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ON THE DEPICTIONS AND INTRICACIES OF SENILITY

Throughout history, elderly people comprised an insignificant part of human societies. We have entered the era in which elderly people are considered to be one of the most numerous social groups in the world. Nevertheless, some people still do not feel comfortable using term like “old age” or “aging”. Sometimes, this mechanism is activated involuntarily. Perhaps this was so in the case of Coco Chanel, who once said: “Old age does not protect from love, but love protects against aging”. If I had the opportunity to ask this heroine who was fulfilled and victorious in so many aspects of life a question, it would probably be – why do we have to protect ourselves from old age, and try to skip this period of our lives, which in favourable conditions can be just as long and full of content as the rest of our prior existence. The doubts raised in me by this quote attributed to Coco Chanel seem to me to be as obvious as would be my surprise if someone advised me to quit reading recent volumes of an interesting saga, out of concern that they could disappoint me. In other cases, the reluctance to use the term “old age”, and a tendency to substitute it with other words, such as: the “third age”, “golden age”, “Golden Autumn” – stems from concerns that this could be seen as ageism. But even these synonyms after a certain period of use may be treated as a form of discrimination. So why not stay with emotionally neutral term “old age” to denote one of the periods of life, a term neither more nor less significant than the words

“childhood”, “youth” and “maturity”. Of course, old age (which perhaps is one of the reasons that may lead people to avoid this term) can become a parody of one’s earlier existence, because of an unreasonable or inert urge to follow a once chosen direction, or vice versa – indifference that undermines the erstwhile passion or conviction. But every period of our lives can become a parody, except perhaps infancy and early childhood, that both now and from the dawn of human history are subject to their own, separate laws.

Regardless of whether we agree with the term “old age”, or we use one of the synonyms, people researching the phenomenon of rapid enlargement of this group usually take a stand for one of two basic positions. Among the primary approaches to this situation, two particular ones seem to be the most common. Micheal Philbert is among the proponents of the approach that old age is an issue unique to the human race, and that it came into existence not so long ago – mainly thanks to the increasing quality of life and the development of medical knowledge.

George Minois warns that it is easy to overinterpret the abovementioned approach, and to assume that the people of old age were nearly non-existent before the 19th century. A seemingly more plausible approach states that, although elderly people have existed throughout the ages, they were not treated as a separate social category, since they were merged with adults in general. Even though there might have been no social difference between an adult and an elderly person, it doesn’t lead to the assumption that the notion of old age was non-existent at the time. It was, however, rather abstract in nature, as it didn’t really refer to any age group. The notion of old age did not bear any significance in reference to social groups. As soon as a person started working, he or she was considered an adult right up to the day of death. An old person, in such case, was in fact considered an old adult.

Therefore, can we safely assume that there is no difference between the fate of elderly people before and after the 19th century? Nothing could be further from the truth. One can hazard a guess that over the ages each society had the elders – or sages – it deserved, depending on how these elders were treated; whether they were respected or even revered, or despised to a lesser or greater extent¹.

When creating an abstract division of society or, as it happened in the 20th century, separating the old from the adults, one has to answer the obvious question: When does a person enter old age? Subtracting the date of birth from the current year is tempting in its simplicity, but too primitive. The resulting difference implies that all of a sudden one is considered old upon turning sixty, or seventy, eighty

¹ J. Pruszyński, A. Gębska-Kuczerowska, A. Cicha-Mikołajczyk, L. Gomulska, *Character of Abuse towards the Elderly through History*. „Przegląd Epidemiologiczny” 2011, vol. 65, no. 3, p. 503–507.

or even ninety. There's nothing more elusive than the boundaries of old age, as George Minois stated, and it's hard to argue with him. In the modern world, the only "ritual" associated with entering old age is of artificial nature: retirement. The socio-economic conditions dictate and influence the timing of retirement (thus imposing when one is treated as old), as the government regulation regarding the retirement age has proved – in 2012 the retirement age was increased from sixty five to sixty seven. The government cited the willingness to reduce the labour shortage in the growing economy, and the effort to provide financial security for Polish citizens as the reasons for the retirement age increase². The legislators failed to recognize increasing life expectancy (a phenomenon that has been observed since the beginning of the 19th century) as one of the reasons. Why? Because paradoxically, instead of prolonging life, we can only prolong a specific stage of life – old age. Old age, by definition a period in which: a person, being free of labour and having financial security, can pursue all the joys that eluded him or her in all these years of work. By increasing the retirement age the legislators do not claim they have extended the mature age. They claim; we do it in order to provide financial security, implying that otherwise the pension system would run out of money. For those working in the field of gerontology (which concerns itself with aspects of aging and senescence), it means that the message they have been trying to convey over the years is finally brought to attention. And the message speaks of the growing influence of changes resulting from the undergoing processes within the age structure of society³. What has not changed? The dread of senescence from both the personal and social standpoint, typical of the vast majority of people. One of the oldest texts dealing with senescence focuses on this very fear. The record in question bridges the gap between our times and the times of pharaohs, and its message gets through without a hitch even today, just as it did when our distant ancestors had been reading it from a papyrus scroll. Ptahhotep, vizir to Pharaoh Izezi in the fifth dynasty around 2 450 years B.C. wrote:

Oldness has come; old age has descended. Feebleness has arrived; dotage is here anew. The heart sleeps wearily every day. The eyes are weak, the ears are deaf, the strength is disappearing because of weariness of heart, and the mouth is silent and cannot speak. The heart is forgetful and cannot recall yesterday. The bone suffers old age. Good has become evil. All taste is gone. What old age does to men is evil in every respect⁴.

² M. Hołowińska. *System emerytalny w Polsce*. Warszawa 2012, <http://www.financebezbarier.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/systemEmerytalnyWPolsce.pdf> [accessed 02.04.2015].

³ J. Pruszyński, J. Maksymiuk, J. Putz, *Old Age – a Challenge to UE Countries. Is Europe Ready to Face It? A Tentative Assessment*. In: *Old Age – a Public Health Challenge. Selected Issues*. Ed. M. Zysnarska. Poznań 2014, p. 139–150.

⁴ G. Minois, *Historia starości*. Warszawa 1995, p. 26.

Another preserved medical document from the times of Egyptian hieroglyphs, which depicted old age as a hunched man with a walking stick, confirms that efforts were made to explain the cause of growing old – the Ebers Papyrus. It reads that the dilatation of the heart causes the feebleness experienced by old people. Over the course of 4 thousand years this observation hasn't lost its validity. In 2011, PolSenior published research which indicates that unattended high blood pressure among seniors may indeed cause a considerable dilatation of the left ventricle. This in turn leads to congestive cardiac failure, manifesting itself by a general decline in the organism's functioning, commonly known as weakness. In yet another papyrus we can find a formula, "how to change an old man into a young one". To do so, one has to apply a special ointment which must be stored in a container made of half-gemstone. The Edwin Smith Papyrus gives both the application method and the subsequent effects of the very ointment: once applied on the skin, it was supposed to eliminate head wrinkles, and upon absorption, embellish the skin, remove blemishes and any irregularities on the body⁵. One cannot help but notice a fundamental contradiction in the approach and attitude towards growing old which has remained the same for centuries. On one hand, people always complain about the annoyances of being old. On the other hand, they search for a way of extending human life at all costs, which actually means extending the old age of life that they disdain so much. And the expression "at all costs" carries a lot of weight here. The story of Countess Elizabeth Báthory, niece to the Polish king Stephen Báthory, serves as anecdotal to that statement. In the most popular version of the story, Elizabeth discovered "the elixir" of youth and beauty by accident, when being infuriated with her servant. The countess struck her with a hairbrush so forcefully that the blood splattered all over Elizabeth's face. After wiping the blood off, she allegedly realized that her skin became smoother and whiter. After this "discovery" the countess had been ordering murder of young women, whose blood she used to retain youth. During the trial in 1611, her servants confessed to killing between thirty to sixty women. However, the records found in the castle indicated that at least six hundred killings took place in order to preserve Elizabeth's youth and beauty, and to extend her life⁶.

The exchange between Persians and Ethiopians as quoted by Herodotus is yet another story that may be either true or fictional. They discussed the life expectancy of their people, among other topics, and dietary habits, apparently already associated with longevity. The king of the Ethiopians, upon hearing that

⁵ J.H. Breasted, *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus*. Vol. 1: *Hieroglyphic Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary*. Oriental Issue Publications 3. Chicago 1930, p. 498.

⁶ M. Twiss, *Najwięksi zbrodniarze w historii*. Warszawa 2005, p. 114.

Persians mainly eat wheat bread, and usually reach the age of eighty, supposedly replied that he is not surprised the Persians are such a short-lived nation. He added that they wouldn't even reach eighty, if it wasn't for the wine. When asked about the lifespan and dietary habits of Ethiopians, he responded that most of his people reach the age of 120, and some live on even longer, eating boiled meat and drinking milk. Nevertheless, the diet was not the sole reason for the longevity of Ethiopians, as we can conclude from Herodotus' account. Purportedly, they had a certain fountain, a bath in which made the skin look vivid, as if oil flowed through the water of the very spring, which also exuded a pleasant violet scent. Moreover, nothing seemed to stay afloat in the water of this fountain – neither wood nor even lighter objects. Herodotus implied that maybe the water from this spring granted longevity, as the Ethiopians used it for everything⁷.

Another description of “the curse of old age” is attributed to Mimnermus of Colophon, who wrote the following in the 7th century B.C.:

But when painful old age comes on, which makes even a handsome man ugly, grievous cares wear away his heart and he derives no joy from looking upon the sunlight; he is hateful to boys and women hold him in no honour. So harsh has the god made old age⁸.

Hesiod provides a bitter reflection about the end of human life, typical of Hellenic culture, which despite its accomplishments could not discard the endless pursuit of beauty as an ultimate value. A nation which deemed the state of decrepitude to be worse than death, and worshipped Achilles (who obviously died young) had to treat old age as a curse. And indeed, “Old Age” of the Hellenes was a daughter of Night, and a granddaughter of Chaos. Her siblings were Fate, Death, Woe, Hunger, Sleep, and Affection. Hellenic “Old Age” appears as a punishment sent by Zeus, who could not forgive humans for acquiring fire. He unleashed Pandora, spreading diseases and misfortune. Hesiod wrote: “And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils”⁹. To their amazement, the Western civilization keeps discovering that ancient Greeks invented and empirically tested most of the concepts lauded at the times of the Enlightenment and Renaissance as great accomplishments. The Western civilization has adopted, at least partially, ancient Greeks' views on the phenomenon of old age and aging. That's why we are not

⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*. University of Chicago Press 1988, Book 3.

⁸ D. Gerber, *Greek Elegiac Poetry*. Loeb Classical Library 258. Harvard University Press 1999, p. 81.

⁹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*. Oxford University Press 1978.

taken aback by the generation gap and the ensuing clashes described in the story about Uranus, who was dethroned by his son Cronus. Later, Cronus himself tasted defeat at the hands of Zeus, his own son.

However, there was one special place in the Hellenic world – Sparta. They established a body called Gerousia – a council of elderlies comprised of thirty sages (who had to be at least 60) chosen from the citizens of Sparta. The council was in charge of the state policy, especially foreign policy; they prepared bills, and were treated as the highest court in case of felonies, being empowered to strip civil and political rights, and to sentence to death. The council also assumed the role of a tribunal authorized to summon and judge both kings. They did not answer to anyone. Nonetheless, the members of the council needed to have an impeccable reputation, and be chosen unanimously. The shortage of senior citizens also played an important role here; people of Sparta rarely reached the elderly stage of their lives, as a lot of them simply did not survive all the wars that the military-oriented Sparta was involved in¹⁰.

Ancient Rome, unique because of its durability and the territories on which it spread its influence, is a historic peculiarity on a global scale. Being both Greek (cultural roots) and Latin (administration and law) at the same time, Ancient Rome emerged as a separate civilization, which still continues to leave its imprint on more than just Europe and America. Ancient Rome can be split into two periods: the Roman Republic, and the Roman Empire. During the Roman Republic the society was characterized by an unprecedented, lifelong power held by a father of the family (*pater familias*) over all the members of his kin¹¹. He could sell his own children as slaves, or condemn a family member to death (after an investigation and deliberation with his closest relatives). Sparked in the Hellenic world, the consequent clash of generations was especially fierce, as children remained underage until the father's death. Ancient Rome and its law perfectly illustrated the duality of the fate of the elderly, that repeats itself over the ages; the more rights and power the old wielded, the more in conflict they were with the young. Conversely, the less rights they had, the worse they were treated by younger generations. One may conclude that the legal system cannot offer an alternative to the elderly; it's oscillating between either being treated with aversion by the younger members of society, or "vegetating" in the shadow of the next generations. Surprisingly, the Roman Empire (which in our general understanding was a step back in comparison to the Republic) brought an improvement of family members' fate. The head

¹⁰ G. Minois, *Historia starości*, p. 74.

¹¹ P. Veyne, *Historia życia prywatnego. Od Cesarstwa Rzymskiego do roku tysięcznego*. Wrocław 2005, p. 85–88.

of the family was not allowed to condemn his kin to death anymore, and could not abandon a newborn infant; a woman could become guardian of her children, and preserve the rights to control her dowry. Literature reflects the situation in which the fear of the elderly lessened, and the Romans, as well as any succeeding societies, started to reveal, and even exaggerate (through writers) the mental and physical limitations of the old.

The Hebrews' distinct portrayal of old men enrooted itself in the Christian tradition. "As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool" (Dan. 7,9)¹². From that point on, the depiction of the elderly remained a symbol and embodiment of wisdom and God's eternalness. For early Christians, the problem of old people was not clearly outlined, which may be treated as a positive, or a negative. The church advised taking care of the downtrodden (whether they were poor, widowed, orphaned, crippled, sick, and old) without dividing them according to gender or age¹³. And yet even in this society one encounters a duality in the image of the old. On one hand, old age afflicts humans as a punishment for their sins, while on the other hand, the "dignified" old age results from leading a virtuous life.

There has been a considerable interest in Poland (both in the past and in more recent times) regarding the image and ways of old age. In his book *Domy i dwory* (which roughly translates into "houses and manors") from 1830, Łukasz Gołębiowski described cases of certain Poles who enjoyed extraordinarily long lives. Apart from the semi-legendary Piast the Wheelwright who allegedly reached the age of 120, Gołębiowski presented a series of more credible instances, one of which is a Polish cook from the village Kozielec who lived in the first half of the 18th century. She was famous for her excellent, self-made food which she continued to prepare even at the age of 108. Róża Twardowska (deceased in Mińsk) was another person having a long lifespan. Wojciech Bagiński, a Dominican friar, wrote that she had reached twenty years of age when Poles returned victorious from Vienna; born in 1663, she joined the Monastery of the Sisters of the Order of Saint Basil the Great at the age of twelve, and lived there for more than 100 years. By the age of 103 she could barely walk, and for the last six years of her life she was bedridden. She died at the age of 113. In Bagiński's account, one can discover that Róża Twardowska had not taken any medicines, nor refused any type of food in her entire life. In "Wiadomości Uprzywilejowane Warszawskie" (a Varsovian weekly peri-

¹² *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Colorado Springs 2011.

¹³ G. Minois, *Historia starości*, p. 127–146.

odical) from the 30th of June, 1762, one can find an obituary stating that one Wojciech Popiołek from Kaczmiska lived without the slightest hint of sickness for 114 years. Another, somewhat amusing example of longevity is the story of Stanisław Rudnicki. According to a Varsovian diarist Antoni Magier, king Stanisław II August, had been informed about an old man from Warsaw who was allegedly over 100 years old, but still vigorous and in good health. The king was curious about the old man's way of life, so he summoned him and asked many questions, among which was an inquiry about Rudnicki's approach towards women. The old man replied that he has never had a woman, nor was he ever married. The king commented shortly calling him a fool and ended the conversation. Whether this anecdote really is based on Rudnicki, we do not know. According to the Varsovian newspaper "Kurier Warszawski" from June 7th, 1823, the old man who was supposed live until 114, lived in Warsaw on the third floor of a corner tenement house on Krzywe Koło Street. He was healthy, vigorous and had a conscious mind until his last days. He did not have a wife and he could recall the coronation of king August. He lived a modest life, not needing any assistance himself, he gladly helped the poor. In another periodical, a Cracovian "Gazeta Krakowska" issued on October 11th, 1812, there was an analysis of the data regarding old age that had been recorded in the Kraków Department, which at the time was a home to roughly four million people. In 1810, there were 132 people who reached the age of 81–85, 162 people who lived till 86–90 years old, thirty four people who reached 91–95, thirteen people who reached the age of 100, one person who reached 102, five people who reached 103, one person who reached 105 and one person who lived till 110. This information was accompanied by a disclaimer, according to which the climate of Kraków Department is beneficial for health, regardless of its frequent sways resulting from being in the vicinity of Tatra Mountains.

Although there are numerous other examples of longevity worth pondering upon, the story of Wojciech Figarski, a resident of Warsaw, proves to be the most peculiar one. For many years the fellow citizens of Warsaw spotted him almost every day, as he walked, leaning on a sturdy cane, to attend the mass in the nearest church located on Zakroczymska Street. When someone asked him whether he knew the king Stanisław himself, he would respond by "Well, who doesn't?". The Varsovian lived until the age of 112 and died in 1880¹⁴.

In order to properly evaluate all of those examples of longevity we must realise that, traditionally in Polish countryside, people over fifty years old were considered to be old. There was a difference between men and women in regard to age

¹⁴ R. Kaleta, *Sensacje z dawnych lat*. Wrocław 1986, p. 130–137.

beyond which person was considered a senior. Men were able to push the customary border of old age, as long as they had the strength, by working on the farm, because one of the most important factors indicating beginning of the old age was to waiver the farm on behalf of younger generation and transit to life which depended entirely on financial support of heirs. Another determinant of old age was the appearance of grandchildren. In this case, threshold of old age could be exceeded quite early, even in fourth decade of life especially for women¹⁵.

Due to those reasons it comes as no surprise that people who managed to live to old age were in the spotlight of both writers and doctors. As far as scientific studies are concerned, there are two prominent figures that devoted their studies to discover the secrets of longevity, also touching upon the subject of old age. Professor of medicine from the Jagiellonian University Józef Majer, having based his investigation on 600 cases of centenarians, analysed instances of long life and tried to determine what is the recipe for longevity¹⁶. The other notable example of a medicine practitioner who studied the notion of old age was Teodor Tripplin¹⁷.

Regardless if we consider the social status and life conditions of old people in Poland or in other countries, if we analyse them thoroughly we should keep in mind at least five factors to be considered that have always been influencing this matter. The first factor to be considered is the fragility of an old person's body, the diminishing of its physical strength and abilities. In any culture following the survival of the fittest and favouring physical advantage, the fate of old people prove to be worse than in societies that honour either common or national laws and provide protection for the weaker individuals who are unable to defend themselves. The second issue of consequence for older people is knowledge and life experience.

Old people can actively participate in cultures based on verbal tradition. In this type of society, people who wield the knowledge of its history and tradition in their memory are seen as a link between the generations.

The development of written law and popularization of written documents and chronicles, as well as a shifting focus from tradition to law has deprived elderlies of their highly valued place in the social hierarchy. Another reason lies in the diminishing physical attractiveness of older people. Wherever there is a cult of beautiful

¹⁵ B. Glapiński. *Ludzie starzy na wsi polskiej od schyłku XIX wieku po rok 1939*. Poznań 2014, p. 86–88.

¹⁶ J. Majer, *O trwaniu życia ludzkiego*. „Tygodnik Naukowy i Literacki” 1866, vol. 9–11. Cited in: R. Kaleta, *Sensacje z dawnych lat*, p. 136.

¹⁷ T. Tripplin, *O długowieczności ludzkiej*. Biblioteka Warszawska 1. Warszawa 1856, p. 393–419. Cited in: R. Kaleta, *Sensacje z dawnych lat*, p. 136; idem, *Hygiena polska, czyli sztuka zachowania zdrowia, przedłużenia życia i uchronienia się od chorób, zastosowana do użytku publicznego z szczególnym poglądem na okoliczności w naszym kraju i klimacie wpłynąć mogące na tworzenie się słabości, cierpień i chorób*. T. 2. Warszawa 1857, p. 150–194.

body, old people will be socially degraded. In a culture with more abstract views on the archetype of beauty, where it is mostly of symbolic nature, outside the mundane aesthetic canons, growing old will not have such an impact on social status. The fourth factor influencing the social life of old people is the form of an average family. The elderly have usually been supported by big families in cultures based on patriarchy. Such families were surprisingly well functioning in difficult times, such as the birth of a new civilization, or during a severe crisis, whereas stable conditions often meant shifting the focus to the marital relationship, thus loosening the family ties and leaving the elderly on their own. The last factor affecting the approach towards older people is the financial condition.

In societies in which property was firmly bound to a particular person, the authority of old people was strengthened; however, it evoked disdain from the young. In societies in which owned land estate provided the main source of income, old people, unable to work the land, were dependant on those who could maintain a household. Nowadays, social structures characterized by immense respect towards the elderly, belong to the so-called post-figurative cultures. In these societies, cultural models are passed on from elders to younger generations, and adolescence entails taking over the responsibilities of an adult. This model has been slowly vanishing from today's world, partly because of the rapid changes in various areas of life, with which old people struggle to keep up.

We can make an assumption that each culture was following its own vision of an elderly person and tried to fit old people into that picture. That would often entail high expectations regarding wisdom and leading a life devoid of mistakes. As a result (whether it is due to liabilities or advantages) the conception of an old person is more often than not different from a picture of an average human. The true picture of old age has been therefore obscured throughout the ages by the susceptibility of human nature to arbitrariness and extremities. However, reviewing the treasure of creations of the human mind, the achievements of a time when philosophy was the love of wisdom, not a way of earning a living, with delight we can lean on two archetypes affecting the problem of old age. They function in our culture for so long that we almost stopped noticing them. The first is the "king with the golden branch in his hand", restored by Frazer. A picture of a lonely ruler who, in his (we do not hesitate to use that word) madness, who is vainly trying to protect and preserve the Nemorensis kingdom of his youth for himself. A shadowy figure, during summer and winter, sun and bad weather, trembling with fear that the slightest weakness, barely perceptible reduction in performance or relentlessly appearing grey hair will seal his fate. The second archetype, belongs to two

characters, Ulysses and Penelope. Despite the passage of years, and temptations – eternal youth – promised by Circe to Ulysses, and suitors that surrounded Penelope, they victoriously overcame obstacles and awaited together their old age – the culmination of their rich life.

Returning to the issue of the border separating previous life from old age, we find a situation in which neither the somewhat recently born phenomenon of retirement, nor the laws established over the course of history, can mark the threshold of old age. Due to this fact maybe we should consider the phenomenon of old age as one of the vaguely demarcated parts of life. It should not be forgotten that neither old age, nor youth, nor any other stage of life occurs in separation from one another. Each stage has its own unique value, but it is only when they are combined that they complement each other and become complete. Agatha Christie has grasped this idea saying that no man can truly be himself until he has left his middle age behind. It is only when we comprehend life as a whole can it become real; it cannot be treated as a play consisting of separate acts, with us as actors playing their parts. This approach brings us closer to the notion of an elderly adult and shows that what we nowadays call an old age constitutes a valid element of life, being at least as important as other stages, from childhood years, through adolescence, to adulthood. Bearing in mind the abovementioned value of senescence, it has to be noted that it will never bring satisfaction. What lies deeply in human nature is that we are never satiated and never fully approve any stage of life. As Herbert Henry Asquith once said: "Youth would be an ideal state if it came a little later in life".

O obrazach i zawiłościach starości

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Starszy człowiek niejako na naszych oczach stał się przedstawicielem jednej z najliczniejszych grup ludności współczesnego świata. Rozpatrując w związku z tym zjawiskiem zagadnienie starości, oscyluje się przeważnie pomiędzy dwoma poglądami. Jeden z nich głosi, że starość jest cechą typowo ludzką, która pojawiła się w niezbyt odległym od nas okresie dzięki poprawie warunków życia oraz postępowi wiedzy. Drugi zakłada, że żyjący wcześniej starsi ludzie nie pojawiali się jako odrębna kategoria społeczna, ponieważ utożsamiało się ich z ogółem dorosłych. Niezależnie od tego, jaką wersję przyjmujemy, okres, który nazywamy starością, jest obecnie powszechnie dostępną dla większości osób częścią życia człowieka. Okresem, który zwykle nas nie zadowala, choć jest równie istotny i cenny jak dzieciństwo, okres dojrzewania lub młodości. Celem niniejszego artykułu przeglądowego

jest próba zachęcenia czytelnika do zainteresowania się zagadnieniem wieku sędziwego poprzez przedstawienie zarysu losów oraz obrazów starości w kontekście wybranych społeczeństw.