, mocking, or bullying behaviour¹⁰.

After a year or so, their parents decided that Diogenes and Nanus had had enough school education. It was time to move on with their lives. The boys did not have to say goodbye to good old Nicetas, since they would see him every day in the little village, with his small class of new kids, whenever there were pupils sent by their parents. Still, they gave him their heartfelt thanks. Diogenes was grateful that Nicetas never had him recite in front of the class, nor had he made him read aloud. It had spared him a lot of embarrassment. In their teenage years, both boys looked back with gratitude on their time spent with Nicetas.

As for most of the kids in this environment, there was only one option for professional life: the salt mine was to become their working place. When Diogenes and Nanus entered the profession at the age of ten, they were among the youngest workers. "But then", said their fathers, "we were about the same age when we started this work". The proprietor did not pay them a high wage, but together with their fathers' salaries, it was enough for their households to survive and, every now and then, to afford some things offered at the market. After all, both Diogenes and Nanus were lucky that the little land that was cultivated largely by their mothers also supplied both the basics and some extra for their own food support, and sometimes for exchange. Others were less well off, and their mothers had to work in the salt mine too. Men, women, and teenagers all shared a heavy

workload¹¹. Carrying the sacks of salt wasn't easy, and more than one worker ended up crook-backed, head and shoulder bowed to the side on which they carried their loads. Especially in summer, labour under the relentless sun was difficult. Accidents happened, and though the owner in such cases called for medical assistance, more than one of his labourers ended up with a perpetual limp, a dislocated shoulder, or a hand that wasn't good for any work. Nevertheless, almost everyone continued working as long as they possibly could. And surely, life wasn't always unpleasant. By now, his workmates were accustomed to Diogenes' strange speech - what he could say was more than enough for basic communication at work, and his considerable bodily strength compensated for a lot. The workers also discovered that a dwarf could have his share in carrying heavy loads. After all, they also accepted the occasional teenage girl as a co-worker¹², so with Nanus they weren't that bad off.

In the evenings and during free days, most of the inhabitants of the little village would gather together and tell stories about cities, far away and closer by. Diogenes listened eagerly, but was not particularly attracted to the crowded and bustling life in Ostia, let alone Rome. How many people there would stare at him, and how long would it take to make them understand that he was at least as good as they thought themselves to be? When the village women were not present, there were the casual jokes about girls and lessons in love. During moments when it was just the two of them, Diogenes and Nanus dared to discuss this further. Going to town, Nanus had more than once felt how certain women gazed at him with interest, but he had never pursued the matter¹³. As for Diogenes, he remembered the moment when he had desperately tried to kiss Lucia, whom he had chased after for months. She had fled and made known her disgust. Since then, he had never tried again. After all, did you really need to have a girl to be happy? Despite the macho stories of their peers, Diogenes and Nanus were not so sure about this.

Dysfunctional and pitied?

They were both only teenagers when their fathers died in an interval of only a few months. In their early forties, they had become old men: blunt and taciturn, they sensed their end coming near. The pattern for both was similar: initial coughing ended up in severe respiratory problems, fever, and exhaustion. Their deaths were as though as their lives had been¹⁴.

So Diogenes' life continued quietly and peacefully with his mother. She grew accustomed to his presence, which would not have changed even if he had married, for a daughter-in-law would have lived in Diogenes' little house. Of course, he had been able to feed himself for many years, but he was still attached to the sweet porridges his mom had prepared so diligently since he was a child with special needs. More than once, he experienced how bad this was for his teeth, and on more than one occasion, the barber came to the house to perform his grim task. Diogenes was already accustomed to the extractions: after all, as a boy, he had suffered worse.

Nanus, however, chose a different path. Several times, a wandering group of entertainers had proposed to him that he join them when they passed through the little village. When his mother died, he decided to accept the proposal. From then on, Nanus and Diogenes would only meet a few times during the year, but Nanus always returned with good stories, relating to successful events. Indeed, the artists had not lied about his chances for success. Wealthy gentlemen and ladies now and then generously donated to fund his performances, and he now even owned a little room in the City of Rome. Both friends could spend hours in such conversations, though it was mostly Nanus who did the talking.

And even now, at the evening of the funeral, the conversation between Thais and Nanus engendered sparks of joy as they cherished memories of the past. "After all," said Nanus, Diogenes' life was not that bad at all had. You were always there for him. Remember what I told you about the sinister old hunchbacked lady, who was

constantly nicknamed the Witch? The last time I saw her, she had lost almost all her teeth. She was skinnier than ever, and her eyes had turned red. A friend told me she had recently died. Someone had thrown a stone at her, and she did not survive the attack¹⁵. You know what happened next? She did not have any family members left, and her body was simply thrown into a ditch and covered with dirt. My dear friend and your beloved son, Diogenes, may have looked different, but at least he had us. So his burial was decent. And so will be yours. I promise to take care of you, and you will not have any financial burdens. Take my word for it, dear Thais, mother of only true friend. As for Diogenes: may the earth be light for him: *sit ei terra levis.*”

Postscriptum

All names in this article have been invented, but I have tried to offer imaginative and not implausible scenarios.

In fact, Diogenes is known as skeleton 132, found in grave 13218 in the necropolis of Castel Malnome, dated between the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, which covered about 3000 square metres near Ponte Galeria, along the Via Portuense. This excavation has returned a total of around 300 skeletons, almost all buried. Most of the skeletal remains showed high frequencies of stress markers and traumas, suggesting that the population was probably employed as manpower in the nearby and recently discovered salt mine. Skeleton 132 had a stature of about 153 cm, and both the upper and lower limbs show traces of intensive workload. The most striking feature is the bone fusion of the joint with complete immobilization of the jaw, identified as temporomandibular joint ankylosis. This is a severe and rare deformation of the maxillofacial complex, maybe induced by an accident, but possibly congenital. Osteologists believe that tooth extraction in the front, both top and bottom, might have been voluntary to ensure the opportunity to feed the individual. Moreover, the

Dysfunctional and pitied?

remaining teeth show traces of abscesses and caries. Skeleton 132 was between 30 and 35 when he died¹⁶.

Nanus was ‘the Dwarf from the Collatina Necropolis’, with a stature of 134 cm, dated in the same period as Castel Malnome. He lived up to the age of 20-25. In reality, dwarfs are rather short-lived, so I have taken the liberty of making Nanus a bit older than he became in reality¹⁷.

Also from the Collatina Necropolis is the skeleton of an aged woman (over 50 years old) affected by a spinal disease causing body deformity. This is an advanced case of ankylosing spondylitis, a chronic and usually progressive rheumatic disease of unknown etiology (with a partial genetic component), principally affecting, as in this severe case, the vertebral column. Spinal alterations by ankylosing spondylitis caused a very unnatural posture in this woman. Archaeologists have pointed to her bodily deformation, the loss of almost all her teeth, puny bones and her short stature (about 150 cm), as well as to some possible symptomatic manifestations connected to the disease (such as anorexia, red eye, or skin rash). Her grave is a case of anomalous burial: she was just thrown in a small oval ditch and the body was forced into this ditch and directly covered by the soil. This possibly caused post mortem trauma to the skull, though the skull trauma may also have been the reason of her death¹⁸.

This story relies on current trends of what has been called the bioarchaeology of care: after studying the pathology and the possible clinical and functional impact, researchers develop a basic model of the care an individual is likely to have been received, and what such care suggests about contemporary social practice and relations. Such study also includes creating bodily reconstructions of people from the past, and writing fictional life stories according to the bioarchaeology of personhood model, with much attention for objects, care and anthropological comparison¹⁹. Bioarchaeologists have repeatedly pointed out that a decent burial does not necessarily imply

that the deceased had lived a life full of compassion (as we would understand it in the contemporary western world). I have therefore tried to sketch a picture that is neither too black nor too rosy²⁰.

Ever since the nineteenth century, both writers and historians have tried to come closer to the voices of the past by writing fiction. In the last years, the task has been taken up again by ancient historians, who at the same time fully acknowledge the methodological challenges involved²¹. Enthusiastically embraced by some, fiction has also met its strong opponents. Referees have found this article “a contribution of fantasy that should not find a place in a scientific journal” or compared it to tales by Charles Dickens or Victor Hugo - writers that by the way sketch very well the mentality and everyday life conditions of their times. To such critics, I respond by quoting Keith Hopkins, whose use of the Aesop Novel met with similar criticism: “In some, the text produced the same reactions as its hero, Aesop; out of respect, I have changed it little”²². As far as I know, this is the first attempt to bring disabled persons from the Roman period to life. I can only hope that it does justice to the multifaceted experiences of people who were never categorized as such in the ancient world. *Alii aliter iudicent*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

General Bibliography

(*) Abbreviations of journals according to

http://www.annee-philologique.com/files/sigles_fr.pdf

Aasgaard R, Growing Up in Constantinople: Fifth-Century Life in a Christian City from a Child’s Perspective. In: Laes C, Mustakallio K, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Family in Late Antiquity. Life, Death and Interaction*. Leuven: Peeters; 2015. pp. 135-67.

Booth A, Elementary and Secondary Education in the Roman Empire. *Florilegium* 1979;1:1-14.

Dysfunctional and pitied?

- Boutin AT, Exploring the Social Construction of Disability: an Application of the Bioarchaeology of Personhood Model to a Pathological Skeleton from Ancient Bahrain. *International Journal of Paleopathology* 2016;12:17-28.
- Brigand R, Weller O (eds), *Archaeology of Salt: Approaching an Invisible Past*. Leyden: Sidestone; 2015.
- Brooten B, Early Christian Enslaved Families (First to Fourth Century). In: Laes C, Mustakallio K, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Family in Late Antiquity. Life, Death and Interaction*. Leuven: Peeters; 2015. pp. 111-34.
- Butterworth A, Laurence R, Pompeii. *The Living City*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson; 2005.
- Carroll M., *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World. 'A Fragment of Time'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2018.
- Catalano P, Benassi V, Caldarini C, Cianfriglia L, Mosticone R, Nava A, Pantano W, Porreca F, *Attività lavorativa e condizioni di vita nella comunità di Castel Malnome (Roma, I-II secolo d. C.)*. *MedSec* 2010;22(1):111-128.
- Catalano P, Caldarini C, Mosticone R, Zavaroni F, *Il contributo dell' analisi traumatologica nella ricostruzione dello stile di vita della comunità di Castel Malnome (Roma, I-II sec. d. C.)*. *MedSec* 2013;25(1):101-118.
- Catalano P, Fornaciari G, Gazzaniga V, Piccioli A, Rickards O, *Scritto nelle ossa. Vivere, ammalarsi e curarsi a Roma in età imperiale*. Rome: Centro Stampa Università di Sapienza Università di Roma; 2013.
- Catalano P, Iannetti G, Benassi V, Caldarini C, De Angelis F, Pantano W, Tartaglia G, *Integrazione in una comunità romana di età imperiale di un individuo con anchilosi temporo-mandibolare*. In: Delattre V, Sallem R (eds), *Décrypter la difference: la place des personnes handicapées au sein des communautés du passé*. Paris: CQFD; 2009. pp. 50-56.
- Cojocar OM, *Everyday Lives of Children in Ninth-Century Byzantine Monasteries*. In: Laes C, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London: New York, Routledge; 2017. pp. 250-66.
- Dasen V, 'All Children are Dwarfs'. *Medical Discourse and Iconography of Children's Bodies*. *OJA* 2008;27(1):49-62.
- Dettwyler KA, *Can Paleopathology Provide Evidence for Compassion?* *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 1991;84:375-84.
- Harris WV, *Popular Medicine in the Classical World'*. In: Harris WV (ed), *Popular Medicine in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: Explorations*. Leyden: Brill; 2016. pp. 1-64.
- Herter H, *Amme oder Saugflasche*. In: Mullus. *Festschrift Theodor Klauser*. Münster: Aschendorff; 1964. pp. 168-172.
- Hopkins K, *Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery*. *P&P* 1993;138:3-27.

- Hosseini K, *And the Mountains Echoed*. New York: Riverhead Books; 2013.
- Hughes J, *Souvenirs of the Self. Personal Belongings as Votive Offering in Ancient Religion*. *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2017;3(2):143-63.
- Husquin C, *Freak Show à Rome : du corps exposé au corps exhibé?*. In: Chauvaux F, Grihom M-J (eds), *Les Corps défaillants. Du corps malade, usé, déformé au corps honteux*. Paris: IMAGO; 2018. pp. 209-21.
- Jaeggi S, *Un biberon sur une fontaine d'époque augustéenne à Palestrina?* *Latomus* 2019;78:24-67.
- Laes C, *Jonge moeders, miskramen en dood in het kraambed*. *Kleio. Tijdschrift voor oude talen en antieke cultuur* 2004;33(4):163-85.
- Laes C, *School-teachers in the Roman Empire: a Survey of the Epigraphical Evidence*. *AClass* 2007;50:109-27.
- Laes C, *Child Slaves at Work in Roman Antiquity*. *AncSoc* 2008;38:235-83.
- Laes C, *Learning from Silence. Disabled Children in Roman Antiquity*. *Arctos* 2008;42:85-122.
- Laes C, *Children in the Roman Empire. Outsiders Within*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2011.
- Laes C, *Silent Witnesses. Deaf-mutes in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. *CW* 2011;104(4):451-73.
- Laes C, *Disabilities and the Disabled in the Roman World. A Social and Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2018.
- Laes C, *Children and Bullying/ Harassment in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. *CJ* 2019;115(1):33-60.
- Laes C, *Motherless Infancy in the Roman and the Late Ancient World*. In: Huebner SR, Ratzan DM (eds), *Missing Mothers: Maternal Absence in Antiquity*. Leuven: Peeters; 2021. pp. 15-41.
- Laes C, Vuolanto V, *A New Paradigm for the Social History of Childhood and Children in Antiquity*. In: Laes C, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London, New York: Routledge; 2017. pp. 1-10.
- Leyerle B, *Appealing to Children*. *J ECS* 1997; 5(2):243-70.
- Minozzi S, Catalano P, Pantano W, Caldarini C, Fornaciari G, *Bone Deformities and Skeletal Malformations in the Roman Imperial Age*. *MedSec* 2014;26(1):9-22.
- Parkin T, *Demography and Roman Society*. Baltimore MA, London: John Hopkins University Press; 1992.
- Prowse TL, Schwarcz H, Saunders S, Bondioli L, Macchiarelli R, *Isotopic Evidence for Age-Related Variation in Diet from Isola Sacra, Italy*. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 2005;128:2-13.
- Prowse T, *Diet and Dental Health Through the Life Course in Roman Italy*. In:

Dysfunctional and pitied?

- Agarwal SC, Glencross BA (eds), *Social Bioarchaeology*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell; 2011. pp. 410-37.
- Saller R, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1994.
- Sivan H, *Jewish Childhood in the Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2018.
- Tilley L, *Theory and Practice in the Bioarchaeology of Care*. Heidelberg: Springer; 2015.
- Van Der Eijk PJ, Galen and Early Christians on the Role of the Divine in the Causation and Treatment of Health and Disease. *Early Christianity* 2014;5:337-70.
- Vuolanto V, Experience, Agency and the Children in the Past. The Case of Roman Childhood. In: Laes C, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London, New York: Routledge; 2017. pp. 11-24.
- Weiler I, "Hic audax subit ordo pumilorum (Stat.silv.1,6,57)." *Überlegungen zu Zwergen und Behinderten in der antiken Unterhaltungsliteratur*. GB 1995;21:121-45.

(*) I owe my thanks to Lynn Rose (American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, Iraq) for the language review of this article and to Oana Maria Cojocaru (Umeå university, Sweden) for useful suggestions.

1. For this reconstruction, I follow the Coale-Demeny Level 3, Model West, life tables. I presume that Thais was about eighteen when she married Claudius, who was approximately twenty-five. At the moment of this story, she is in her early fifties. Diogenes died when he was thirty. See Parkin T, *Demography and Roman Society*. Baltimore MA, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 67-90; Saller R, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 23-5; LAES C., *Children in the Roman Empire. Outsiders Within*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 23-7.
2. On death in childbed, see Laes C, *Motherless Infancy in the Roman and the Late Ancient World*. In: Huebner SR, Ratzan MD (eds), *Missing Mothers: Maternal Absence in Antiquity*. Leuven: Peeters; 2021. pp. 15-41. Carroll M, *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World. 'A Fragment of Time'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2018. pp. 55-66; Laes C, *Jonge moeders, miskramen en dood in het kraambed*. *Kleio. Tijdschrift voor oude talen en antieke cultuur* 2004;33(4):163-85.
3. Surely, there were reasons to let the baby survive, even if it was apparent from birth that something was wrong. See Laes C, *Learning from Silence*.

- Disabled Children in Roman Antiquity. *Arctos* 2008;42:96-99; Laes C, Disabilities and the Disabled in the Roman World. A Social and Cultural History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2018. pp. 27-28; on possible scenarios regarding survivors, not denying that many disabled children did not survive their first days. Curiously enough, statements about “the legend according to which children born with defects were thrown from the Tarpeia rock” still turn up in an otherwise excellent article by Minozzi S, Catalano P, Pantano W, Caldarini C, Fornaciari G, Bone Deformities and Skeletal Malformations in the Roman Imperial Age. *MedSec* 2014;26(1):20.
4. An option mentioned in: Herter H, Amme oder Saugflasche. In: Mullus. *Festschrift Theodor Klauser*. Münster: Aschendorff; 1964. pp. 168-72; with regard to Saint Theodorus, who after the death of his mother, was fed in this way by his father, Erythrius (Vindobonensis theologicus graecus 60). On feeding bottles, see now Jaeggi S, Un biberon sur une fontaine d'époque augustéenne à Palestrina? *Latomus* 2019;78:24-67, with p. 25-6 on three key texts. Theodore's hagiography is indeed one of the three texts mentioning a vase in the shape of a breast, though it is obviously much later in time (12th century). The texts contemporary to the narrative do not mention a content made of cereals and honey, but wine mixed with water (Sor. *Gyn.* 2.17; Mustio, *Gyn.* 1.131). A reference to the text of Caelius Aurelianus where a rabies patient receives a potion through a breast shaped vase could be added: Caelius Aurelianus, *De morbis acutis* 3.16.128: *Dandus interea potus in fictili uasculo subtili cauerna perforato, tamquam sunt papillae uberum* (I owe thanks to the anonymous referee for pointing out this passage).
 5. Incurability is still a much understudied topic in the history of disabilities in Antiquity. See Van Der Eijk P J, Galen and Early Christians on the Role of the Divine in the Causation and Treatment of Health and Disease. *Early Christianity* 2014;5:337-70 and for popular medicine and sanctuaries, respectively Harris WV, *Popular Medicine in the Classical World*. In: Harris WV (ed.), *Popular Medicine in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: Explorations*. Leyden: Brill; 2016. pp. 1-64 and Hughes J, *Souvenirs of the Self. Personal Belongings as Votive Offering in Ancient Religion*. *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2017;3(2):143-63.
 6. Studies on the necropolis of the Isola sacra have showed that people only had a limited access to meat or fish. See Prowse TL, Schwarcz H, Saunders S, Bondioli L, Macchiarelli R, *Isotopic Evidence for Age-Related Variation in Diet from Isola Sacra, Italy*. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 2005;128:2-13; Prowse T, *Diet and Dental Health Through the Life Course*

Dysfunctional and pitied?

- in Roman Italy. In: Agarwal SC, Glencross BA (eds.), *Social Bioarchaeology*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell; 2011. pp. 410-37.
7. Laes C, Silent Witnesses. Deaf-mutes in Greco-Roman Antiquity. *CW* 2011;104(4):364 referring to Isid. *Etym.* 10.169: *mutus, quia vox eius non est sermo, nisi mugitus: vocalem enim spiritum per nares quasi mugiens emittit* (“mute because his voice is not human speech but bellowing. When speaking, he emits air through the nose, as if he were bellowing”). See also Non. *De compendiosa doctrina* 14 (ed. Lindsay): *mutus onomatopoeia est incertae vocis, quasi mugitus. Nam mutus sonus est proprie, qui intellectum non habet* (“the word *mutus* is an onomatopoeia for an indiscernible voice, almost as bellowing. Properly *mutus* refers to a sound which is not understandable”).
 8. Dasen V, ‘All Children are Dwarfs’. *Medical Discourse and Iconography of Children’s Bodies*. *OJA* 2008;27(1): 49-62, with many further references to dwarfs in Antiquity. See also Husquin C., *Freak Show à Rome: du corps exposé au corps exhibé?* In: Chauvaux F, Grihom MJ (eds), *Les Corps défail-lants. Du corps malade, usé, déformé au corps honteux*. Paris: IMAGO; 2018. pp. 209-21.
 9. We do know of schoolteachers in outskirts or rather remote place, and the possibility cannot be ruled out that children in such places attended classes do acquire some basic skills in reading and writing. See Booth A, *Elementary and Secondary Education in the Roman Empire*. *Florilegium* 1979;1:1-14 and Laes C, *School-teachers in the Roman Empire: a Survey of the Epigraphical Evidence*. *AClass* 2007;50:109-27.
 10. There are no such accounts from Antiquity, but I borrowed the idea from the touching and telling story of Thalia Ganiakos, told in the eight chapter of the novel by Hosseini K, *And the Mountains Echoed*. New York: Riverhead Books; 2013. The story takes place on the Greek island of Tinos, in the sixties of the twentieth century. From what we know, educators in Antiquity usually reacted in quite a different way to the bullying of children. See Leyerle B, *Appealing to Children*. *JECS* 1997;5 (2):258 and Laes C., *Children and Bullying/ Harassment in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. *CJ* 2019;115(1):33-60 on children and bullying.
 11. Laes C., *Children in the Roman Empire. Outsiders Within*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2011. pp. 148-221 on child labour.
 12. Laes C., *Child Slaves at Work in Roman Antiquity*. *AncSoc* 2008;38:251-2 on six-year-old Passia working in the Dacian mines of Alburnus Maior. The work in salt mines has often been considered an archaeologically invisible phenomenon of a very *longue durée*. See Brigand R, Weller O (eds),

- Archaeology of Salt: Approaching an Invisible Past. Leyden: Sidestone; 2015.
13. Weiler I, "Hic audax subit ordo pumilorum (Stat.silv.1,6,57)." Überlegungen zu Zwergen und Behinderten in der antiken Unterhaltungsliteratur. *GB* 1995;21:121-45 on fascination of Roman aristocrats for dwarfs, who were regarded as 'freaks'. See e.g. Plin. HN 7.75 on Emperor Augustus' granddaughter Julia and the dwarf Conopas, or Augustus' daughter Julia and the freed-woman Andromeda. Cf. also Sen. Epist. 50.2 on Harpaste and Seneca's wife.
 14. At age fifteen, only 62 percent of Roman children would have their father alive. See Saller R, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1994. pp. 53-65 for the tables mentioned supra in note 1.
 15. Laes C., Learning from Silence. Disabled Children in Roman Antiquity. *Arctos* 2008;42:115 on throwing stones at the disabled.
 16. Catalano P, Caldarini C, Mosticone R, Zavaroni F, Il contributo dell' analisi traumatologica nella ricostruzione dello stile di vita della comunità di Castel Malnome (Roma, I-II sec. d. C.). *MedSec* 2013;25(1):17-19.
 17. Minozzi S, Catalano P, Pantano W, Caldarini C, Fornaciari G, Bone Deformities and Skeletal Malformations in the Roman Imperial Age. *MedSec* 2014; 26(1):10-12.
 18. Minozzi S, Catalano P, Pantano W, Caldarini C, Fornaciari G, Bone Deformities and Skeletal Malformations in the Roman Imperial Age. *MedSec* 2014;26(1):15-17.
 19. Tilley L, *Theory and Practice in the Bioarchaeology of Care*. Heidelberg: Springer; 2015 on the bioarchaeology of care; Boutin AT, Exploring the Social Construction of Disability: an Application of the Bioarchaeology of Personhood Model to a Pathological Skeleton from Ancient Bahrain. *International Journal of Paleopathology* 2016; 12:17-28 on the personhood model.
 20. Dettwyler KA, Can Paleopathology Provide Evidence for Compassion? *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 1991;84:375-84 is a classic in the field. Catalano P, Iannetti G, Benassi V, Caldarini C, De Angelis F, Pantano W, Tartaglia G, Integrazione in una comunità romana di età imperiale di un individuo con anchilosi temporo-mandibolare. In: Delattre V, Sallem R (eds), *Décrypter la difference: la place des personnes handicapées au sein des communautés du passé*. Paris: CQFD; 2009. pp. 50-56; rightfully stress the element of integration, which is of course not the same as experiencing compassion. The care taken to educate Skeleton 132 up to adult life must in any case have been considerable. The hasty and anomalous burial of the old

Dysfunctional and pitied?

woman from Collatina is by all means a strong indicator of neglect and being a social outcast.

21. Laes C, Vuolanto V, A New Paradigm for the Social History of Childhood and Children in Antiquity. In: Laes C, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London, New York: Routledge; 2017. pp. 1-10 and Vuolanto V, Experience, Agency and the Children in the Past. The Case of Roman Childhood. In: Laes C, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London, New York: Routledge; 2017. pp. 11-24 on methodology. Some outstanding examples include Butterworth A, Laurence R, Pompeii. *The Living City*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson; 2005. Aasgaard R, *Growing Up in Constantinople: Fifth-Century Life in a Christian City from a Child's Perspective*. In: Laes C, Mustakallio K, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Family in Late Antiquity. Life, Death and Interaction*. Leuven: Peeters; 2015. pp. 135-67; Brooten B, *Early Christian Enslaved Families (First to Fourth Century)*. In: Laes C, Mustakallio K, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Family in Late Antiquity. Life, Death and Interaction*. Leuven: Peeters; 2015. pp. 111-34; Cojocararu OM, *Everyday Lives of Children in Ninth-Century Byzantine Monasteries*. In: Laes C, Vuolanto V (eds), *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London, New York: Routledge; 2017. pp. 250-66; Sivan H, *Jewish Childhood in the Roman World*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
22. Hopkins K, *Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery*. P&P 1993;138:3.

Revised:13.01.2020

Accepted: 16.02.2020

