

Child Emperors in Rome or The Domestication of an Exception

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Abstract

Child or underage rulers were not uncommon in ancient times, and can be found in almost all ancient cultures. The decisive step in “domesticating the exception” was taken by Valentinian I, the founder of a short-lived Roman dynasty. In AD 367, he immediately appointed his eight-year-old son Gratian as *Augustus*, the “higher” ruler (albeit in his own, western half of the empire). Valentinian’s seed fell on fertile ground. It was adopted by other rulers and associates of his and Theodosius’ dynasty, who rushed to appoint young descendants as *Augusti*. Valentinian’s younger son, Gratian’s half-brother and Valens’ nephew Valentinian II, can be considered the prototype of the late antique child emperor. His reign combined all the negative features of this model of government. The trend established by Gratian and Valentinian II continued for some time in both halves of the empire. Despite the fact that the appearance of child emperors in the fifth century seemed much more common than a century earlier, late antique writers remained reserved about it.

Keywords: child emperors; dynastic principle; imperial succession; Severan dynasty; Constantine the Great; Valentinian II

Izvleček

Otroški cesarji v Rimu ali udomačevanje izjeme

Otroški ali mladoletni vladarji v starem veku niso bili redkost. Najdemo jih v skoraj vseh starodavnih kulturah. Razmere v Rimu so bile v tem pogledu drugačne. Odločilni korak pri “udomačevanju izjeme” je naredil Valentinijan I., ustanovitelj ene kratkotrajnih rimskih dinastij. Leta 367 je svojega osemletnega sina Gracijana takoj imenoval za avgusta, “višjega” vladarja (čeprav le v svoji, zahodni polovici cesarstva). Valentinijanov recept je padel na plodna tla. Prevzeli so ga drugi vladarji in sopotniki njegove in Teodozijeve dinastije, ki so kot za stavo imenovali otroške potomce za avguste. Valentinijanov mlajši sin, Gracijanov polbrat in Valensov nečak Valentinijan II., lahko velja za prototip poznoantičnega otroškega cesarja. Njegova vladavina je združevala vse negativne značilnosti tega modela vladanja. Trend, ki sta ga vzpostavila Gracijan in Valentinijan II., se je nekaj časa nadaljeval v obeh polovinah cesarstva. Čeprav je bil pojav otroških cesarjev v 5. stoletju zato običajnejši kot stoletje prej, so poznoantični pisci ostali do njega zadržani.

Ključne besede: otroški cesarji; dinastično načelo; nasledstvo na prestolu; dinastija Severov; Konstantin Veliki; Valentinijan II.

Child or underage rulers were not uncommon in ancient times, and can be found in almost all ancient cultures. In ancient Egypt, they included Pepi II from the late Old Kingdom (probably 2278–2214 BC), who some credit with a mythical 96 years of rule, although he probably occupied the throne for “only” a good 60 years. Tutankhamun (1332–1323 BC), the most famous pharaoh – through no merit of his own – can also be placed in the same category. However, while the two Egyptians mentioned above have been given reserved assessments by historians, Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC) and perhaps Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC) began their careers as child kings but went on to be much more successful in adulthood.¹

Josiah, king of the peripheral Near Eastern kingdom of Judah (king 640–609 BC), was nine years old when he ascended the throne. If it is true that he was the “driving force” behind the emergence of Deuteronomistic historiography in the Old Testament,² as some researchers still claim, then despite his insignificance in the broader context of ancient political history, he is one of the most influential figures in Western culture. Of course, children and young people on the throne can be found in many places in Greece, and suffice to mention the Spartan King Pleistarchus (reigned 480–458 BC), son of Leonidas I, who was assisted by the successful military leader Pausanias as regent.³ Among his Macedonian colleagues were Amyntas IV (who lived around 365–336 BC), who was replaced by Philip II, and Alexander IV (who lived 323–309 BC), the posthumously born son of Alexander the Great.⁴ Of course, neither of the two Macedonians survived the struggles of their more powerful contemporaries, although Amyntas was considered dangerous enough to be executed only by Alexander III, but not yet by Philip.

The exception in Rome

The situation in Rome was different in this respect, as child rulers or emperors appeared relatively late. There are probably several reasons for this, not least the way in which the Principate was established under Octavian, as the latter was able to closely observe Caesar’s failure,⁵ which is why he refused to directly transfer monarchical models from the East to the Roman context. Therefore, the first *princeps* cloaked his monarchy in a distinctly republican façade.⁶ It is not easy to answer the question of when exactly the Romans recognized, even in a conceptual sense, that they were living in a monarchical system.⁷ In any case, Augustus’ definition from the end of his

¹ See for the mentioned cases Van De Mieroop 2011, 84–86, 171–175, 206 ff., 215.

² Cf. for different contemporary theories in this regard Braulik 2011, 233–254.

³ Cf. Bradford 2011, 95 ff.

⁴ Cf. Parker 2014, 274, 322, 332.

⁵ Cf. Brandt 2021, 71 ff.

⁶ Cf. Eich 2019, 11 ff.

⁷ Eich 2019, 54. But cf. Brandt 2021, 100 ff.

life, although valid only on paper, persisted for a long time, stating that *auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt*.⁸ If a child came to the highest position in the empire, the premise of preserving republican institutions would collapse on its own.

Regardless of this, the dynastic idea, which is a basic prerequisite for the rise of a child to a leadership position in any community, had taken root in Rome much earlier. Its origins can be found in the crisis of the Roman nobility in the late 2nd second century BC. At that time, the position of the republic's more or less "collective" leadership, within which a relatively large number of aristocrats were able to take on demanding military and administrative tasks in the growing republic, began to be occupied by charismatic "professional" military leaders.⁹ Their soldiers, who were increasingly dependent on their success, began to rally around them (and not around the abstract republic). This development made it possible for the nineteen-year-old Octavian, who was exceptionally young according to established Republican rules, to take advantage of Caesar's legacy.¹⁰ The veterans of the latter gave him preference over the experienced right-hand man of the dictator, Mark Antony, even though they knew him from the battlefield.¹¹ It is therefore not surprising that the *princeps* did not shy away from the possible succession of his young relatives, his nephew and grandsons, as long as they were available.¹² In the end, he was succeeded by his 56-year-old stepson Tiberius, with whom he had a rather difficult relationship.¹³

Regardless of the strength of the idea of dynastic succession, Roman dynasties during the Principate were short-lived, not only in comparison with those of the European Middle Ages or the modern era, but also with some of those of antiquity. The most enduring was the first, known as the Julio-Claudian dynasty. However, its founder, Augustus, was most responsible for its duration of just under a century, as he ruled the Roman Empire as *princeps* for more than two-fifths of its time. The events following the violent death of Caligula on January 24, AD 41,¹⁴ were very instructive for the context in which child rulers could later emerge. At first glance, there were no living relatives of Augustus who were suitable to take power. However, the Senate's deliberations on alternative solutions were thwarted by the Praetorian Guard's determination to support the stuttering and lame Claudius, Caligula's uncle, as *princeps*.¹⁵ Later, he had to prove his ruling competence with a military campaign in Britain, and

⁸ R. Gest. div. Aug. 34.3. *I excelled all in influence, although I possessed no more power than others who were my colleagues in the several magistracies.*

⁹ Cf. particularly Blösel 2021, 168 ff.

¹⁰ Cf. Galinsky 2013, particularly 38 ff.

¹¹ Cf. Osgood 2018, 187.

¹² Cf. Eich 2019, 55.

¹³ Edelmann-Singer 2017, particularly 23–24.

¹⁴ See Suet. *Claud.* 10 and *Ios. ant. Iud.* 19.162 for a description.

¹⁵ Cf. Eich 2019, 69–71.

in the end his reign was relatively successful.¹⁶ The story of Claudius himself does not belong in the category of child emperors, as he was already over 50 years old at the time of the events described. However, the fact that a candidate of suitable origin was given preference over a possible alternative who was not related to Augustus' family, even though he had previously been considered unfit to take power, indirectly paved the way for the idea of succession by a child, although this was still a long way off. Yet Claudius' successor, the son of his last wife Agrippina the Younger, Nero, was by far the youngest *princeps* at the time of his accession to the throne at the age of 16. Already Roman historians linked Claudius' death by poisoning to fears that Nero's half-brother Britannicus (who died in AD 55 under mysterious circumstances) would come of age.¹⁷

The dynastic principle demonstrated similar strength in the final phase of the period of the adoptive emperors as it had during the first crisis of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Marcus Aurelius was accused in antiquity of enabling the rise to power of his son Commodus, who was considered unsuitable, because he broke with the decades-old tradition of adopting the "most capable" heir.¹⁸ The description of *Historia Augusta* is quite merciless: *Iam in suos tanta fuit benignitate Marcus, ut cum in omnes propinquos cuncta honorum ornamenta contulerit, tum in filium et Commodum quidem - scelestum atque impurum - cito nomen Caesaris et mox sacerdotium statimque nomen imperatoris ac triumphi participationem et consulatum. Quo quidem tempore sine - imperator filio ad triumphalem currum in circo pedes cucurrit.*¹⁹

However, neither the philosopher emperor nor his entourage apparently gave serious thought to any other solution, as Marcus Aurelius had a biological son. He had already appointed him *Caesar* in 166, when he was five years old, and on January 1, AD 177, he made him co-emperor, while reserving for himself, as in the time of Lucius Verus' co-reign, the position of supreme priest of the Roman cults (*pontifex maximus*).²⁰ When Aurelius died three years later, there was no doubt about the succession. Nevertheless, Commodus could be classified as one of the predecessors of the child emperors. In any case, Alexander Demandt's observation that no Roman emperor recognized anyone other than his own son as the most suitable candidate for succession,²¹ if he had one, remains valid for Marcus Aurelius.

¹⁶ Cf. Brandt 2021, 177–178.

¹⁷ Cf. Suet. *Nero* 7–9. Cf. also Cedilnik 2011, particularly 34.

¹⁸ Cf. Eich 2019, 199–200.

¹⁹ SHA *Aur.* 16.1–2. *Such was Marcus' kindness toward his own family that he bestowed the insignia of every office on all his kin, while on his son, and an accursed and foul one he was, he hastened to bestow the name of Caesar, then afterward the priesthood, and, a little later, the title of emperor and a share in a triumph and the consulship. It was at this time that Marcus, though acclaimed imperator, ran on foot in the Circus by the side of the triumphal car in which his son was seated.*

²⁰ Cf. Brandt 2021, 404.

²¹ Cf. Demandt 2007, 256.

Changes during the 3rd century

At least some changes were brought about by the Severan dynasty. The increased role of Eastern influences, embodied by the Syrian Julia Domna during the reign of her African-born husband Septimius Severus,²² may have contributed to the Roman environment becoming more open to the rule of minors. However, as already indicated above, dynastic thinking was decisive. After the violent death of Caracalla in AD 217, there were no biological relatives of the dynasty's founder left. The leading position was taken over by Julia Domna's sister, Julia Maesa, who successively brought her two daughters' sons to power, first Elagabalus and then Severus Alexander.²³ Both were around 14 years old when they took office, which meant they were of age according to the customs of the time.²⁴ In addition to their power-hungry grandmother, they were greatly influenced by their mothers, her daughters.²⁵ The influence of mothers was also pronounced at the time when the phenomenon of child emperors reached its peak at the end of the 4th and during the 5th century.²⁶

Gordian III should also be included among the early very young rulers. His reign is interesting because it coincided with what was probably the last major attempt by the Senate to independently decide on the ruler of the Roman Empire. During the civil war with the first military emperor, Maximinus Thrax, the Senate first chose Gordian I, the grandfather of Gordian III, as emperor, who then chose his son Gordian II as co-ruler. Their reign, which began in January AD 238, was short-lived. When Gordian II fell in battle against troops loyal to Maximinus, Gordian I committed suicide. Their son and grandson, respectively, was proclaimed as ruler (at least on paper) thanks to the army's loyalty to the dynastic principle. The Senate chose its members Balbinus and Pupienus as *Augusti*, equal successors to the older Gordians.²⁷ However, the Praetorian Guard and some Roman citizens were dissatisfied with this, and forced the appointment of the young, 13-year-old Gordian as *Caesar* and *princeps iuventutis* (a title that had also been given to Commodus, a few months before being appointed his father's co-ruler in AD 177). In the spring of 238, the military emperor Maximinus was killed, and soon after the Praetorian Guard killed the two emperors who had been appointed by the Senate. This made Gordian III the sole *Augustus*.²⁸ The portrait of his six-year long rule in the sources is relatively favourable, but it is also clear that he did not have much real say during his time as emperor.²⁹ *Historia Augusta* also expresses such views, summarizing his tenure as follows: *Post quod non puerile iam*

²² Cf. Eich 2019, 216.

²³ Brandt 2021, 464 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Beard 2015, 311 f.

²⁵ Cf. Kulikowski 2016, 143.

²⁶ Cf. Leppin 2003, 105.

²⁷ Cf. Sommer 2020, 32–34.

²⁸ Cf. Eich 2019, 257–259.

²⁹ Cf. Kulikowski 2016, 178.

*et contemptibile videbatur imperium, si quidem et optimi soceri consiliis adiuuaretur, et ipse pro parte aliquantulum saperet nec per spadones ac ministros aulicos matris vel ignorantia vel coniventia venderetur.*³⁰ He most likely lost his life in early 244 in a battle between the Roman and Persian armies at Misiche, near Fallujah in present-day Iraq.³¹ Persian sources attribute his death to his own weapons, while Roman sources blame Philip the Arab, who succeeded Gordian III.³²

Diocletian inadvertently contributed greatly to the establishment of the model of child emperors with his tetrarchic system. With his reforms, he weakened the role of the Senate and thus the illusion of the “peculiarity” of the Roman monarchy from the Principate period, which had already almost completely disappeared by the 3rd century.³³ There is no consensus among contemporary historians about the relationship between Diocletian’s tetrarchy and the dynastic principle, and some see it as an attempt to permanently abolish this principle.³⁴ However, Corcoran’s assumption that the reformer of the Roman Empire (temporarily) avoided it only because he had no biological male heir and only a daughter seems quite plausible. On the other hand, he was certainly not immune to family ties when it came to the composition of the first tetrarchy. He was indeed linked to his first co-ruler Maximian by a joint military experience, but Constantius Chlorus was Maximian’s and Galerius his own son-in-law.³⁵

From Constantine to Theodosius

Diocletian’s seemingly very clever system of rule over the empire was challenged by the dynastic principle just one year after the successful first “change of guard”, when soldiers elevated Constantine, who was not part of the tetrarchic system, to power.³⁶ At the same time, the ruler was inspired by his predecessor’s model to replace the “artificial” tetrarchy with a “natural” one based on biological kinship. This tendency is evident in his plans for succession after his death. He was to be succeeded by four biological relatives,³⁷ but his nephew Dalmatius was eliminated immediately after the emperor’s death.³⁸ With this plan, Constantine finally opened the door to the reign of “true” child emperors. Both he and his last remaining co-ruler (and rival) Licinius

³⁰ SHA Gord. 23.7. *After this his rule seemed not in the least that of a child or contemptible, since he was aided by the advice of this excellent father-in-law, while he himself, on his own account, developed considerable sagacity and did not let his favours be sold by the eunuchs and attendants at court through his mother’s ignorance or connivance.*

³¹ Brandt 2021, 498.

³² Cf. Sommer 2020, 39.

³³ Cf. Kuhoff 2001; Bratož 2014, particularly 53–57.

³⁴ Cf. Demandt 2007, 257.

³⁵ Cf. Corcoran 2008, 232.

³⁶ Cf. Brandt 2006, 30, where Constantine is explicitly declared an usurper.

³⁷ (Ps.-)Aur. Vict. *epit. Caes.* 41.19–20.

³⁸ Cf. Hier. *chron.* ad a. 338.

sought to secure their positions by appointing their biological descendants as co-emperors at an early age, contenting themselves with granting them the title of *Caesar*. Similarly, these children and adolescents had not yet gained any real influence over the administration of the Roman Empire during their fathers' lifetimes.³⁹

The death of the powerful ruler in May AD 337 initially created a visible vacuum. As a result, the intended successors did not assume the title of *Augustus* until almost four months later. In the meantime, Dalmatius was eliminated, as already mentioned, and the remaining surviving Constantine's relatives were massacred, with the exception of his sons and their cousins Gallus and Julian.⁴⁰ There are different interpretations of the circumstances surrounding these bloody events. It is probably indisputable that Constantine's middle son Constantius had a hand in it, but it cannot be ruled out that the late assumption of the pagan historian Zosimus from around AD 500 about the major role of military discontent, because the dead emperor was not succeeded solely by his sons, is true.⁴¹ This would be consistent with the military preference for solutions in which power is inherited by the closest biological relatives. In Constantine's case, these remained in power, but their joint rule was fraught with mutual conflicts, which did not change even after the surviving cousins entered the administration of the Roman Empire. However, none of Constantine's sons had his own son whom he could proclaim co-emperor while still a child.

The next step in "domesticating the exception" could therefore only be taken by Valentinian I, the founder of the next short-lived Roman dynasty. In 367, he immediately appointed his eight-year-old son Gratian as *Augustus*, the "higher" ruler (albeit in his own, western half of the empire).⁴² Two circumstances probably prompted him to abandon usual reservations about at least the formal rule of children, which his predecessors had held. The first was a life-threatening illness he had just survived,⁴³ and the second was the usurpation of Julian's relative Procopius, which his brother and co-ruler in the east, Valens, had to deal with. The decisive battle took place in May 366 at Tyatira in Lydia.⁴⁴

Valentinian's seed fell on fertile ground, and was adopted by other rulers and associates of his and Theodosius' dynasty, who rushed to appoint young descendants as *Augusti*. Valentinian's younger son, Gratian's half-brother and Valens' nephew Valentinian II can be considered the prototype of the late antique child emperor, with his reign demonstrating all the negative features of this form of government. In his case, it was unusual that his half-brother and uncle, the *Augusti* at the time, were not interested in proclaiming him *Augustus* after his father's death in 375, when he was only four years old. Nominal power over a portion of the western part of the empire

³⁹ Cf. Demadt 2007, 88.

⁴⁰ Cf. Kulikowski 2016, 349 and the following pages.

⁴¹ Zos. 2.40.3. Cf. also Demandt 2007, 104; Bratož 2014, 115.

⁴² Amm. 27.6.

⁴³ Amm. 27.6.1.

⁴⁴ Cf. Errington 2005, 349–351.

was granted to him by the troops, which clearly wanted to avoid the direct control of Valentinian's already more independent older son, Gratian.⁴⁵ Their expectations were fulfilled, as the new *Augustus* became little more than a puppet passed around by various military commanders. Besides that, once again in the history of the Roman child emperors, his mother, Valentinian's widow Justina, wielded considerable influence. The most important monument to her and her alleged misguidance of her son was erected by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who had been bishop in Valentinian's capital since 374.⁴⁶ After Justina's death and the victory over the usurper Maximus, his eastern colleague Theodosius I effectively ruled over the part of the empire that was nominally ruled by the young emperor. Upon his return to the East, he appointed the military commander Arbogast as a kind of supervisor in Gaul, who ensured that Valentinian was unable to exercise any real power even after reaching the age of 20.⁴⁷ To improve his position, the young man decided to be baptized. However, Ambrose's arduous journey to perform the baptism was in vain. Valentinian II had most likely passed judgement on himself and committed suicide in his palace in Vienna in May 392.⁴⁸ Although there were also explanations circulating that blamed Arbogast directly for his death, it is not difficult to imagine the situation in which the humiliated young man, without any political influence, saw no other way out than to leave the world (honourably).⁴⁹

It was probably stories similar to that of Valentinian that late antique critics had in mind when they criticized the rule of children in the Roman context. Among them, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, a panegyrist from Gaul at the end of the 4th century, deserves special mention. In his panegyric addressed to Theodosius, he outlined the weaknesses of the child emperor: *At quanto aliter illorum principum mos fuit (quos loquar, notum est), qui maiestatem regiam imminui et vulgari putabant, nisi eos intra repositum Palatinae aedis inclusos tamquam aliquod Vestale secretum veneratio occulta consuluisse, nisi intra domesticam umbram iacentes solitudo provisa et silentia late conciliate vallassent.*⁵⁰ Probably written at around the same time, the *Historia Augusta* projected this phenomenon into the 3rd century and justified the choice of the elderly military commander Tacitus as emperor in AD 275 by saying that soldiers did not want to entrust the throne to a child, since: *Dii avertant principes pueros et pa-*

⁴⁵ (Ps.-)Aur. Vict. *epit. Caes.* 45.8–10. Cf. Brandt 2023, 66.

⁴⁶ Cf. Leppin 2003, 105–107.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kulikowski 2019, 136.

⁴⁸ Cf. Leppin 2003, 204.

⁴⁹ Cf. for examples Greg. Tur. *Franc.* 2.9. The theory of Arbogast's immediate fault was e. g. exposed by Oros. 7.35.10, although he also mentions other explanations.

⁵⁰ *Paneg.* 2.21.3. *But how different the custom of other emperors (you know of whom I speak) who considered their royal majesty diminished and cheapened unless they were shut up within some remote part of the palace, as if in some sanctuary of Vesta, to be consulted with reverence and in secret, and unless a carefully arranged solitude and widely imposed silence protected them like a rampart as they lay buried in the shade of their abode.*

*tres patriae dici inpuberes et quibus ad suscribendum magistri litterari manus teneant, quos ad consulatus dandos dulcia et circuli et quaecumque voluptas puerilis invitet.*⁵¹

A slightly different image of Valentinian II can be gleaned from Ambrose's letter, in which he reports on a meeting of the Crown Council devoted to the question of Victoria's statue in the Senate chamber. There, the bishop emphasizes the young man's independent decision, in accordance with his Christian faith: *Lecti sunt libelli mei in consistorio, aderat amplissimus honore magisterii militaris Bauto comes, et Rumoridus, et ipse eiusdem dignitatis gentilium nationum cultui inserviens a primis pueritiae suae annis. Valentinianus tunc temporis audivit suggestionem meam, nec fecit aliud, nisi quod fidei nostrae ratio poscebat. Acquieverunt etiam comiti suo.*⁵² However, Ambrose's main intention in presenting the events in this way was to strengthen his own position on the matter of the mentioned statue.

Conclusion

The trend established by Gratian and Valentinian II continued for some time in both halves of the empire. Arcadius and Honorius, who became *Augusti* at the ages of 11 and eight, respectively, were quite "mature" compared to Arcadius' son Theodosius II.⁵³ The latter was appointed *Augustus* by his father at the age of nine months. At the age of seven, after his father's death, he assumed rule as a sole emperor, at least on paper.⁵⁴ His "record" of being appointed *Augustus* was only broken four centuries later by the Eastern Roman emperor Michael III – "the Drunkard" – who became co-emperor with his father and *Augustus* in May 840 at the age of approximately four months.⁵⁵ Despite the fact that the appearance of child emperors in the 5th century seemed much more common than a century earlier, late antique writers remained reserved about it.⁵⁶ This is probably because none of the rulers mentioned, like Valentinian II, developed an independent ruler profile, even though they reached adulthood and even a mature age on the throne. None of them lived to a particularly old age, however, not even Michael III, but Theodosius II was 49 (for instance) when he died. He, along with Valentinian II, is perhaps the most typical figure of the former child

⁵¹ SHA Tac. 6.5. *May the gods forbend that we should give the title of prince to a child or of Father of his Country to an immature boy, whose hand a schoolmaster must guide for the signing of his name and who is induced to confer a consulship by sweetmeats or toys or other such childish delights.*

⁵² Ambr. epist. 57.3. *My petitions were read in the Consistory. Count Bauto, a man of the highest military rank, and Rumoridus, himself too of the same dignity, and from the first year of his boyhood attached to the Gentile worship, were present. Valentinian then listened to my suggestion, and did nothing but what our faith reasonably required. And they submitted to his officer.*

⁵³ Cf. Demandt 2007, 170 and the following pages.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 195.

⁵⁵ Cf. Preiser-Kappeler 2023, 148.

⁵⁶ Cf. Molè Ventura 1992, *passim*.

emperors. Until the end of his reign, he remained in the shadow of his relatives and their associates. In his case, his older sister Pulcheria was the main source of influence (also due to his mother's early death), and after his death he was succeeded by her husband Marcian.⁵⁷

In the European Middle Ages and the early modern period, a somewhat different principle gradually gained acceptance, namely that a monarchy dependent on a capable monarch was doomed to failure. This view left more room for child (nominal) rulers. A typical example is the French King John I Posthumous, born five months after the death of his father Louis X the Quarrelsome on 15 November 1316. He became king on the same day and died after only four days of his "reign" on 19 November.⁵⁸ The story of the Hungarian, Croatian and Czech king Ladislaus V Posthumous, son of Albert of Habsburg and Elizabeth of Luxembourg, was similar. His father died at the end of October 1439, and his son was born at the end of February 1440. His supporters crowned him king in May of the same year, but his nominal authority was challenged by the Polish King Vladislaus III until the former's death in the Battle of Varna in 1444. Before Ladislaus could truly take the reins, he died at the age of 17.⁵⁹ The career of the last Count of Celje, Ulrich II, was closely linked to his fate.

⁵⁷ Cf. Demandt 2007, 195.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bradbury 2007, 281 and the following pages.

⁵⁹ Cf. Štíh 1999 for details.

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