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The current four volumes of Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité*: a review of the state of research, 2022

By providing a review of the present state of research regarding French historian of ideas Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) current four-volume series *Histoire de la sexualité*, this essay highlights an acceleration in tempo after the publication of an edited fourth volume (*Les aveux de la chair*) in 2018. After providing an overview of the manuscript development of *Les aveux de la chair*, and the emergence of a pattern regarding the structural and chronological composition of *Histoire de la sexualité*, namely that the series should effectively be read backward from the first volume *La volonté de savoir* to the thematically last volume *L'usage des plaisirs*, several developing themes in the most recent scholarship on *Histoire de la sexualité* are noted and annotated. The report concludes with a presentation of two notable features of the current four volumes, namely its unconventional composition and existing historical gaps, regarding the Carolingian and post-Carolingian periods, later Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation.

Keywords: Michel Foucault (1926-1984); *Histoire de la sexualité*; *The History of Sexuality*; *La volonté de savoir*; *Les aveux de la chair*

Introduction: Foucault's ongoing impact on the humanities

Whatever one may think of his provocative chronicles, archaeologies and genealogies, be it of madness, surveillance, the clinic, the human sciences, crime, punishment, or sex, French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) impact on the contemporary research register of the humanities remains unparalleled. The series *Histoire de la sexualité*, the only of his histories that was developed throughout several volumes, continues to contribute considerably to Foucault's exceptional profile in contemporary modern-critical philosophy and his ongoing impact on the social sciences in general. Although he would have been embarrassed to be framed into any sort of statistic, it does serve this report's purpose to emphasise that Foucault was, according to the authoritative *Times Higher Education Bulletin* of 28 April 2009,¹ the most cited scholar in the humanities in 2007, remotely followed by Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas and Judith Butler in the philosophy section. A decade later, according to their confirmable presence in the Google Scholar Citations database, administered by the Ranking Web of Universities, a list of the public profiles of the most highly cited authors (with an h-index larger than 100) was published in the first week of April 2019:² again, Foucault ranked an overall first, with an astonishing h-index of 280 and 884 807 verifiable citations. Overwhelming as these numbers were, only a year later, in May 2020, they rose to 296 and 1 026 230 respectively.³ Although it was not the only factor,⁴ this increase toward an even higher h-index and citation calculation is due to the substantial expansion of both the specialised scholarship and a non-specialised readership after the publication of the fourth volume of Foucault's history of sexuality, *Histoire de la sexualité 4 (Les aveux de la chair)*; Foucault 2018a), in February 2018 at Gallimard in Paris under the editorship of Frédéric Gros (ed. 2018).

1 Available at: <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/BanduraTopHumanities.pdf> [accessed on 30 May 2022].

2 <https://michel-foucault.com/2019/05/01/highly-cited-researchers-h100-foucault-at-number-1-2019/> [accessed on 30 May 2022].

3 <https://www.webometrics.info/en/hlargerthan100> (accessed on 30 May 2022). Up to the March 2020 edition of the database, both living and deceased authors were included. The latest edition (March 2022), however, includes only living authors and thus makes no reference to Foucault. Had it not been the case, Foucault undoubtedly would still have outranked all authors in the humanities, and not only in the philosophy section.

4 Note that Foucault's earlier (during the 1960s) lectures on sexuality were also published in 2018 (Foucault 2018b; see Leezenberg 2019) while there is a renewed interest in Foucault's idea-historical analysis of madness (see Venade 2021: 54-79; Treiber 2019; Van Rooden 2019). The publication of thus two edited works by Gallimard in 2018 as well as this progressive and more general focus on the early Foucault (see Elden 2021), certainly contributed to the significant rise in Foucault's already unrivaled h-index and citations number by 2020.

The fact that Foucault was a profoundly interdisciplinary thinker – usually referring to himself not merely as a philosopher but ‘historian of ideas’ – has led to Foucault scholarship itself being characteristically multidisciplinary from the outset, ranging from philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, historical studies, criminology, linguistics, theology, jurisprudence, and political studies. Since *Les aveux de la chair* expressly deals with Foucault's reading of the church fathers' perspectives on sex and the ensuing ‘confessions of the flesh’, this transdisciplinary register over recent years was expanded to include patristics, the study of the teachings of the church fathers and their monastic counterparts from the second to the fifth centuries. Several eminent patrologists currently participate in Foucauldian scholarship, including, apart from Foucault's long-standing collaborator and initiator of the contemporary field of late antiquity Peter Brown, Niki Kasumi Clements (2020, 2021a, 2022), Danny Praet (2020, 2021), Chris de Wet (2020) and Johannes Zachhuber (2020), to name only a few.

Against this background, the objective of this review essay is twofold: firstly, to survey the most recent research on the now four-volume *Histoire de la sexualité* (since the publication of the fourth volume also brought the three earlier volumes back into the spotlight); secondly, to present two significant features of the current four volumes, namely its unconventional composition and current historical gaps, regarding the post-Roman and (post-) Carolingian periods, later Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation. Both sections provide a contribution to Foucault scholarship in general, and the ongoing analysis and dissemination of the current four volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité* in particular.

***Histoire de la sexualité* 4 (*Les aveux de la chair*), 2018, and the state of research, 2022**

Les aveux de la chair follows the three established volumes published in 1976 and 1984 (*Histoire de la sexualité* 1 [*La volonté de savoir*, Foucault 1976], *Histoire de la sexualité* 2 [*L'usage des plaisirs*, Foucault 1984a] and *Histoire de la sexualité* 3 [*Le souci de soi*, Foucault 1984b]).⁵ The publication is an edited (Gros ed. 2018) version

5 References to the four volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité* in this review refer to the publication dates of the original French texts (Foucault 1976, 1984a, 1984b, 2018a) but use the page numbers of the English translations (by Hurley), as listed in the bibliography, for the sake of English-orientated accessibility. Hurley (trans. 2021) presented an English translation of *Les aveux de la chair* in early 2021, again at Pantheon in New York, which published two of his translations of the earlier volumes (see Foucault 1976 [trans. 1978], 1984b [trans. 1986]). Jeanne Holierhoek (trans. 2020) presented the first translation of *Les aveux de la chair* in any language (in Dutch) already in January 2020, after having provided a translation of the three earlier volumes in a single edition (see Holierhoek trans. 2017).

of an unfinished manuscript, primarily based on Foucault's lectures presented at the Collège de France from 1977 to 1981 (see Ewald, Fontana and Senellart 2004, 2012). However, only days before his death on 25 June 1984, Foucault explicitly prohibited posthumous publications, noting only a few exceptions,⁶ of his unfinished manuscripts, lectures, and related personal material. This ban was acknowledged for close to three decades until, in 2013, all his manuscripts (comprising around 100 boxes and 40 000 pages; see Massot, Sforzini and Ventresque 2018: 2) were transferred from a bank vault to the existing Foucault archives at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. While acknowledging the disquiet of some Foucault scholars regarding the eventual publication of the unfinished manuscript *Les aveux de la chair* (see Sforzini 2021; Beukes 2020a: 1–3; 2020b: 16–24), the consensus in the international scholarship, after three years of intensive debate and taking editor Gros's (2021: vii–xiii) eloquent explanations in the forewords of the French text and the English translation into account, holds that the edited text could legitimately be utilised as the fourth volume in the series (see Clements 2021a: 1–40, 2021b; Chevallier 2021). Importantly, the editing and publication of a fifth and a sixth volume are in some research circles already considered to be feasible, based on the substantially drafted manuscripts *La chair et le corps* and *La croisade des enfants*, held at the (thus since 2013) expanded Foucault archives (NAF 28730)⁷ at the Bibliothèque Nationale (see Bernauer 2021: 38–9; Chevallier 2011: 137–42; Gros 2018: vii; Sforzini 2018: 485–505; Raffnsøe 2018: 419–21).⁸

In his *Collège de France Leçons 1974–1975*⁹, Foucault explored the initial (apostolic) and subsequent (patristic) early Christian distinctions between the body (*corps*) and bodily pleasures (*plaisirs*) on the one hand, and the (sinful) 'flesh' (*chair*) and its pleasures or 'lusts' (*désirs*) on the other, but restricted his analysis to early modern handbooks of penance. Foucault argues on the premise

6 These exceptions pertinently applied to the material provided for the two-volume *Dits et écrits*, an edited compilation of Foucault's manuscripts from 1954 to 1984 (see Foucault 2001).

7 See <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc98634s> [accessed on 30 May 2022].

8 Foucault's initial structure for the project, as set out on the *quatrième de couverture* of the first volume *La volonté de savoir*, consisted of six proposed volumes: 1) *La volonté de savoir*; 2) *La chair et le corps*; 3) *La croisade des enfants*; 4) *La femme, la mère et l'hystérique*; 5) *Population et races*; and 6) *Les pervers*. Of these only 3 and 4) were substantially drafted, while 3) were partly used for the editing of what turned out to be volume 4, *Les aveux de la chair* (Gros 2018: vii). This intricate development is discussed in Beukes (2021d: 1287–310.)

9 For the edited text, see Ewald et al. 1999). For an accessible and updated table of all Foucault's *Collège de France Leçons*, dating their original presentation and tracing their initial publication in French and eventual translations in English, as well as a detailed table of dynamic data visualisations, indicating Foucault's citations from patristic texts, see Clements (2021a: 6–7, 2021b: 1; see <http://www.nikiclements.com/foucault/> [accessed on 30 May 2022]).

that *La volonté de savoir* departs a year later (and *Les aveux de la chair* in 2018 be concluded with a thorough exposition on Augustine), that the subject's confession is not directed toward the verbalisation of a sinful lust in sexual encounters with other subjects, but on the progressive revelation of the subject's own sexual desires and intimate thoughts, always in service of a 'will to knowledge'. *La volonté de savoir* puts body and flesh, in this articulated sense, in opposition (Beukes 2021c: 3). This difference is extended in the distinction between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis* as an intrinsic cultural development, namely between foregone Western cultures (Rome included) and the modern (Western) post-Christian culture. This last opposition is being engaged systematically in *La volonté de savoir*, with the proposal (Foucault 1976: 208) that a series of consecutive works would launch a counterattack on the 'modern invention of sexuality', not finding support on the flesh and desires (*chair* and *désirs*), but on the body and bodily pleasures (*corps* and *plaisirs*). From the sequential development of the second volume *L'usage des plaisirs* to the third volume *Le souci de soi* to the fourth volume *Les aveux de la chair*, it becomes clear that there was, in Foucault's view, a noticeable shift (yet also a discursive continuity) from "the aestheticization of the desires in Hellenism, to the subtle ethitization of it in Roman contexts, to the attempted control over it by the church fathers" (Beukes 2021c: 3).

Les aveux de la chair is a dense yet vast text, comprising 426 pages, in three parts, with four untitled excursions. Part I (*la formation d'une expérience nouvelle*, 'the formation of a new experience') consists of four chapters: the first chapter explores regulations and routines within early Christian monastery societies and conventional domestic life concerning *ta aphrodisia*, (τὰ Αφροδίσια) or *erga Aphroditis*, as the Greeks (and Foucault, by preference) referred to it, that is 'all things sexual' (indicated within an overtly Augustinian context as marital issues in general, including sexual activity with the pertinent intention of procreation and the denial of sexual pleasure precisely within marriage). The following three chapters in part I deal with associated forms of confession in early Christianity (confession of faith [in 'laborious baptism'], confession of guilt ['the second penance'] and general confession ['the art of arts', as the formal dominion for the 'confessions of the flesh']). Part II engages the 'virginal life' (*être vierge*, 'being a virgin'), which includes the relation between virginity and self-constraint, and the relation between virginity and self-knowledge. These three chapters explore the monasterial art of living together (thus as 'virgins'), the necessity of constant self-investigation and the attainment of self-knowledge through celibacy as an affirmative example of chastity. Part III focuses on the 'married life' (*être marié*, 'being married') concerning the regulations for and the responsible routinisation of sex within marriage, regarding 'the duty of spouses' (*le devoir des époux*,) 'the good and the goods of marriage' (*le bien et les biens du mariage*) and 'the

libidinisation of sex' (*la libidinisation du sexe*). The four untitled excursions deal with the comparatively stable corpus of instructions for confession in Greek and Roman literature; the virtually unchanged integration of that corpus into first- and second-century patristics; the modification of that virtually unchanged corpus in the reshaping of the relation between subjectivity and truth in third- and fourth-century patristics, especially concerning a reassessment of sexual pleasure and the economies it gives birth to; and lastly, that this restyling of the relation between subjectivity and truth did not come down to a prohibition on sex as such, but rather to an analysis of a framework wherein sexual desire was allowed and how subjects in early Christianity had to adapt to that agenda (see Beukes 2021c: 2–3).

In terms of case-specific recent¹⁰ research on the series *Histoire de la sexualité*, concise but profoundly informative introductions to *Les aveux de la chair* directly after its publication were presented by Stuart Elden (2018: 293–311), Michiel Leezenberg (2018a: 1–5, 2018b: 6–7) and Sverre Raffnsøe (2018: 393–421). More extensive analyses were later offered by Clements (2021a: 1–40), Machiel Karskens (2019: 559–81) and Zachhuber (2020: 170–82), while Herman Westerink (2019) provided the first large-scale analysis in book form. Patrick Stefan (2020) presented an intriguing analysis of the origins of disciplinary practices in early Christianity and how they were reconfigured in the introspective monastic subject of the fourth century, which explains the rapid development of monastic practices in this period, which forms the spectrum of Foucault's gaze in *Les aveux de la chair*. Two outstanding monographs directly preceding the publication of the fourth volume but explicitly dealing with the later Foucault are Elden's (2016) *Foucault's Last Decade* and Karskens' (2012) *Michel Foucault*. Clements' (2022, forthcoming) *Foucault the Confessor*, given the sophistication of her analysis mentioned above, is justly awaited with enthusiasm.¹¹

In April 2021 a special number on *Les aveux de la chair* was published in the dedicated journal *Foucault Studies*. The issue¹² presented contributions by five accomplished readers of Foucault's texts: Philippe Büttgen (2021: 6–21), dealing with Foucault's idiosyncratic use of the concept of confession (*aveu*) as such; Lynne Huffer (2021a: 22–37), addressing the place of virginity at the centre of

10 The following selection of the current secondary literature represents a subjective selection and prioritisation of the most recent literature.

11 For initial (during the 1980s) readings of Foucault's interpretation of early Christian sexual ethics, both with reference to *Histoire de la sexualité 2 (L'usage des plaisirs)* and *Histoire de la sexualité 3 (Le souci de soi)*, see Cameron (1986: 266–71), Clark (1988: 619–41), and Vandermeersch (1985: 250–77).

12 See <https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/article/view/6216/6814> [accessed on 30 May 2022].

the work; James Bernauer (2021a: 38–47), exploring the Catholic dimension in Foucault's examination of the church fathers; Bernard Harcourt (2021: 48–70), employing *Les aveux de la chair* as the keystone to Foucault's critique of Western neoliberal societies; and Agustín Colombo (2021: 71–90), problematising Foucault's diagnosis of the Christian elaboration on the 'analytic of the subject of concupiscence' that closes *Les aveux de la chair* – while conceding that the work is central to understanding the series *Histoire de la sexualité* as a unit. Shortly after, in May and June 2021, an international conference titled *Foucault's Confessions*, arranged by Rice University, Houston, and attended by the author, achieved much in facilitating and synthesising research on *Les aveux de la chair* in a single event. Hosted by Clements and James Faubion, in-depth presentations were offered by 11 leading international Foucault scholars, including (in presenting order): Bernauer (2021b, on the spiritual turn in the later Foucault); Brown (2021, on Foucault and Augustine; see Brown 2018); Philippe Chevallier (2021, on the manuscript development of *Les aveux de la chair*); Mark Jordan (2021, on the origin of sexualised Selves); Huffer (2021b, on Foucault's 'queer virgins' and the role of transgression in early Christianity, also see Huffer 2020 on Foucault's 'strange eros'; see Goldhill 1995: 1–45); Clements (2021b, on the later Foucault's progressive interest in early Christianity and patristics); Elizabeth Clark (2021, on Foucault's reading of Augustine); Arianna Sforzini (2021, on the impact of mediaeval female mysticism and homoeroticism on the Foucauldian notion of counter-conduct); Daniele Lorenzini (2021, on the genealogy of modern knowledge about sexuality); and Achille Mbembe (2021, on Foucault scholarship within the context of postcolonialism).

However, preceding this significant international conference, Dutch academic society¹³ *Foucault Cirkel Nederland/België* engaged *Les aveux de la chair* within weeks of its release in February 2018 (Beukes 2020a: 2–7), and contextualised the three earlier volumes in a coherent framework toward its development to *Les aveux de la chair* (or backward from *Les aveux de la chair* to the second and third volumes, depending on how one reads the chronological interplay between them). The latest contributions from this society include those by Steven Dorrestijn (2021, on technology as 'seductress', and the relation of subjectification and power in a technological culture; see Dorrestijn 2019); Marli Huijer (2021, on the differences and overlaps of confession in early Christianity and early modernity); Karskens (2021, on the religious codification of spirituality concerning martyrdom and self-sacrifice; see Karskens 2019: 559–581 for a detailed preceding analysis);

13 The publication of *Les aveux de la chair* was not only celebrated in scholarly circles but in many European magazines and daily newspapers as well, notably in the Netherlands and Belgium as well (compare the extensive bibliography in Beukes 2020a: 13–14). For the activities of the original (North American) *Foucault Circle* during 2020 and 2021, see McGushin (2021: 116–8).

Marc De Kesel (2021, 'from lust to desire and back'); Leezenberg (2021, in a deeply intuitive reading of Foucault's intuitions about the relation of sex, spirituality, and governmentality in the *later* Middle Ages); Praet (2021, on Foucault, technologies of the Self and the ascesis of the desert fathers; also see Praet 2020: 213-36 for a solid introduction to Foucault's reading of Augustine; compare the earlier ground-breaking analysis of Behr 1993: 1-21; see Beukes 2021a: 1-12, 2021b: 1-15 on Foucault and 'Augustinian sex'); Liesbeth Schoonheim (2021, presenting a feminist reading of *Les aveux de la chair* in terms of counter-conduct and techniques of virginity); Patrick Vandermeersch (2021, on Foucault's reading of Methodius of Olympus; see Vandermeersch 2017: 1-21 on Foucault and the 'confessing animal'; see Beukes 2021c: 1-12 for a contextualisation of Vandermeersch's reading), and Westerink (2021, on John Cassian, Augustine and the problem of the *libido*; see Clements 2020 on Cassian and early Christian ethical formation). The peer-reviewed manuscripts of these presentations by *Foucault Cirkel Nederland/België* on *Les aveux de la chair* during 2021 are due to be published in a special number of *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* in late 2022 or early 2023, under the editorship of Dorrestijn and Westerink.¹⁴

The analyses mentioned above are multifaceted and diverse in their interpretations of *Les aveux de la chair*. However, what they have in common are their attempts to link and coordinate the current four volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité*, since the publication of the fourth volume certainly brought back into focus the three earlier volumes and Foucault's even earlier lectures in the 1960s (see Leezenberg 2019; Beukes 2021d: 1287-310, 2022: 1-10). Some Foucault scholars insist that the fourth *Les aveux de la chair* will be the concluding volume, even if the manuscripts *La chair et le corps* (for a fifth; see Chevallier 2011: 137-42) and *La croisade des enfants* (for a sixth) could be edited. For example, the editor of *Les aveux de la chair* Gros (2021: vii) himself seems to have doubts about any further expansion of the series: 'None of these works will see the light of day' – albeit more strictly referring to three other unfinished manuscripts in the archives, *La femme, la mère et l'hystérique*, *Population et races* and *Les pervers* (see endnote 8). Gros's position is echoed by Harcourt (2021: 48), who stresses that *Les aveux de la chair* is the 'fourth and final volume' and 'now-final' volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*. However, one can be certain that a new generation of Foucault scholars, represented by dynamic interpreters such as Daniele Lorenzini and Arianna Sforzini, and the renowned publisher Gallimard that commissioned by far the majority of Foucault's texts in the original French, will not be content to leave those two unfinished manuscripts unedited and unpublished in the archives: if there is adequate academic will, publishing support, as well as a truly

14 See <https://www.aup-online.com/content/journals/00025275/115/1>

competent and committed editor in the league of Gros or Ewald willing to take up the tremendous task to edit an unfinished manuscript of Foucault and have it published – precisely as was the case with Gros and *Les aveux de la chair* – it could be reasonable to assume that *La chair et le corps* and *La croisade des enfants* will be edited and published, and in the not so distant future. What is currently not clear, at least from outside the archives, is how far these two manuscripts were from completion by Foucault himself – we can know for certain (see Chevallier 2021) that it is to a far lesser extent than was the case with the manuscript(s) that led to the publication of *Les aveux de la chair*. The publication of a fifth and sixth volume will thus pose even more severe challenges than those faced by Gros in the editing of the fourth volume. Time will have to tell which direction the current series will be going – but hopefully forward.

Two significant features of the current four volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité*

In the meantime, from the most recent scholarship a pattern seems to be emerging regarding the interpretation of the structural development of *Histoire de la sexualité*, in the sense that the series should effectively be read backwards. On the one hand, it is clear from the interpretations referred supra that the textual development and publication history of the four current volumes in the series are intricate: each of the four texts' origins, objectives, and place within Foucault's larger oeuvre should thus be acknowledged to appreciate the current series as a coherent body of knowledge. On the other hand, if taken into account that the fourth volume should thematically, regarding the period involved (the patristics of the fourth and fifth centuries) and in terms of the time of its completion around 1980/1, rather be regarded as the current 'second' volume, while the published second (*L'usage des plaisirs*) and third (*Le souci de soi*) volumes, dealing with the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and which were only finalised and published in 1984, instead be considered the 'third' and 'fourth' volumes, Foucault's development of the series (departing from early modernity and working its way back to antiquity) becomes more coherent. If a fifth (thus *La chair et le corps*) and a sixth (thus *La croisade des enfants*) volume were added, these two texts would, in turn, have to be placed before *Les aveux de la chair*. The published numbering of the current second and third volumes in the series always will, whether a fifth and a sixth volume are added or not, always lead to confusion. It was recently suggested that the most straightforward solution would be to primarily account for the backward development in the series rather than using the published numbers of the separate volumes: "what will not change is *La volonté de savoir* will always be the first, *L'usage des plaisirs* the last and *Le souci de soi* the penultimate volume" (Beukes 2021d: 1287-8). The 'actual' (thus

not as published) structure of *Histoire de la sexualité* could, were a fifth and sixth volume added, in terms of its backward development or the period-orientated place of each volume, be represented accordingly:

- Volume 1 (published as volume 1), *La volonté de savoir*, connecting to the historical frame of early modernity, with references to the central and later Middle Ages;
- Volume 2 (possibly published as volume 6), *La croisade des enfants*, with references to the later Middle Ages, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation;
- Volume 3 (possibly published as volume 5), *La chair et le corps*, with references to the central Middle Ages;
- Volume 4 (published as volume 4), *Les aveux de la chair*, engaging patristics and the early Middle Ages;
- Volume 5 (published as volume 3), *Le souci de soi*, early Roman period; and
- Volume 6 (published as volume 2), *L'usage des plaisirs*, Hellenistic period.

If the possible publication of a fifth and sixth volume is not taken into account, the structure stays the same: *Les aveux de la chair* would then be the published volume 4 but 'actual' volume 2, *Le souci de soi* the published volume 3 and 'actual' volume 3, and *L'usage des plaisirs* the published volume 2 but 'actual' volume 4. Given Foucault's unusual and indeed labyrinthine development of the series, this scheme of 'actual' volume numbers makes more sense than the official numbers of the published volumes. This awareness constitutes a first feature of the series *Histoire de la sexualité* as such: the series should, because of its unconventional composition, be interpreted backward from the 17th century (*La volonté de savoir*, early modernity) to antiquity (*L'usage des plaisirs*, Hellenism).

A second feature of the current series is the huge gap between Foucault's (already cursory) references to the central Middle Ages in the first volume and the early Middle Ages in the published fourth (thus 'actual' second) volume (Foucault 1976: 19–22; 58–65, 2018: 269, 277, 317). That is why the existing research on Foucault's relation and interpretation of the Middle Ages (for instance, in Bartlett 1994: 10–18, and Payer 1985: 313–20) is remarkably limited and has not yet been able to integrate Foucault's more complete views on the Middle Ages, that is, beyond the infrequent references in the first three volumes of the series. However, the current series of four volumes still leaves the post-

Roman, Carolingian, post-Carolingian and early scholastic periods¹⁵ in mediaeval intellectual history unmapped (that is, from the late sixth to the 12th centuries) while the periods between the later Middle Ages and early modernity (mid-14th to the early 17th centuries), including significant developments regarding the interpretation of sex, the flesh, and confession during the Italian Renaissance, Reformation, and Contra-Reformation, are also still unexplored. This is the reason why the possible editing of *La chair et le corps* as a fifth and *La croisade des enfants* as a sixth addition to the current series is such a promising possible development: The relevant passages in *La chair et le corps* could address the later Middle Ages, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation while applicable references in *La croisade des enfants* could illumine substantially Foucault's perspectives on the central Middle Ages.

Two examples of the relevance of these two manuscripts to fill the historical gaps in the current series can be provided. First, regarding Foucault's famous statement in *La volonté de savoir* about the discrepancy between the 'mediaeval sodomite' and the heteronormative 'nineteenth-century homosexual': "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault 1976: 43). I traced the most likely discursive source of that statement to the reorganising initiatives of the labour and monastery reformer Peter Damian (1007-1072) regarding his obscure yet consequential text, *Liber gomorrhianus* (presented in 1049 to Pope Leo IX, preceding the Council of Reims). Re-engaging Damian's long-forgotten text, it is argued that the 'mediaeval sodomite' was

15 My suggestion for the internal periodisation of mediaeval philosophy comprises the following six-part scheme (for extensive argumentation, see Beukes 2020c: 1:6-11): (1) The *post-Roman* period (5th to 7th centuries [410 {Alaric I and the first successful barbaric invasion of Rome} to 668 {d. Constans II}], with Augustine [354-430] and Boethius [480-524] as the leading philosophical exponents); (2) The *Carolingian* period (8th and 9th centuries [742 {b. Charles I} to 877 {d. Eriugena}], with Alcuin [730-804] and Eriugena [815-877] as the leading Latin-West exponents of the Carolingian Renaissance, *vis-à-vis* the rise of Arabic philosophy in Baghdad and Andalusia Spain); (3) The *post-Carolingian* period (9th to 11th centuries [877 {d. Eriugena} to 1088 {onset of the crusades and the rise of the first universities}], with Anselm [1033-1109] and Abelard [1079-1142] as the most influential among the Latin thinkers who eventually profited from the rehabilitation of antiquity in the Carolingian Renaissance); (4) The *early-scholastic period* (12th to 13th centuries [1088 {founding of the University of Bologna, the first European university} to 1225 {b. Aquinas}]); (5) The *high-scholastic period* (13th to 14th centuries [1225 {b. Aquinas} to 1349 {d. Ockham}, with Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Ockham as the most influential among the high-scholastics]); (6) The *post-scholastic period* (14th to 15th centuries [1349 {d. Ockham} to 1464 {d. Cusa}]). In the current four-volume series of *Histoire de la sexualité*, only the first decades of the post-Roman period (410 up to circa 480) and a few decades of the early and high-scholastic periods (regarding the event of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215) are substantially covered. Any initiative that could fill the vast historical spaces regarding the Middle Ages in Foucault's work, beyond these parameters, should thus be encouraged.

far removed from an elementary precursor to the modern *scientia sexualis* homosexual but was presented by Damian as a complex and gender-inclusive licentious person, within the context of the disintegration of sexual morality (especially within the domains of celibacy and confession) in the church and monasteries of the 11th century (see Beukes 2019: 1-7). Employing a Foucauldian reading, thus sensitive to the pastoral configurations of power, Damian's core theses for the rigid removal of *lapsi* ('fallen priests') and the expulsion of promiscuous monks and nuns were hence critiqued, with specific reference to Damian's unique concepts *contra-natural* and *irrational* fornication. Leo's cautious answer to Damian (*Ad splendidum nitentis*) was used to conclude the appraisal, including Leo's eventual sanctioning of Damian's complex concept of 'sodomy', which, on that ground, became the conceptual source for the council of Reims (1049), and subsequent mediaeval councils dealing with the problem of sodomy in the church and monasteries. The canons of those councils were the main sources of Foucault's initial analysis of mediaeval sexuality, as cited in *La volonté de savoir* – yet the more fundamental discursive source was Damian's obscure text.

A second example refers to the abovementioned 'new' material in holder 27 in the expanded Foucault archives (see Sforzini 2021: 47): we now know that Foucault was interested in the works of some mediaeval women mystics (notably the experience-driven epistemology of the Flemish beguine Hadewijch of Antwerp [fl. 1240; see Beukes 2020d: 1-10], and the annihilation of the soul in the works of her executed French counterpart, Marguerite Porete [1250-1310; see Beukes 2020e: 204-29], yet also the dissenting mysticism of Beatrijs of Nazareth, Angela of Foligno, Gertrude von Helfta, Dorothea von Montau, and Mechtild von Magdeburg, to the extent that he thoroughly read and noted their texts, since he considered the role of mediaeval female mysticism, especially when combined with mediaeval female homoeroticism, to be important within the context of his notion of *contre-conduites*, as developed in his lectures of March 1978 (Ewald et al. 2004: 194-211; see the argument in Schoonheim 2021). In this context, the relationship between local resistance and gendered norms is explicit, especially when linked to excessive physical experiences (inter alia regarding *raptus*, or 'divine orgasm', as a form of transgressive counter-conduct, carefully recorded by several of these female mystics; see Huffer 2021; Sforzini 2021; Beukes 2021b). Given the relative high frequency of same-sex relations between women (at least until the mid-14th century; see Beukes 2020f: 1-13), also in monasteries and among the beguines (until 1311), it must have been clear to Foucault that mediaeval female homoeroticism was more about the resistance to a male-dominated sexual discourse (especially as institutionalised in societal structures such as the church and monasteries, and indeed in pastoral and confessional

practices) than it was about sex: these virgins' virginity stayed intact while they effectively resisted the intrusion of men in the most intimate (if not spiritual) aspects of their lives. However, until Foucault's notes in holder 27 regarding this form of mediaeval 'local resistance' are aligned with his already edited and published lecture notes of 1978 (in Ewald et al. 2004), and the way he formulated them in the unfinished manuscript *La croisade des enfants*, interpretations of Foucault's readings of this crucial idea-historical phase in the later Middle Ages will always border on the speculative. In other words, while similar examples of analyses that endeavour to fill the gaps in the current series of *Histoire de la sexualité* could be presented, they will be limited to hypotheses, bordering rather on intuition than grounded in literary analysis.

If the scholarship could be provided with stronger textual substantiation in the format of edited and published manuscripts regarding the unfinished *La chair et le corps* and *La croisade des enfants*, and, therefore, Foucault's more articulate views on sex and confession in the central and later Middle Ages, it would, apart from providing the current series with a much needed historical-philosophical symmetry, fill the existing historical gaps in Foucault's survey and enrich an understanding of Foucault's standing references to the Middle Ages in the current four volumes as such.

Summary and conclusion

After the publication of *Les aveux de la chair* in February 2018, there was a rapid development in the research on not only this fourth volume in *Histoire de la sexualité* but also the three earlier volumes in the series, as well as a growing focus on the currently still unedited manuscripts *La chair et le corps* and *La croisade des enfants*. By reporting on the present state of research regarding these texts, including the emergence of a pattern regarding the structural and chronological composition of *Histoire de la sexualité* (namely that the series should effectively be read backward from the first volume *La volonté de savoir* to the thematically last volume *L'usage des plaisirs*), several developing themes in the existent scholarship were noted and annotated. The review of the state of research anno 2022 concluded with a presentation of two notable features of the current four volumes of the series, namely its unconventional composition and significant existing historical gaps, especially concerning post-Roman developments from the sixth to the 12th centuries, and the later Middle Ages. Given these fissures in the current four volumes, some work still needs to be done before there could be a legitimate reference to 'the history of sexuality': currently the series *Histoire de la sexualité* (if reviewed backward, as proposed) refers to early modernity (from the 17th to the 19th centuries), the 13th century,

the early Middle Ages (fifth and early sixth century), the later patristics of the third to the fifth centuries, the later Roman period, and Hellenism. Until Foucault's lectures and unfinished manuscripts expressly referring to the later Middle Ages, Italian Renaissance, Reformation, and Contra-Reformation (14th to the early 17th centuries), and from the Carolingian, post-Carolingian and early scholastic periods (seventh to the 12th centuries), are edited and provided to the dedicated scholarship, the four current volumes of *Histoire de la sexualité* will only be able to provide a limited perspective on Foucault's unquestionably complete views on the question of how "sex became a seismograph of subjectivity in Christian cultures" (Foucault 1999: 183). At this stage, even after providing his readership with close to 1 200 pages throughout four volumes, the published Foucault has answered this decisive question with remarkable inventiveness and rigorous precision – yet still not in its entirety.

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