

FRATERNAL BONDS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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FRATERNAL BONDS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA SS	<i>Acta Sanctorum.</i>
ArFranc.	<i>Annales regni Francorum.</i>
BHL	<i>Biblioteca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis.</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Medievals.
ChLA	<i>Chartae Latinae Antiquiores.</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.
MemLuc	<i>Memorie e documenti per servire all'istoria del Ducato di Lucca</i> , 4–5 (in 5 parts). Lucca: Bertini, 1818–1844.
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica.
MGH DD	MGH Diplomata.
MGH Epp.	MGH Epistolae.
MGH LL	MGH Leges.
MGH SS	MGH Scriptores.
MGH SS rer. Germ.	MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi.
MGH SS rer. Mer.	MGH Scriptores rerum Merowingicarum.
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina.</i> Edited by Jacques Paul Migne, Paris 1844–1855.
SC	Sources Chrétiennes.
TrFr	<i>Die Traditionen des Hochstifts Freising.</i>
UStG1	<i>Urkundenbuch der Abtei St. Gallen</i> , 1.
UStG2	<i>Urkundenbuch der Abtei St. Gallen</i> , 2.

PREFACE

THIS BOOK WAS inspired by Paul the Deacon's well-known poem addressed to Charlemagne, in which the author asked the ruler for the release of his brother Arichis, exiled from Italy after Duke Rotgaud of Friuli's failed rebellion (775–776). The poet described his loss in a dramatic fashion:

Listen with serenity, highest of kings, to the words of your servant, look
upon my tears with kindness.
I am more unhappy, and with reason, than almost anyone in the world;
for me there is always mourning and hours of sadness.
For seven years now a violent change has been creating
many anxieties and has broken my heart.
For so long my brother has been a captive in your land,
desolate and disheartened, naked and needy.
In our homeland his poor wife goes begging for food
by the highways and byways with trembling lips.
By this shameful means she brings up four children
whom she scarcely manages to cover with rags.¹

As I was reading the poem, I asked myself what was behind the poetic formula. What were the mutual obligations between Paul and Arichis, the two sons of Warnefrid and Theodelinda? What role was played by the fraternal bond in the maintenance of the cohesion of the family group and the position of its members in society, also in case of a threat? What were the relations between the brother, sister-in-law, and the nephews? What models and values shaped the author's idea of these relations? What did it mean to be a brother in the late eighth century?

Much to my surprise, a preliminary bibliographic survey showed that the question of the relations among brothers was not explored in any great detail in the literature. In fact, the only question analyzed extensively was that of the relations among Louis the Pious's sons and their rivalry over power. However, the authors of these studies focused primarily on systemic and political questions. On the other hand, scholars carried out intensive studies of the forms of medieval communities that drew on a metaphorically

1 *Pauli et Petri diaconorum carmina*, 47: "Verba tui famuli, rex summe, adtende sereus, / respice et ad fletum cum pietate meum. / Sum miser, ut mereor, quantum vix ullus in orbe est; / semper inest luctus, tristis et hora nihi. / Septimus annus adest, ex quo nova causa dolores / multiplices generat et mea corda quatit. / Captivus vestris extunc germanus in oris / est meus, afflicto pectore, nudus, egens. / Illius in patria coniunx miseranda per omnes / mendicat plateas ore tremante cibos. / Quattuor hac turpi natos sustentat ab arte, / quos vix pannuciis praeavalet illa tegi." Translation from Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 83.

understood brotherhood. This lack of research into biological brotherhood seemed all the more surprising to me given that, when I studied various topics relating to the history of women and the family, the role of brothers often turned out to be of key importance. In the language of early medieval sources the terms “brother” and “brotherhood”, used both literally and metaphorically, are omnipresent.

The present study is an attempt to answer the questions posed above. I focus on an analysis of the relation among biological brothers—what it was in society’s life and how it was perceived. Yet mine is not a typical study on the history of the family. I believe that an analysis of the institutions of social life cannot be limited only to what can be described as “social practices,” which are usually the focus of such studies. In order to understand the functioning and the transformations of these institutions I also need to study the system of ideas, of models which determined thinking about relations among people and influenced the actions of various groups as well as individuals. In the case of the early Middle Ages such a research approach is particularly justified. This was a period marked by a profound redefinition of the ideological foundations of the social order; also on the level of relations within family groups. The conflict between various normative systems, legitimized by both tradition and religion, was reflected, for example, in the eighth- and ninth-century disputes over the institution of marriage.

When embarking on this study of fraternal relations as an independent research topic, I am aware of the fact that such a distinction is somewhat artificial. After all, fraternal relations were only one part of a complex system of connections constituting what is called the family or, more broadly, the kin group. I believe, however, that these relations do require a separate treatment for several reasons. First of all, the very definition of early medieval terms of “brother” and “brotherhood” is not as obvious as it might seem. While scholars are willing to note the historical changeability of the institution of marriage, and even of motherhood or fatherhood, relations between brothers are usually treated as constant and as such not requiring explanations. Consequently, they are marginalized. Yet even a perfunctory perusal of the sources suggests that the situation was, in fact, different. However, in order to capture this changeability, we need to change our research perspective and abandon the belief, firmly established in historiography, in the key role of marriage and of the resulting bond between ancestors and descendants in family relations.

It also needs to be stressed that fraternal relations occupy a special place in the medieval system of ideas, because they simultaneously function in two dimensions—the literal and the metaphorical. The notions of opposing fraternal communities born of the flesh and of the spirit—*fraternitas carnalis* and *fraternitas spiritualis*—play an important role in the early medieval model of society, evolving under the overwhelming impact of St. Augustine’s thought. Restoring the harmony between the carnal and the spiritual dimensions of brotherhood becomes an important topic in theological reflection. One of the questions I would like to answer concerns the way in which these deliberations among intellectual elites influenced the perception of relations among brothers, their legal definition and daily practice.

I embarked on this work fully aware of the source barriers restricting research into such a complex subject matter as the relations between people and the motivations of human actions. We always and inevitably remain bound to writing, which was a more or less elitist tool, irrespective of whether we are dealing with a theological treatise or a private document. What we can learn thanks to the available evidence is just a small fragment of the whole picture, created by authors whose ways of seeing and describing the world was shaped primarily by the Church's teachings and conforming to literary linguistic and rhetorical patterns.

The source-related limitations cannot be avoided, but we can certainly expand the field of observation. That is why I opted for a justifiable approach: to use a variety of sources, from theological treatises, through normative sources, to private documents. Obviously, such a huge and diverse body of material required some selection. I am aware of the fact that the expansion of the scope of my preliminary research may have resulted in some sources being left out. In many cases I have also been forced to give up detailed source analyses, undoubtedly important and interesting, but driving me away from the main topic. Adopting such a broad perspective enabled me to view the subject from different angles and, even more importantly, to follow the existing (or non-existing) connections between sophisticated theological reflection and the law and collective ideas concerning the essence of fraternal relations.

I have decided to limit the chronological scope of this study to the ninth century, only rarely reaching for older, mainly eighth-century sources. There are several considerations behind this decision. First of all, I consider the ninth century to be a key moment in the evolution of the model of the Western European family. This was a time when the Christian models of relations among relatives became gradually internalized. This process was accompanied by displacement of older practices and customs, which often led to conflicts. The many diverse texts originating in that period provide scholars with extensive research material. Its systematic analysis required me to give up my initial plan to include in this study also tenth-century sources. I can only hope that I will be able to return to them one day.

The topics I discuss have been arranged thematically. In the introductory part I examine the current state of research and our source basis. It is an important part of this study, because I try to demonstrate how interpretation patterns established in historiography, as well as various theoretical inspirations concerning the form and functioning of the family, have influenced the perception of brotherhood, and, more broadly, how they influence the formulation of research questions relating to the role of the bond of kinship in medieval societies. I have been forced to go beyond the area of historical reflection closest to me and to think about the role played by theoretical inspirations coming from the humanities and social sciences generally. I have also devoted much space to a description of the source basis—although it resulted by no means in an exhaustive description. Given the multiplicity of sources used in this study and their diversity in terms of genres, I have tried to signal at least the most important problems of interpretation and explain the limitations I came across in my research.

Chapter 2 is devoted to a discussion of the basic terms and concepts used by the authors of texts writing about brothers and the relations among them. A more detailed analysis reveals that the language used by them hides contents different from those which are ascribed to them in contemporary society and which scholars are often inclined to see in them intuitively. In this part of the study I also try to show how the terminology associated with fraternal relations was used in the Middle Ages in a metaphorical sense. The metaphor referred primarily to an ideal model of fraternal relations emerging from theological and moralist reflection going back to the beginnings of Christianity. I have decided not to carry out a detailed analysis of the development of the significance and function of the brotherhood metaphor with regard to medieval communities such as religious confraternities or monastic congregations. This is a separate and vast research topic, which has been amply analyzed in historiography, and goes beyond the main focus of this study.

A large part of my reflection is devoted to the question of hierarchical relations among brothers. This is a key issue in a historiographic discussion, which has been going on for some time, about the order of inheritance in pre-Carolingian and Carolingian Europe. The question is essential both when it comes to explaining the principles of the functioning of the medieval family group as the foundation of the social order and to better understanding specific cases—above all those relating to the inheritance policy in the Carolingian dynasty and the conflicts arising in connection with that policy. What has turned out to be particularly interesting in this context is an analysis of the legal position and the ideas, rooted in the biblical tradition, of the role of the firstborn and his relations with his younger brothers. Conclusions that can be drawn from such an analysis suggest that greater caution is needed in our approach to historiographic patterns referring to, for example, the uniquely early medieval egalitarianism of fraternal groups—patterns usually built on the basis of an analysis of just one aspect of the relations among brothers. Another aspect is the perception of relations among brothers: the early medieval sources reveal the Janus-faced nature of the fraternal bond, stretching between ideal love and hate, loyalty and rivalry, sometimes even leading to fraternal bloodshed. I have tried to demonstrate the role of the biblical tradition in the conceptualization and consolidation of the ambivalent image of the relations among brothers and how these ideas overlapped with social practice.

The social practice of relations among brothers is the focus of my attention in the last part of the book. Analyzing references recorded primarily in diplomatic sources from various parts of the Carolingian realms, I have demonstrated the ways and tools used in the fulfilment of brothers' mutual obligations and exercise of their rights as well as the interactions between brothers and other relatives. My reflections in this part of the book also serve to compare social practice with the models discussed in the previous chapters, that are present in various sources: models shaped, on the one hand, by often archaic custom, and on the other by Scripture and the teachings of the Church.

This book has been written thanks to the help and support of many people. I would like to thank Professor Roman Michałowski for including me in his research team and for his valuable remarks. I recall with gratitude Professor Henryk Samsonowicz († 2021) for his kindness and for the discussions during the Medievalist Doctoral Seminar at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, where I was able to present successive chapters of the book. I am grateful to Krzysztof Skwierczyński, Grzegorz Pac, Michał Gronowski, and Piotr Węcowski for their advice and assistance in obtaining the necessary literature. My thanks go to Dr Anna Adamska from University of Utrecht for consultations and words of encouragement while preparing the English version of this book. I owe most to Professor Karol Modzelewski, my Master, who always supported me and always believed in me and who passed sadly away in 2019, before the translation was finished. I would like to extend special thanks to my family for bravely enduring the difficult period when I was writing and translating the book.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The State of Research and Theoretical Framework

Until recently relations among siblings did not attract much interest among scholars studying the history of the early medieval family. They were mentioned primarily in discussions of marriage strategies used to safeguard the interests of family groups and in analyses of relations between families linked by marriage. Fraternal relations appeared as a research topic almost exclusively in studies dealing with political history, mainly those concerning power struggle, the best known example of which was the fratricidal conflict among Louis the Pious's descendants. Questions about the definition of the fraternal bond, about what it was and how it was perceived, almost never appear in historical studies. It could be said that fraternal relations were regarded as so obvious and immutable that they escaped scholars' attention. Consequently, the question of models and ideas of fraternal relations has not been studied in any detail either.

We can point to several reasons behind this neglect of the position and role of brothers in kin groups. First of all, what was all-important in the development of research into the history of the family, and not only in the early Middle Ages, was the input of cultural anthropology from the time when the discipline was dominated by the structuralist-functionalist methodological orientation. This influence was particularly evident in French- and English-language historiography. The emphasis put on the analysis of kinship structures and the search for models explaining their functioning in studies conducted by anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s stimulated interest in the topic also among historians.¹ Even if George Duby and Karl Schmid, who in the 1950s defined new directions and methods in the study of the history of the family, had not yet read the works of great anthropologists, over the following decades it was precisely the methodological proposals of anthropology that encouraged many scholars, including medievalists, to take a closer look at the question of kinship, strategies of marital exchange, etc.² What made these proposals attractive was the fact that, as the structuralists argued, a multifaceted study of kinship was key to understanding basically all aspects of the functioning of human society, including its spiritual, economic, and political life. However, anthropologists focused generally on two main topics: recognizing filiation structures (kin groups) and strategies of building links between kin groups through relationships between men and women

¹ For an overview of sociological and anthropological inspirations in research into the history of the family and kinship in the Middle Ages in Western European historiography, see Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 99–155 and Hummer, *Visions of Kinship*, 97ff. and passim.

² Morsel, "Le médiéviste, le lignage et l'effet de réel," 83–110.

belonging to different kin groups.³ Consequently, like anthropologists, historians, too, studied relations among siblings generally in the context of an exchange of women and goods between groups of brothers or in that of limitations of this exchange stemming from biological links between people (the question of marital exo- and endogamy).⁴

The structuralist inspirations and the resulting belief in the existence of universal models explaining the patterns in the development of social institutions contributed to the spread in historiography of a model of transformations of the family from broad structures of bilateral kinship of the early Middle Ages to the strictly agnate family of the high and late Middle Ages, with the principle of primogeniture being more or less rigorously observed. A turning point came apparently around the year 1000, when the break-up of the post-Carolingian social order was finally completed. The concept was formulated in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ It was based on findings of German scholars in the prosopographic Freiburg School, gathered around Gerd Tellenbach.⁶ A decisive influence on its form came from the works of Karl Schmid,⁷ although, in fact, this scholar never aspired to be the author of a general theory of the development of family structures in post-Carolingian Europe. Methodologically innovative research, using as its source basis obituaries and other commemorative sources, made it possible to capture processes which until then had eluded scholars—processes such as the consolidation of patrilineal family structures, the weakening of the female line in the building of the family's position, and the privileged treatment of the eldest sons at the expense of their younger brothers when it came to inheritance.

The biggest role in promoting the concept of a profound change that occurred in family structures in the eleventh century as one of key factors in the emergence of a new, “feudal” order of the High Middle Ages was played by Georges Duby. Duby confronted the results of his German colleagues' research with his own findings obtained as he worked on his doctoral thesis devoted to the society of the Mâcon region in the tenth to twelfth

3 The anthropological theories of kinship are discussed concisely in e.g. Leaf and Read, *Introduction to the Science of Kinship*; Carsten, *After Kinship*; Stone, ed., *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship*, and, in the context of historical research: Yanagisako, “Bringing it All Back Home.”

4 Guerreau-Jalabert, “Sur les structures de parenté”; Guerreau-Jalabert, Le Jan, and Morsel, “De l'histoire de la famille.” As Hans Hummer noted, the interest in anthropological models was a consequence of the exhaustion of research tools used by historians and “the conviction that our modeling is wrong and that if we just had the right anthropology, we might create a machine that could stamp out some answers”; Hummer, *Visions of Kinship*, 2.

5 On the debatable nature of this breakthrough in the history of the family from the perspective of scholars studying the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Period see Sabean, Teuscher, and Mathieu, eds., *Kinship in Europe*. 4ff.

6 Concisely and critically on the role of the Freiburg School in research into the family organization of the elites of post-Carolingian Europe see Leyser, “The German Aristocracy,” 25–53, esp. 32ff.

7 Schmid, “Zur Problematik von Familie”; on Schmid's legacy and role see Oexle, “Gruppen in der Gesellschaft”; on the early criticism of his theses see Freed, “The Counts of Falkenstein,” 1–11.

centuries.⁸ He interpreted the similarities in the phenomena occurring in this area as a common tendency, explaining it by specific political circumstances (the collapse of the structures of the Carolingian state and the concomitant power vacuum, the resulting changes in the economic and symbolic foundations of the position of the elites, etc.). The model provided a convincing explanation of complex phenomena present in many regions of post-Carolingian Europe, for example the regionalization of the old Frankish *Reichsaristokratie* (imperial aristocracy), the concentration of settlement and the creation of indivisible domains around family castles accompanied by an increasingly strong genealogical awareness of the elites, and a tendency to treat the eldest sons in a privileged manner at the expense of their brothers and of women. Duby's later erudite studies, translated into many languages and devoted to the transformations of family structures, for a long time influenced not only the views of scholars but also the common picture of the transition from the early to the high Middle Ages, an influence that has continued to this day. It is enough to recall, for example, the international success of his study *Le chevalier, la femme et le prêtre*, seductive in its literary elegance but rather controversial.⁹ In this book it is hard not to notice the distant echo of the fierce and ideologically burdened disputes raised by anthropologists at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries over the historical evolution of human societies, especially over the inevitable replacing of matriarchal kinship structures with patriarchal ones.

As early as the 1970s critical opinions about the Schmid-Duby theory emerged, especially in German medieval studies,¹⁰ but it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the model was thoroughly revised. The criticism came from many sides and concerned the very essence of the problem, that is the historicity of the profound breakthrough which apparently happened around the year 1000 and was commonly referred to as the "feudal revolution."¹¹ This was followed by a thorough revision of the basic interpretative categories, challenging the validity of using the very term "feudalism" to describe the reality of the past. On the wave of this criticism polemics also included the assumption—often accepted *a priori* in the past—that there were major differences in the form of the basic relations keeping societies together in the early and late Middle Ages, including the differences in family structures characteristic of these periods. In

8 Duby, *La société aux XI^e et XII^e siècles*, see also Bougard, "Genèse et réception"; nearly twenty years later Duby abided by his main theses in Duby, "Lignage, noblesse et chevalerie," 803–23. The role played by Duby and the discussion surrounding the breakthrough in social structures in the eleventh century are analyzed by Bisson, "Nobility and Family."

9 Duby, *Le chevalier, la femme et le prêtre*.

10 For a discussion of the arguments of the critics, including Friedrich Prinz, Karl Bosl, Wilhelm Störmer, and Karl Leyser, see Freed, "The Counts of Falkenstein," 1–11.

11 The 1990s were marked by the publication of numerous studies revising the established views on the "feudal revolution" of the eleventh century. The most important among them was the discussion on the pages of the *Past and Present* journal in 1994–1997. Its participants included Thomas Bisson, Dominique Barthélemy, Stephen D. White, and Chris Wickham. See also Bagge, Gelting, and Lindkvist, eds., *Feudalism: New Landscapes of Debate*.

France, the theory of a breakthrough was attacked especially by Dominique Barthélemy. He accused its advocates of not drawing conclusions from the changes happening in the eleventh century in the sources themselves (an increase in the number and emergence of new kinds of sources) and of being too hasty in equating the reality of the sources with social phenomena.¹²

A scholar who emerged as the main figure in the revolt against Duby's classic model in the English-speaking world was the English medievalist Constance B. Bouchard, who attacked the premises of the model, drawing on earlier sources than those used by the French scholar.¹³ Her analyses of texts from the Carolingian era and the early post-Carolingian period demonstrate the lasting nature of the privileged treatment of the male line in inheritance at least two centuries before the boundary of the year 1000. In addition, she has shown that kinship in the female line continued to play an important role as a factor in both the construction of identity and in the inheritance of property and position. Whether in a given family or at a specific point in time, the patrilineal or matrilineal orientation came to the fore, and whether sons or paternal uncles were ahead in the inheritance order depended on a complex combination of factors including the personal status of the various individuals, both men and women, within the family's political or economic interest at the time; it may also have been resolved simply through violence.¹⁴ The situation was similar in the following centuries. Bouchard deserves credit for pointing to the incompatibility of convenient structuralist-functional interpretative patterns with the rather complex reality of the sources, as well as to the shortcomings of the widely used methods of studying the organization of family groups (especially anthroponymic analyses).

The advocates of the theory of the breakthrough in family structures usually did not resist strongly, being instead inclined to revise Duby's theses in part. The French medievalist Regine Le Jan, for example, was willing to reduce the sharp opposition between the agnate and cognate family structures to various "tendencies" prevailing in a given period, and to acknowledge regional variability in the rhythm of the changes, remaining nevertheless convinced of the key significance of the late Carolingian era in this process.¹⁵ In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century the path indicated by Bouchard was followed by other scholars working on sources from various parts of post-Carolingian Europe.¹⁶ The differences in the conclusions drawn from earlier studies and, in the first place, the recent progress of regional studies are to a large extent a

¹² Barthélemy, *La mutation de l'an mil a-t-elle eu lieu?*; the same idea can be found in Barthélemy's study devoted to kinship and published in the collection Duby, ed., *Histoire de la vie privée*.

¹³ Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 98–134; Bouchard, *Strong of Body*, 67ff.

¹⁴ For an overview of controversial issues see Goetz, "Coutume d'héritage," and Goetz, "Les 'affins' au haut Moyen Âge"; see also Ubl, "Zur Einführung Verwandtschaft."

¹⁵ Le Jan, *Famille*, 381–427; Le Jan, "Continuity and Change"; see also e.g. Aurell, "La parenté en l'an mil."

¹⁶ It is hard to list here all numerous studies of recent years. Worthy of note among them are: Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*; Livingstone, "Kith and Kin"; Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin*; Everard, *Brittany and the Angevins*.

consequence of a change of the source basis—the broad use of documentary material analyzed independently of normative and narrative sources. They also stem from the different nature of the questions put to these sources—a move away from questions rooted in the history of law and political systems (normative systems regulating relations within groups, principles of inheritance, land trading, etc.) towards problems typical of anthropology and historical sociology (various coexisting forms of social bonds, individual strategies of building one's position within a group, the role of women, etc.). On the one hand, these studies have brought us much more information about the local diversity in the functioning of family groups; on the other hand, they have conclusively confirmed that it is high time to mothball the decades-long belief in the universality of the socio-political model initially created on the basis of source data originating at the centre of the Frankish domain.

Post-structuralist criticism is a strand represented by works of scholars who pointed to the dependence of the advocates of the eleventh-century breakthrough theory on the historical context in which the theory emerged.¹⁷ It was influenced by the nineteenth-century approach—evolutionistic and evaluative—of the agnate model of the family as a higher level in the development of European society, contrasted with the amorphous nature of “primitive” societies. Seen from this perspective, the shift from vast cognate structures to agnate lineages was not just a stage of development (progress), but really a historical necessity, which was to lead to the emergence in the late Middle Ages of the foundations of the social organization of early modern Europe, lasting until the nineteenth century. Yet critics also noted that the belief in the crucial differences between the early and late medieval family model stemmed from the number and nature of the sources. They pointed to two main questions challenging the framework of the theory of a revolutionary change in family structures between the early and high Middle Ages. This concerns primarily the fact that between the tenth and eleventh centuries the number and kind of sources available to historians changed: the eleventh century is much better documented than the previous periods (especially the tenth century). As a result, historians, having noticed a change in the types, structure, and proportions of sources, considered that it must reflect some profound social change. It has also been noted that in the late Middle Ages there was a greater chance for the emergence and survival of family archives and historiographical works recording family traditions hitherto transmitted orally and used to legitimize claims to power by representatives of the various families.¹⁸ It is precisely the study of these sources that has contributed to the emergence in historiography of a picture of old patrilineages well aware of their origins among the Western European aristocracy in the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. A question arises, however, as to whether we do not have earlier accounts of this type because the patrilineal genealogical awareness did not exist or because the way of

¹⁷ One of the most radical critics of the traditional research approach is recently Hans Hummer (*Visions of Kinship*).

¹⁸ Barthélemy, *La mutation de l'an mil a-t-elle eu lieu?*; from a slightly different perspective but in a similar spirit see Morsel, “Le médiéviste, le lignage et l'effet et l'effet de réel,” *passim*.

recording this genealogical memory changed. Obviously, we can reverse the problem and ask about the cause and effect in this case. That is, whether the sources create or reflect reality and whether by drawing on *ex silentio* conclusions we can say anything certain about the preceding period. Irrespective of what answers we give in this never-ending discussion, it seems right to point out to the advocates of the breakthrough theory their tendency to overuse retrogression and to underestimate the consequences of transformations of literacy to social history.

Yet Bouchard, Barthélemy, Hummer and other scholars who dared to challenge the authority of the great historians of the older generation deserve credit above all for overcoming the schematic pattern of thinking about the organization of the family as an ordered structure based on immutable and inviolable principles, doomed to a gradual decline with the emergence of the late medieval and then early modern institutions of the (nation) state and the law. It could be said that it was only with their studies that medievalists were able to liberate themselves from the impact—going as far as Marc Bloch's works—of the Durkheimian way of seeing the history of the family as an evolutionary series of successive developmental stages from fluid cognate groups, through the domination of agnate and patrilineal bonds, to the emergence of the modern nuclear family.¹⁹ The changes in the theoretical foundations of historical research coexisted with the transformations taking place in the 1980s and 1990s in sociology and anthropology in the way of thinking about the family and kinship, primarily with the questioning of the structural-functional paradigm according to which the family is a self-contained, relatively stable system best adapted to the existing conditions (which mean it can change only under the impact of external factors). The criticism of family studies in the social sciences concerned primarily the insufficient consideration of the cultural context in which the analyzed institutions functioned and the disregard for the role of individual circumstances in the emergence of family bonds (direct contact between family members, being brought up together, mutual care, etc.). Even such fundamental concepts in anthropology and sociology of the family as "kinship" were challenged, as they were seen as a construct created by scholars from a European cultural background, through which they tried not so much to explain but to translate phenomena incomprehensible to them from foreign cultures into the language of their own cognitive categories.²⁰ Under the impact of this criticism, at the turn of the century anthropology and sociology creatively managed to revise their own methods and conceptual categories, and to formulate new questions about the directions and objective of family studies.²¹ An important role was also played here by interpretations originating in the studies of psychological determinants of the functioning of the family

¹⁹ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 103ff.

²⁰ See especially Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*; a critical analysis of Schneider's key studies is found in Feinberg and Ottenheimer, eds., *The Cultural Analysis of Kinship*.

²¹ Worthy of note among numerous studies is Marshall Sahlins's short book *What Kinship Is—and Is Not*, which contains a critical summary, important also for historians, of the main threads in the discussion from the point of view of social sciences at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

as well as interpretations, inspired by evolutionary biology, of altruistic behaviour in the family as a form of the evolutionary adaptation of human beings, subordinated to the overriding principle of genotype survival (especially the theory of “inclusive fitness”).²²

The change of paradigm in family studies in the social sciences led to a shift in the emphasis to topics other than those previously attracting scholars’ attention. From the point of view of research into relations among brothers, the most interesting are theoretical proposals concerning the analysis of the creation of kinship relations, factors strengthening or weakening them, and transformations of ideas about these relations under the influence of various systems of values. In this approach every kinship (system) is a primarily socio-cultural construct; consequently, studies should focus on understanding the perception and cultural meaning of this relationship in past society. These assumptions became the basis for Hans Hummer’s research on early medieval kinship.²³ In his view, the most notable weakness of the previously conducted research was the “genealogical and biogenetic presupposition,” which does not necessarily have to correspond to what the authors and recipients of the sources adopted when they thought and wrote about family relations.

The end of the twentieth century was also marked by a break with a tendency, dominating research since the 1970s, to look for a single, culturally legitimized and essentially abstract kinship and family model excluding all examples of otherness as deviations disrupting the functioning of society’s life. In more recent studies, sociologists and anthropologists emphasize the role of individuals and their individual choices in constructing the family and the resulting changeability of its forms. In other words, environmental factors do set the boundaries of human activity, yet within these boundaries individuals can shape forms of family life depending on their own needs, without violating the social norm; their actions are not without influence on the social order. This change in the approach to the family was also associated with sociologists and anthropologists appreciating the historical changeability of this institution.²⁴

In recent decades, as a result of inspiration from the social sciences within medieval studies, the structuralist-functionalist family model has clearly begun to give way to a dynamic processual approach in which the form of the family is not regarded as constant in the analyzed period. Depending on a variety of factors, both external and internal, various solutions may exist side by side and are not treated by contemporaries as a deviation from some abstract norms. Thus, even if the model of the family and family relations present in normative or moralistic sources seems to be fixed and durable, social practice may, although it does not have to, deviate considerably from this model, without the social system losing its stability and coherence.

22 On the significance of these studies to sociology of the family, see e.g. Szlendak, *Socjologia rodziny*; Giza-Poleszczuk, *Rodzina a system społeczny*.

23 Hummer, *Visions of Kinship*.

24 Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family*; Szlendak, *Socjologia rodziny*, passim.

This new way of looking at the family and its changeability over time has given rise to an increased interest in bonds within it other than those bonds that were a consequence of marriage (kinship, filiation). The change was also influenced by an intensification of research into the topic in sociology, anthropology, and psychology.²⁵ More studies devoted to relations among siblings appeared after the year 2000. However, the revival of interest concerned primarily research into the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Period as well as studies of societies during the era of industrialization. This was largely associated with attempts to describe the (successive) turning points in the history of the family which historians were inclined to date to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and to the nineteenth century.

The impact of anthropology and psychology can be found in the clearly privileged position assigned to relations between siblings of the opposite sex as the object of analysis. Relations between sisters and brothers were examined both in the context of the pursuit of family property strategies and in that of the psychological and emotional significance of these bonds. Historians studied classic themes tackled by anthropology, such as the question of sexual taboo encompassing relationships between siblings and its impact on the relations among sisters and brothers. Similarly, the structuralist theory of exchange inspired scholars to analyze the flow of property between fraternal groups following marriages of their sisters or the role of these marriages in building the position of the families. In recent years, scholars have increasingly used the category of gender in sibling studies, for example in analyzing the power balance between brothers and sisters, or the construction of gender-determined social roles in the family.²⁶ The relations between same-sex siblings usually served as a background

25 Among the studies devoted to relations among siblings published in recent years in social sciences the one that can be useful as an introduction to the topic is a study by the French sociologist Buisson, *La fratrie, creuset de paradoxes*, because of its cross-sectional nature and the author's sensitivity to historical contexts; see also Coles, ed., *Sibling Relationships*; Alber, Coe, and Thelen, eds., *The Anthropology of Sibling Relations*; Buchanan and Rotkirch, eds., *Brothers and Sisters*.

26 The scholar who has studied the question of siblings in history, especially in the late Middle Ages, most intensely is Didier Lett. See *Histoire des frères et sœurs*, a revised version of the study: *Frères et sœurs: Histoire d'un lien*. See also important collections of studies: Godeau and Troubetzkoy, eds., *Fratries: Frères et sœurs*; Miller and Yavneh, eds., *Sibling Relations and Gender*; Johnson and Sabean, eds., *Sibling Relations and the Transformation of European Kinship*; among studies devoted to sibling relations in the nineteenth century is Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*; see also Hemphill, *Siblings: Brothers and Sisters*, and special issues of journals: "Fratello/sorella," *Quaderni storici*, 83, no. 2 (1993), "Sibling Relations in Family History: Conflicts, Cooperation and Gender Roles (Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)," *European Review of History*, 17, no. 5 (2010), and "Frères et sœurs," *Médiévales* 54 (2008). In March 2012 an international conference was organized at the University of Toulouse, "Frères et sœurs du Moyen Âge à nos jours" (see volume: Boudjaaba, Dousset, and Mouysset, eds., *Frères et sœurs du Moyen Âge* and audio recordings of papers delivered: www.canal-u.tv/chaines/ouvrirlascience/open-science-european-conference-osec; for a summary of the main research threads discussed during the conference see Fine, "Frères et sœurs en Europe." Worthy of note are also studies devoted to siblings in Antiquity: Harders, *Suavissima Soror*; Cox, "Sibling Relationships in Classical Athens."

for such analyses and were not the subject of separate studies.²⁷ While it could be said that for the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Period relations among siblings of both sexes have been analyzed at least to some extent, the situation for the early and high Middle Ages is far from satisfying. There are basically just two extensive monographs devoted to the topic. Jonathan R. Lyon discusses the political aspects of the relations among brothers and sisters in German elites in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁸ Carolyne Larrington presents sibling relationships across medieval literature from a vast chronological and geographical perspective. She uses various sources written in many languages and in different cultural contexts (from *Beowulf* and Scandinavian sagas to Arthurian romance and the *Decameron*), and on this basis she formulates sometimes risky generalizations about a complex phenomenon.²⁹

In addition, there are also some case studies.³⁰ One of the few studies that asks broad questions concerning the place of siblings in family organization and symbolic social order in the seventh–tenth centuries is a conference paper by Isabelle Réal.³¹ The author emphasized the need for a parallel analysis of topics relating to anthropological reflection on the structure of kinship and the question of family strategies and topics relating to ideas and representations. However, in this article, too, the focus of the analysis is on interdependencies of brothers and sisters. The paper's overview-like nature does not make it possible to examine each topic thoroughly.

What is striking in nearly all studies touching upon the question of sibling bonds and dependence is a disproportionately limited interest in relations among brothers as a separate phenomenon, as well as a tendency to analyze bonds among brothers and sisters together. It seems that fraternal relations became marginalized in the social sciences, including history, largely because of an a priori and essentially intuitive assumption that these relations were invariably relations of solidarity and cooperation. I would like to refer here to the words of a classic of sociology by the author of one of the first sociological studies devoted to fraternal relations and roles, Florian Znaniecki. In his unfinished book, published posthumously, *Social Relations and Social Roles*, Znaniecki wrote:

When two male children have been born of the same parents, each of them is unconditionally obliged to accept the other as a brother, and neither has anything to

27 The rare exceptions include a study devoted to fraternal relations in ancient Rome: Bannon, *The Brothers of Romulus*.

28 Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters*.

29 Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters*.

30 Primarily in the collection of studies: Cassagnes-Brouquet and Yvernault, eds., *Frères et sœurs* and the special issue of the journal *Médiévales*, 54, 2008; see also e.g. Bühner-Thierry, "Fratelli e sorelle: Solidarietà familiari." In May 2013 an interesting paper on the relations among brothers and sisters in the eighth–tenth centuries in the light of epistolographic sources was delivered at a conference in Kalamazoo (ICMS) by Hailey La Voy ("Brothers and Sisters: Sibling Bonds in Early Medieval Letters, c. 700–900"). I would like to thank the author for making the paper available to me.

31 Réal, "Représentations et pratiques."

say about it. Of course, the older boy is the first to accept the other boy as his brother; but eventually both of them, as they learn the standards and norms of their community, are made fully aware that they are innately and inseparably united as brothers, and will remain so, as long as they live—perhaps even in the next world, according to the religious beliefs of some communities. Their mutual acceptance implies mutual positive valuation; for, if one of them evaluated the other negatively, he should also evaluate negatively himself, since they share the same hereditary nature.³²

It was no coincidence that Znaniecki chose fraternal relations as an example of a social bond that is universal (it occurs in all human communities) and, at the same time, is an ideal type, a model for other social relations to follow. The excerpt from the Polish sociologist's book contains all the premises that set the direction of research into fraternal relations (or rather, no matter how paradoxically this may sound, would explain a lack thereof) in sociology and cultural anthropology, basically until the 1980s. They can be summarized in three points. Firstly, a relationship between the brothers emerges at the moment of birth; it is unbreakable and non-negotiable. Secondly, brothers are forced to accept each other, view each other positively and, consequently, collaborate; a deviation from this principle means questioning one's own value. And finally, brothers are united by their "hereditary nature," that is a brother is "another I," and thus brothers share an identity.

The concept of altruistic collaboration among brothers, an essential condition for the functioning of the family and likewise for the existence of a balance in the social system, was developed by functionalists in the 1950s and 1960s.³³ The scholar who comes to the fore among them is Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. Of key importance to brotherhood studies is his thesis that siblings are a separate whole within a broader kinship structure. This has its own internal structure, in which a crucial role is played by gender division and age difference, and its functioning is based on cooperation among the group members. For the English anthropologist, as for Znaniecki, this principle of solidarity and cooperation stemmed from siblings' biological unity (being of "one flesh and one blood").³⁴ It should be noted, however, that Radcliffe-Brown, like other anthropologists from this circle, was interested in relations among siblings (especially relations among brothers and sisters) only to the extent they could be used to explain the kinship structures he regarded as key. In other words, the research problem was the way in which sibling bonds were used to construct a "system." Scholars were not interested in relations among siblings as such, especially in relations among same-sex siblings. From their point of view these relations were insignificant, as they were wholly subordinated to the overriding objective of maintaining a structure based on links between ancestral relatives and descendants. Consequently, information from sources not conforming to a family model regarded as characteristic of a given period was seen

³² Znaniecki, *Social Relations*, 135.

³³ Parsons and Bales, *Family: Socialization and Interaction*.

³⁴ Radcliffe-Brown, "Introduction." In Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, eds., *African Systems of Kinship*, 83.

as a deviation without cultural sanction. Thus, cases of conflicts among brothers, their reluctance to engage in altruistic actions and collaboration, and even the very conflict of norms determining the brothers' conduct were viewed as a violation of the social order dangerous to the whole system.³⁵

Fraternal relations were treated in anthropology as serving to maintain the cohesion of the family group also by the structuralists, including the most representative and influential exponent of this school of thinking, Claude Lévi-Strauss.³⁶ The structuralists believed that fraternal groups constituted the foundation on which the social structure rested, but they did not explore the relations within these groups. The groups were important primarily as a collective entity in the process of marital exchange, of fundamental significance to social relations; it was men linked by blood ties who had power over women. The structuralists assumed an internal coherence of these groups of brothers, coherence based on natural bonds of cooperation existing among their members.

This way of seeing or, rather, not seeing fraternal relations as a stand-alone research topic was transferred, with inspirations of the structuralist school, to research into the history of the family. Even if references to fraternal relations do appear in this research, it is almost always with the implicit assumption that the relations were based naturally, as it were, on cooperation. And if fraternal relations were determined by biological bonds between brothers, then, essentially, studying these relations from a historical perspective does not make sense, for their nature is not, *ex definitione*, dynamic. If evidence of deviations from the "natural" rule—ordering altruistic fraternal relations—does appear, it is treated as breaking the "natural" community based on blood ties. Scholars have tried to explain such cases either by referring to disruptions in the mechanisms of the functioning of the structured family group, or to external determinants—and not by the institution of brotherhood itself.

The most important consequence—also from the point of view of historical studies—of the redefinition of concepts concerning family relations in the social sciences and of the application of new methodologies in research on this topic in the 1980s and 1990s was the rejection of the hitherto commonly accepted belief in the objective, universal nature of family relations. Scholars challenged the model of a fraternal bond based on positive values and cooperation, a bond that apparently emerged in the case of the elder child already upon the birth of his younger siblings and was then only consolidated through socialization. There were ever more advocates of the thesis that kinship and family relations were mainly cultural.³⁷ As Marshall Sahlins succinctly put it, "whatever is constructed genealogically may also be constructed socially."³⁸ Thus, it is not only that biology, "flesh and blood," determines kinship and relations among family members,

35 At this point I refer e.g. to opinions of anthropologists expressed in the introduction to Alber, Coe, and Thelen, eds., *The Anthropology of Sibling Relations*, 4ff.

36 Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires*.

37 This view was developed recently by Hans Hummer, *Visions of Kinship*.

38 Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not*, 2.

but the emergence, understanding, and form of these relations is influenced by a set of various factors and cultural categories, characteristic of a given community, and the relations themselves are constructed and re-constructed throughout an individual's lifetime. To put it very simply: brothers can be brothers by birth without regarding themselves and being regarded as brothers. Or they can be without any biological ties, but be brothers with regard to their social role, mutual relations, and the way they are perceived.

This seems to be a banal observation, but it does have far-reaching consequences. For, if being or not being someone's brother in the social sense depends mainly on cultural factors, there is no fraternal relation pattern common to all human cultures stemming from a biological bond. Fraternal relations and ideas about them should be treated dynamically, as changeable, not only depending on a given culture and period, but also on the circumstances in which siblings function. Accepting such an assumption also means rejecting the immutable and universal model, adopted *a priori*, of fraternal relations characteristic of European culture. As Klaus van Eickels rightly notes, a historian cannot see fraternal relations in the Middle Ages through the metaphors of brotherhood which are present in contemporary culture, which can be found between two ideals: that of the Christian *fraternitas* and that of the Republican *fraternité*.³⁹

In the light of these remarks what may emerge as a paradox is the interest, attracted for over fifty years, especially in German medieval studies, by those forms of social bonds which, not being bonds of biological kinship, did nevertheless refer to the ideal of brotherhood as a model.⁴⁰ However, the paradox is not hard to explain and stems from a different historiographical tradition in which studies into topics traditionally regarded as part of the history of the family in Germany could develop. Unlike in French- and, to some extent, also in English-language historiography, research into bonds of kinship has been part of a broader investigation of social groups, considered primarily in cultural terms. Thus, groups directly invoking genealogical criteria (such as kinship) and other groups, including those imitating family ties (understood metaphorically), have been analyzed as equal and interpenetrating elements of the organization of medieval societies.⁴¹ Consequently, topics intensively studied by German medievalists have included questions such as friendship as a form of social bond or history of various fraternities, beginning with monastic prayer communities and ending with guilds. Emphasizing the cultural nature of the relations within groups referring to the family model, groups whose members described themselves as "brothers," scholars seemed to lose sight of the basic question about what it meant to "be a brother" in the early Middle Ages and to what these bonds were really compared. Significantly, more or less in the

39 Eickels, "Der Bruder als Freund."

40 Among classic studies, see Schmid and Wollasch, "Societas et Fraternitas"; Oexle, "Conjuratio und Gilde"; Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers*; and the collection Krieger, ed., *Verwandschaft, Freundschaft, Bruderschaft*.

41 Jussen, "Famille et parenté."

1980s, the interest in the emergence and functioning of groups clearly began to prevail over research into kinship relations (apart from genealogical studies). Thus today, topics like “friendship” or “spiritual kinship” seem to be sometimes studied more thoroughly than the question of bonds among biological kin.

What I have said so far has prompted me to formulate several initial theoretical assumptions. First of all, we need to reject the evolutionist belief in a single line of development common to a vast area of Western Europe, a line that supposedly led from the early medieval egalitarian model of relations among brothers to the principle of primogeniture, more or less strictly observed, characteristic of the late Middle Ages and early Modern Period. It cannot be demonstrated that changes in family structures were linear—elements which in traditional theories belonged to different orders (let us call them, following the German terminology, *Sippe-Geschlecht* model⁴²), occurring in parallel in the same areas. Even if in some periods and groups the tendency to treat the eldest male heirs in a privileged manner predominated, for example, this does not give us grounds to claim that this particular model was the only model legitimized in society. Thus, the phenomenon described by Bouchard—that is domination of patrilineal ties in the inheritance system in the early Middle Ages with a recognition of the significance of ties in the female line—is not inherently contradictory, but is rather a natural consequence of various choices made by individuals and family groups functioning in specific environments. Similarly, fraternal relations within a family cannot be examined with regard to a simplified family model which places the nuclear family (parents–children) at the centre. In such a model, all other forms of family relationships are by definition of secondary importance, distorting the picture emerging from the sources. If we consider the average life expectancy in the Middle Ages and the duration of marriages, it turns out that it was precisely the relationship among siblings that was the longest and most stable bond in the life of an individual within a kin group. This relationship changed over time, if only because it was established among children and lasted until the death of one of the siblings. Given the frequent premature death of one or both parents, resulting in children being orphaned quite early, it was the siblings, especially brothers, who were the most important partners for each other in family strategies; they supported each other, but it was among them that the biggest tensions arose as well.

What should also be emphasized, is the crucial difference in the relations among siblings of the same and of the opposite sex. This criterion is of key significance: the relations between brothers and sisters were determined by the social roles assigned to each gender and by the different social status of the brothers and of the sisters. The brother–sister relationship was a relationship of power and subordination, in which the brother had custody rights over his unmarried or widowed sister, who as a woman did not have full legal capacity. The relations between siblings of the opposite sex were strictly connected with the economy of honour; they played an important role in the building and preservation of the group’s symbolic capital. To this was added a system

42 For a summary on the genesis and evolution of this model see Hummer, *Visions of Kinship*, 35ff.