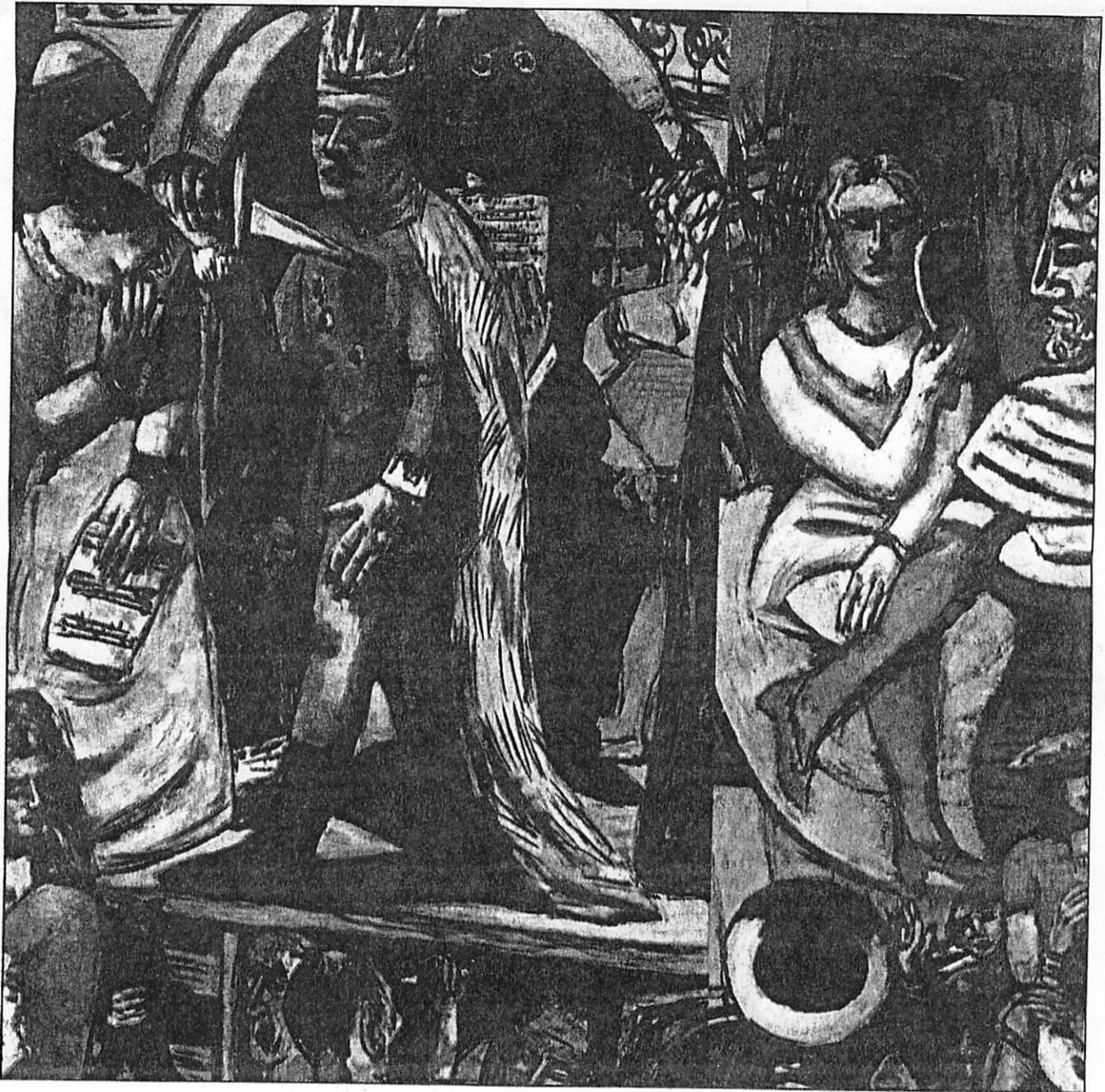


A HISTORY OF



YOUNG PEOPLE

**A HISTORY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WEST:
VOL. I, ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL RITES OF
PASSAGES; VOL. II, STORMY EVOLUTION TO
MODERN TIMES**

Edited by Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt
Translated from the French by Camille Naish and
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REVIEWED BY DAVID WAGNER

The writing of history continues on a trajectory that has taken it far from the chronicles of political leaders and military battles that once dominated the field. Social history is in the ascendant today and, in a sense, this is long overdue. We want to know how "ordinary" people lived in past ages, and the small flashes of light that fall on this subject from the history of the "great ones" does not satisfy us.

But the new historiography also raises problems. How, for example, can one approach a topic as vast as "the history of young people"?

The first answer is, "one" can't: It has to be a collection of several historians' contributions. In short, it takes a village to raise a history of children.

The second answer is that readers must not hope for the comprehensiveness of the older generation of multi-author histories, such as the ever-useful Cambridge histories. Harvard/Belknap's previous contribution to the multivolume, multi-author genre of historical writing — the "History of Private Life" edited by Philippe Aries and Georges Duby — now looks like a transitional work — social rather than political history, yet still trying to answer readers' general questions. (What was the household like, what was the role of women, how did they treat slaves, etc.)

The same publisher's new "History of Young

Perceptive essays on youth, families through time



People in the West" takes specialization a step further: It is a collection of highly specific examinations of particular categories of evidence. The contributors include an archaeologist, two art historians and three economic historians, besides several historians with no qualifying specialty. Nine of the contributors are French, seven Italian, two Swiss and one Israeli.

Alain Schnapp, professor of Greek archaeology at the University of Paris, leads off with a chapter on young people in the Greek city-state. Discussing Greek homosexuality, he clearly shows what makes it a problematic model for today's self-affirming "gay" movement: For the Greeks, homosexuality was part of a culture of militarism and hierarchy.

Though critical of 19th-century German scholarship for overemphasizing the military element, Mr. Schnapp's analysis of the relationship of pederasty to "paideia" (education) does nothing to subvert historian Paul Rahe's verdict (in his "Republics Ancient and Modern") that the Greek city-state was a men's club, while the Roman was a federation of families.

The pottery vases that are Mr. Schnapp's academic specialty are full of images of boy-infants being handed over by men to a centaur for education, as Achilles was. Other vases depict graduates of the centaurian instruction demonstrating their hunting prowess for appreciative older men. "Educating boys was men's business," the author concludes. It took a veritable revolution for the home — the women's domain — to assert its rights.

A chapter on Roman youth is contributed by Augusto Frascchetti, professor of classical economic and social history at the University of Rome. He shows how family histories undergird the civic customs of the city. These

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histories are often not themselves harmonious, but the resolution of their conflicts leads to harmony in later generations.

Consider, for instance, the confrontation between the Horatii of Rome and the Curiatii of Alba Longa, a semilegendary event from Rome's pre-republican era narrated by Livy. Young Horatius, having slain young Curiatius in single combat, found his sister — who had been engaged to Curiatius — weeping for her fiance, and he killed her.

His victory in combat made him a hero, but his violence toward his sister was a capital crime. (Women were much closer to legal equality in Rome than in Greece.) The king, wishing to save Horatius, appealed his case to the people at large and, as penance, Horatius was forced to walk beneath a beam, thereafter called the Sister's Beam (*tigillum sororium*).

From this, Mr. Frascchetti says, came a Roman public monument familiar in the time of Livy and Augustus. Near it were two altars, each dedicated to a gender-specific rite of passage. One was dedicated to Janus Curiatius: Janus was the god of doorways and transitions, and the name Curiatius (besides, one guesses, echoing the old Horatii-Curiatii feud) showed that this was Janus of the curia — the court, the public forum. The other altar was to Juno Sororium. This name may refer to Juno, Jupiter's consort, in her capacity as protectress of girls.

Mr. Frascchetti is more specific: "the verb *sororiare*," he writes, "indicated the first appearance of breasts in young girls, and Juno was the goddess who protected this growth." Thus we have "the different civic duties assigned the two sexes: the men took care of war and politics, and the women took care of birth, the physical reproduction that guaranteed the survival of the city." They took care of those things in Greece, too. But it took the Romans to elevate female roles to equality in divine protection and monumental commemoration.

Other essays in Volume 1 look at such topics as Jewish youth in the medieval and early modern periods, late medieval Italian youth and paternal authority in 17th-century Italy.

In an essay on medieval chivalrous literature, Christine Marchel-Nizia of France's elite Ecole Nationale Supérieure argues some provocative theses, such as that courtly adultery served to cement the military loyalty of younger knights and older kings. "The lady," she suggests, "is the knight's implicit reward for the faithfulness he shows the husband and seigneur. . . . She is nothing more than the mediator in a relationship of power among men."

Volume 2 looks at the modern (i.e. post-Renaissance) era, with chapters on military service, village life and factory work. Michelle Perrot, professor of modern French history at the University of Paris, contributes a chapter titled "From the Workshop to the Factory," in which she draws on early 19th-century diaries and novels for some unfamiliar facts about working-class youth.

Miss Perrot is no friend of the family: She attributes parents' resistance to their children's increasingly early departures from home to fear of "being deprived of their salaries." By her account, the working and lower-middle classes in European cities teemed with sexually emancipated young adults.

There are separate essays on youth in fascist Italy and in Nazi Germany. These chapters high-



Clockwise from the top: Caravaggio's "Maddalena penitente" depicting a young woman as a Magdalene figure, the first seal of King Louis IX of France, emphasizing his youth (12); French "sons of the revolution" in 1935; and Atalanta, the pre-eminent female athlete

light that neither of these regimes portrayed itself as reactionary or anti-progressive.

In their own propaganda, they were revolutionary and youth-oriented. The anthem of Italian fascism, after all, was "Giovinezza" — "Youth." "Only the eternally young should have a place in our Germany," declaimed Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach, adding that old people are hostile to "new ideas."

The paper on Italian fascism, by Laura Malvano, a University of Paris art historian, sometimes seems intent on linking Benito Mussolini's Italy to the pro-family politics of today by emphasizing common themes of family harmony and traditional female roles. But Miss Malvano also hints at what's really going on here: Mussolini, unlike Adolf Hitler, had to contend with a strong Roman Catholic Church and a devout Catholic population.

Thus, pointing out that uniforms in youth organizations were more sharply differentiated by gender in Italy than in Germany or the Soviet Union, the author posits a "two-fold ideological

objective of fascism's politics for the masses: the reference to the family (of clearly Catholic origin) for the women, while for the men, the "warrior" like mobilization that after 1935 would take on an increasingly militaristic tone."

The final essay, by Luisa Passerini of the European University in Florence, contrasts youth policy in fascist Italy ("to train 'elites' within a totalitarian system") and in the United States in the 1950s ("to ensure peaceful renewal of the ruling classes in a democratic society"). The latter civilization invented the word "teen-ager."

As each of these entries demonstrates, this is not a "history of young people," but a series of historical vignettes about them — overly specialized, often rendered in awkward English, but occasionally fascinating.

This two-volume work misses that coveted distinction "definitive," but it contributes numerous insights to the growing literature on social and family history.

David Wagner is a writer for *Insight magazine*.