BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN LITERATURE

CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature

YORK MEDIEVAL PRESS

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Carolyne Larrington

THE UNIVERSITY of York

YORK MEDIEVAL PRESS

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First published 2015

A York Medieval Press publication
in association with The Boydell Press
an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9 Woodbridge Suffolk IP12 3DF UK

and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620–2731, USA

website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

and with the
Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York

ISBN 978 1 903153 62 8

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

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Typeset by Word and Page, Chester

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

For my brother David Larrington,

and for Christina Brandenburg

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The number of people who have expressed interest in my siblings project over the years, who have suggested sibling stories, made sibling observations or answered my sibling questions, is enormous. And I am sorry for any omissions in the list that follows. Thanks in particular are due to: Frank Romany and Roger Lindsay for psychoanalytical and psychological leads; Elizabeth Archibald, Frank Brandsma and Kate McClune for Arthurian suggestions; Judy Quinn, David Clark, Jóhanna Friðríksdóttir, Guðrún Nordal, Ármann Jakobsson and Jo Shortt Butler for Norse siblings; Judith Jesch for runic material; Katharine Earnshaw, Gervase Rosser and Cyril Edwards for translation help; Alex Feldman for a chance reference to the *Gesta Romanorum*; Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan for Welsh conversations; Tom Lambert for late Anglo–Saxon sworn-brothers, and John Pitcher for much miscellaneous advice over many years. Nigel Palmer, Keith Busby, Helen Cooper, Will Sweet have all, in different ways, made productive and helpful suggestions. I should also acknowledge the helpful comments made by anonymous publishers' readers, and the many valuable suggestions, particularly those relating to the thorny area of medieval demography, offered by Pete Biller for York Medieval Press. Caroline Palmer has been encouraging and enthusiastic about the project. Thanks too to Tim Bourns for help with the index.

Thanks are due also to many conference, lecture and seminar organizers, among whom are Steve Mitchell at Harvard, the CCASNAC team of 2010, Richard North, Jessica Stoll, and the audiences, students and conversation partners who have listened to me talk about and who have talked themselves about siblings and inlaws over the years. St John's College granted me a year of sabbatical leave to work on the early stages of this project, and I am grateful for the College's continuing support of my research.

This book is dedicated to my own sibling, my brother David, and to my former affine Tina Brandenburg.

ABBREVIATIONS

DNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online resource)
EETS	Early English Text Society
ES	Extra Series
FSN	*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols. (Reykjavík, 1954)
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit
L-G	*Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. N. J. Lacy *et al*. 5 vols (New York, 1993–6)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
OS	Ordinary Series
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne (online resource)
Saxo, *GD*	Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, online at: http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/index.htm
Saxo, *HD*	Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, ed. H. Ellis-Davidson, trans. P. Fisher (Cambridge, 1998)
SS	Special Series

All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

Why Siblings?

Sibling studies are the poor neglected stepchild of the history of the Western family. Interest in vertical relationships, in lineage and genealogies and in inter-generational strife has directed scholarly attention away from lateral ties, while Freudian paradigms have foregrounded mother–child bonds and the Oedipal acting-out of sons against fathers. The bond between brothers and sisters is, however, the relationship which lasts longest of all, from birth or shortly afterwards until death supervenes. From the beginning of the millennium historians of the family and literary scholars have been investigating sibling relationships in the post-medieval period, uncovering the social conditions which shape the sibling relationship and drilling down into the more abundant evidence of sibling emotions found in different kinds of post-medieval source.[1] Only in the last ten years, particularly in France, have historians embarked on detailed analysis of medieval sibling relations.[2] There has been even less investigation of brothers and sisters in the imaginative literature of the Middle Ages: it is this gap which this book aims to address.

The medieval family was, in many respects, as diverse in its formation as the modern family with its blends of half-, step-, full, adoptive and foster-children.[3] Parental mortality rates, remarriages and expansion of the family group to increase the availability of labour were all factors that contributed to complex family structures and created distinctions amongst the cohort of siblings who regarded one another as brother or sister. Leonore Davidoff suggests that nowadays the individual is less likely to have a full brother or sister than at any time in earlier history, thanks to the prevalence of marital breakdown, new

1 See L. Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations 1780–1920* (Oxford, 2012); *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship 1300–1900*, ed. C. Johnson and D. W. Sabean (Oxford and New York, 2011); *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, ed. N. J. Miller and N. Yavneh (Aldershot, 2006); V. Sanders, *The Brother–Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: from Austen to Woolf* (Basingstoke, 2002).

2 For example, I. Réal, *Vies de saints, vie de famille: représentation et système de la parenté dans le royaume mérovingien [481–751] d'après les sources hagiographiques* (Turnhout, 2001); D. Lett, *Frères et sœurs: histoire d'un lien* (Paris, 2009), the special journal issue, *Frères et sœurs – Ethnographie d'un lien de parenté*, *Médiévales* 54 (2008), ed. D. Lett, *Frères et sœurs: les liens adelphiques dans l'Occident antique et médiéval*, ed. S. Cassagnes-Brouquet and M. Yvernault (Turnhout, 2007), and *La parenté déchirée: les luttes intrafamiliales au Moyen Âge*, ed. M. Aurell (Turnhout, 2010).

3 See R. Edwards, L. Hadfield *et al.*, *Who is a Sister and a Brother? Biological and Social Ties* (London, 2005).

household formation and innovations in reproductive technology.[4] Nevertheless, in the modern West 80 per cent of individuals do have a sibling: siblings who live much longer than their medieval counterparts, where child mortality ran at around 50 per cent. The modern sibling relationship can persist over seventy or more years: a truly life-long bond. Especially in childhood, sibling relationships are crucially formative of individual identity; behaviour is learned from peers as much as from parents, especially when older siblings assume care-taking roles, and innate personality traits are emphasized by the drive for differentiation from one's brothers and sisters. Sibling position is thus as important a constituent of identity as vertical lineage. As the historian Michael Roper observes:

> Too often, what goes missing from linguistic analyses is an adequate sense of the material: . . . of human experience formed through emotional relationships with others; and of that experience as involving a perpetual process of managing emotional impulses, both conscious and unconscious, within the self and in relation to others.[5]

Investigation of our cultural past invites us to attend to how siblings think and feel, and how this bears on their behaviour, and the cultural norms which are reinforced or interrogated by the actions of sibling individuals.

In the modern period, the management of emotional impulses can be uncovered in a variety of personal literary forms: in letters, journals, autobiographies and interviews. In earlier periods, emotion and its links to experience and to subjectivity must be excavated via all sorts of writing: from legal documents to sermons, sagas and romance. If we want to develop a more complex picture of medieval brothers and sisters within the families that shaped their identities, we must probe into literary depictions of siblinghood: for it is these which most fully demonstrate how, as Roper argues, 'the assimilation of cultural codes . . . [are] a matter of negotiation involving an active subject'.[6] How siblings behave to one another is strongly inflected both by gender and by social class; processes of social change reconfigure sibling interactions. Thus Boccaccio chronicles how, within a mercantile urban environment, the fact that the family business is run from home exposes a young girl to an unsuitable sexual partner, to the chagrin of her brothers.[7] The aristocratic sibling group, by contrast, both in the early and later medieval periods kept girls under close supervision and was thus better able to regulate sisterly sexuality. While some historical records and folk-tales fitfully illuminate the lives of siblings from the peasant classes,

[4] Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 1–2.

[5] M. Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), 57–72 (p. 62).

[6] Ibid., pp. 66–7.

[7] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (IV.3), cited from: http://www.brown. edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecShowText.php?myID=nov0405&lang=it; *Decameron*, trans. G. Waldman (Oxford, 1993), pp. 283–6.

it is predominantly the lives of aristocratic and, later, gentry and mercantile brothers and sisters which are the focus of high-culture literary texts.

Analysis of medieval siblinghood must of course rest on a thoroughly contextualized and historicized understanding of changing social conditions within and beyond the medieval family, and make use of all available sources. The literature of the Middle Ages often attends very closely to the relationship of brother and sister, laying bare sibling behaviours in their most dramatic forms as models to emulate, admire or avoid, and it opens up multiple perspectives on the sibling emotions – love, hate, rivalry, desire, nurturance and ambivalence – which underlie its narratives. The ways in which medieval people thought and felt, and the interaction of cognitive and emotional processes that generates the actions underpinning medieval stories, have become a major focus of recent research. While the 'emotional turn' originated among historians, the proposition that literary texts make a crucial contribution to our understanding of the history of medieval emotion has gained ground.[8] In an early intervention in the field, I foregrounded the value of contemporary psychological theory in making sense of emotion, and its componential relationships with cognition and action, in medieval literary texts.[9] This book develops that argument in relation to the imaginative treatment of sibling and quasi-sibling relationships. Psychological (and to a lesser extent) psychoanalytic theories are grounded in the biological, embodied nature of human beings and thus they propose the existence of emotional and cognitive continuities through historical time. There is a powerful consonance between our own unofficial understanding of sibling bonds – the stories we still tell ourselves about brothers and sisters, the sibling stories of the past, and contemporary psychological and psychoanalytic formulations of sibling dynamics.

The 'sibling turn', which has come about in psychoanalysis and in developmental and cross-cultural psychology in recent years, yields different kinds of insight into sibling stories. It draws attention both to continuities and dissonances between modern understandings of the sibling and the ways in which the relationship was framed in the medieval period. Such approaches must be intelligently applied: it is debatable how far the particular claims of psychoanalysis to observe universal structures in the human psyche across

[8] There is a growing literature on methodologies for understanding emotion in both history and literature: see for example U. Frevert, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest and New York, 2011); the EMMA website: http://emma.hypotheses.org and its associated publications, such as *Le sujet des émotions au moyen âge*, ed. P. Nagy and D. Boquet (Paris, 2009) and *La chair des émotions*, *Médiévales* 61 (2011), ed. D. Boquet, P. Nagy and L. Moulinier-Brogi. P. C. Hogan's two important books, *The Mind and its Stories* (Cambridge, 2009), and *What Literature Teaches us about Emotion* (Cambridge, 2011), do not specifically treat medieval literature texts, but they make a compelling case for the value of literary texts for understanding emotions in the past.

[9] C. Larrington, 'Some Recent Developments in the Psychology of Emotion and their Relevance to the Study of the Medieval Period', *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001), 251–6.

very different social and cultural conditions can be profitably applied to a premodern self. Nor is it clear that the highly varied cultural conditions of, for example, Oceania, can bear comparison in many respects with medieval European societies. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic practitioners, developmental and cross-cultural psychologists, and anthropologists all offer theoretical insights into childhood– and adult–sibling relations which find productive resonance in medieval texts. Medieval writers also found models for and discussion of sibling ethics in the Bible and in theological writings. Below I outline some of the contributions of these modern disciplines to the sibling thinking in this book, followed by a summary of the principal brother–sister themes of medieval theology.

Psychoanalytic Theory and the Sibling

The psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell's work has foregrounded and expanded the post-Freudian implications of sibling interaction. Freud had relatively little to say on the subject, beyond noting sibling rivalry, both as a general phenomenon and a personal experience, Mitchell argues.[10] He recognized that his adult friendships, in particular with the Berlin ear, nose and throat surgeon Wilhelm Fliess, were generally predicated on the ambivalences of the sibling relationship, noting his desire for 'an intimate friend and a hostile enemy', and that sometimes these roles would 'come together in a single individual'.[11] In his early correspondence with Fliess, Freud foregrounded the crucial importance of sibling relations, but by the time he came to elaborate the Oedipus complex, he seemed to have left sibling relations behind; desire and violence were attributed to the castration complex rather than to the tensions of siblinghood. Although there are a few early references to brothers and sisters in his work, such as the striking observation 'In none of my women patients . . . have I failed to come upon this dream of the death of a brother or sister, which tallies with an increase in hostility', Freud does not theorize sibling rivalry in any detail.[12] Nevertheless, he was well aware of sibling hatred as a contributing factor in neurosis; he records the repeated request of his patient Little Hans, as reported by Hans's father, that his mother should drown his baby sister in the bath.[13]

In the last decades, attention has turned from the Freudian triangle of father–

[10] See J. Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition* (Harmondsworth, 2000) and *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge, 2003). S. Sherwin-White, 'Freud on Brothers and Sisters: A Neglected Topic', *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 33 (2007), 4–20, demonstrates that Freud engaged both more closely and more widely with sibling issues than Mitchell credits.

[11] S. Freud, *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Edition vols 4 and 5 (London, 1953), p. 483.

[12] Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 253.

[13] See Mitchell, *Mad Men*, p. 81; also M. Rustin, 'Taking Account of Siblings – A View from Child Psychotherapy', *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 33 (2007), 21–35.

mother–baby to focus on the intricate web of sibling bonds. Juliet Mitchell's two books have broken this new ground: they compellingly redirect attention to the sibling, not simply by identifying childhood trauma, but in charting continuing sibling effects in adult life. In *Mad Men and Medusas* (1999) Mitchell argues that the sibling bonds forged in the nursery lay the groundwork for other lateral or peer relationships, including those with spouses and with in-laws. In *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (2003), Mitchell pays particular attention to gender, making clear that passionate love, desire (the 'polymorphous perversity' of infant sexuality) and violent hostility can be attributed to the sister as well as the brother. Identifying 'the three faces of the sister who both cares for and destroys: the lateral would-be murderer, the nurse and the lawgiver' (recurrent aspects of the sister in the texts considered in this book), she investigates the roles available to sisters in literature as well as in life.[14] Mitchell offers three central conclusions about the sibling relationship. First, she charts the intensity and ambivalences of sibling relationship: 'the adored sibling, who is loved with all the urgency of the child's narcissism is also loathed as its replacement'.[15] Second, she emphasizes the persistence of conflicted sibling relationships into adulthood. Third, she illuminates how sibling ambivalences are projected on to spouses, affines and peers, noting that 'in a world where siblings . . . flourish, we can see their importance not only in themselves but for all lateral relationships'.[16] As the first social relationship is the sibling one, it sets the pattern for other social relations. Ego-development takes place as a result of interaction with peers rather than with parents; that struggle for identity differentiation is revisited when the sibling marries and a new brother- or sister-in-law is added to the sibling cohort.

Gender is particularly salient in the early years. While the birth of the younger sibling makes the boy fear that he has lost the power he was able to wield as 'His Majesty the Baby', according to Mitchell, a girl 'dreads feeling confirmed in her weakness and lack of social value'.[17] This fear of displacement is not limited to same-sex sibling pairs; cross-sex siblings are equally traumatized by the arrival of a new baby. Reflecting on the Antigone myth, Luce Irigaray assesses the brother–sister relationship as reciprocal only insofar as it stimulates the fear of mutual annihilation, 'Et chacun(e) bientôt reconnaîtra qu'en son égal(e) était aussi bien son pire ennemi, sa négation, sa mort' ('And each will soon realize that his or her equal is also his or her worst enemy, negation, and death').[18] More positively, Irigaray also identifies a recurrent role for sisters

14 Mitchell, *Siblings*, p. 57. Antigone, as we shall see, is a frequent focus for discussion of normative sisterly loyalties (see pp. 95–7, 153 below).

15 Ibid., p. 10.

16 Ibid., p. 225. See also T. Apter, *The Sister Knot* (New York and London, 2007), p. 179.

17 Mitchell, *Siblings*, p. 71.

18 L. Irigaray, 'L'éternelle ironie de la communauté', in *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris, 1974), pp. 266–81 (p. 276); 'The Eternal Irony of the Community', in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G. Gill (Ithaca NY, 1985), pp. 214–26 (p. 222). See chapter three, pp. 90–2.

as their brothers' memory-keepers; as we shall see, sisters often arrogate to themselves the mission of creating and maintaining a saintly brother's cult.[19] Mitchell herself tentatively discusses the political oppression of women by their brothers as originating in sibling trauma.[20] 'Fratriarchy', the oppression of women by their brothers, has been identified chiefly as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon, as a move which extends concepts of equality and fraternity to one gender only.[21] Yet long before the eighteenth century, and consequent upon high adult mortality rates, medieval brothers habitually wielded as much power over their sisters as their fathers did. Marrying off a sister could absorb family assets in the provision of a dowry, or augment them through the payment of a bride-price. The family hoped to benefit from exchanging a woman with another family, bringing their interests into closer alliance and creating homosocial bonds between male coevals.

Ambivalences towards the sibling, feelings in which 'sibling sex and death . . . are intricately entwined', must be resolved; the child must forge an individual identity for him- or herself, a task of psychological differentiation entrenched in deep-rooted concepts of sameness and difference.[22] Psychoanalysts regard this work as potentially traumatic, 'but in most cases these experiences will be healed and the dread and shock will turn into hate and love, rivalry and friendship'; the child will learn to acknowledge that there is room for the next in line.[23] 'Borderwork': the establishment of the boundaries of identity, the deliberate selection of different roles or personality traits to distinguish oneself from one's siblings, is crucial to identity formation. And so siblings choose, consciously or unconsciously, to carve out different paths through life. Brothers and sisters exist in an eternally present relationship, patrolling the boundaries of sameness and difference with respect to one another, while childhood behavioural patterns persist or recur throughout the lifespan. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the Western nuclear family generates historically unchanging psychological structures of hostility and affection, of anxiety and ambivalence.[24] The sibling's task in developing his or her identity is to learn to assimilate these feelings, to accommodate the 'next in line' and, pre-eminently, to find ways of negotiating the principles of differentiation and substitutability both on an internal psychological level and as aspects of social existence.

[19] See below, p. 92.

[20] Mitchell, *Siblings*, p. 71.

[21] See J. F. MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy* (London, 1991); C. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 33–53, for fraternal oppression as an underinvestigated aspect of patriarchy.

[22] Mitchell, *Siblings*, p. 29.

[23] Ibid., p. 48; p. 190.

[24] See chapter one, p. 22, for demographic evidence suggesting that medieval households tended to contain two generations at most; the multi-generational medieval household is, as a consequence of low life-expectancy, particularly in plague-years, not borne out by the data.

Developmental Psychology and Siblings

Psychologists turned their attention to childhood sibling relations from the 1970s onwards, probing the ways in which older children react to the arrival of a new baby and in which sibling alliances shift and reform during later childhood and adolescence. Judy Dunn and her associates' research has confirmed the extreme and conflicted nature of sibling emotion among toddlers and teens; as one mother astutely commented to investigators, 'It comes down to love and hate, doesn't it?'[25] The toddler reacts to the arrival of the new sibling with rage and jealousy, 'feeling[s] of envy, primitive and horrible', but also with intense love, interest and loyalty.[26] The sibling is the first person to whom the child relates as a social being, with whom it works out how to play, how to negotiate the sharing of possessions, and how to relate to the parents; it forms shifting and strategic alliances with all members of the sibling group. Ambivalence is inherent from the outset in psychological characterizations of the sibling relationship.

Longitudinal studies trace how sibling bonds develop over an entire lifetime; these of course require around seventy years of sustained research, and so are significantly fewer in number. Although they lay different emphases on the emotions and behaviours of siblings from those foregrounded in psychoanalytical models, psychologists broadly agree that paradoxical drives and emotions – love and hate, rivalry and loyalty, nurturing and the desire for autonomy – continue to characterize the sibling bond through different life stages. Stephen Bank and Michael Kahn observe that while 'loyalty is a major theme or dimension of sibling relationships', it coexists with 'rivalry, conflict and competition' across the life-span.[27] Adult siblings still struggle to define themselves against their other siblings, repeatedly having to assert 'I am me, I am not you'. Meanwhile, others inside or outside the family may regard siblings as interchangeable: if one sibling is unwilling or unable to undertake a commitment regarded as a benefit for the whole family, such as taking over the family business, caring for an elderly – or younger – relative, or, in some cultures, entering into a marriage alliance, another sibling may be regarded as an acceptable substitute, irrespective of the individual's own views of the matter. The work of the sibling, particularly one of the same sex, is to differentiate him- or herself from the rest of the sibling group. This may be achieved through complementarity: promoting traits and developing identities which overlap minimally with other siblings' spheres of interest. Deidentification is divisive, a deliberate choice to be as unlike other siblings as possible. This strategy can

[25] J. Dunn and C. Kendrick, ed., *Siblings: Love, Envy and Understanding* (London, 1982), p. 208.

[26] Dunn and Kendrick, ed. *Siblings*; Apter, *Sister Knot*, p. 6 ; S. Bank and M. Kahn, 'Intense Sibling Loyalties', in *Sibling Relationships: Their Nature and Significance across the Lifespan*, ed. M. Lamb and B. Sutton-Smith (Hillsdale NJ and London, 1982), pp. 251–67.

[27] Bank and Kahn, 'Intense Sibling Loyalties', p. 251; cf. I. A. Connidis, 'Siblings as Friends in Later Life', *American Behavioural Scientist* 33 (1989), 81–93.

generate as much conflict as the rivalry caused by making identical life-choices; understood as rejection of all that the other sibling(s) stand for, it provokes extreme hostility. Counter-identification, a differentiation strategy which lies between complementarity and deidentification, often mediates competition successfully; the borderline so keenly patrolled by siblings is less likely to be infringed when counter-identities have been negotiated.[28]

'The continuing existence of a blood tie is taken as indicative of the continuing existence of a social relationship between the siblings', notes Graham Allen.[29] The sibling cannot opt out of his or her siblinghood, within neither medieval nor modern culture. Unlike friends, a sibling is a sibling for life: severance of the relationship is problematic.[30] Siblings can be mobilized when needed, turned to in times of crisis; yoked together by biological and legal genealogy, the family functions as a moral unit and, at the same time, a network of social relationships, each of which constrains and structures other relationships.[31] As in the medieval period, modern Western society maintains distinctions between full, half-, step-, adoptive and fictive siblings. Children do not necessarily live in the same household as their biological siblings; they may live with half- or step-siblings. Today's blended families raise similar questions about the relevance 'of culture, language, interpretation and subjectivity to constructing definitions, and social and emotional experiences, of who is a sibling, rather than a self-evident, biological or legal, state'.[32] Powerful affective bonds, both positively and negatively inflected, exist between half- or step-siblings, even when, in the medieval past, they enjoyed very different legal statuses and varying inheritance prospects.

Sibling roles vary over the course of medieval and modern lifetimes; yet the developmental patterns for contemporary siblings are markedly similar to those of medieval brothers and sisters. Sibling caretaking tends to be informal, delegated by the parents on a temporary basis, often to the oldest sister; essential social skills and values are transmitted from older to younger child.[33] Coalitions and conspiracies are formed among siblings in order to deal with parents; children mediate between parents and other siblings, explaining

[28] See C. J. Moser, R. Jones *et al.*, 'The Impact of the Sibling in Clinical Practice: Transference and Countertransference Dynamics', *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 42 (2005), 267–78; M. Charles, 'Sibling Mysteries: Enactment of Unconscious Fears and Fantasies', *Psychoanalytic Review* 86 (1999), 877–901, and S. Bank and M. Kahn, *The Sibling Bond* (New York, 1982), pp. 104–11.

[29] G. Allen, 'Sibling Solidarity', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 39 (1977), 177–84 (p. 179).

[30] T. R. Lee, J. A. Mancini and J. W. Maxwell, 'Sibling Relationships in Adulthood: Contact Patterns and Motivations', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 52 (1990), 431–40.

[31] Allen, 'Sibling Solidarity', p. 180.

[32] Edwards *et al.*, *Who is a Sister and a Brother?*, p. 3.

[33] See V. G. Cicirelli, 'Sibling Relationships in Adulthood: A Life Span Perspective', in *Aging in the 1980s*, ed. L. W. Poon (Washington DC, 1980), pp. 455–62, and A. Goetting, 'The Developmental Tasks of Siblingship over the Life Cycle', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 48 (1986), 703–14.

and translating behaviour.[34] '[S]ibling rivalry . . . a type of conflict arising out of competition for parental rewards' persists concurrently with sibling solidarity.[35] While this pattern is set in childhood, as long as the parents are alive their offspring are likely at some level to compete amongst themselves. They may, however, avoid conflict by deliberately choosing *not* to compete, by selecting behavioural traits and making life choices which maximize the contrasts between them. Such differentiation 'need not always be negative in affect'; it fosters the development of different self-concepts, crucial to successful individualization and identity formation.[36] Adolescence tends to lead to a weakening of sibling bonds: age difference becomes particularly salient as an older sibling resents the younger's attempts to tag along. A sibling's marriage can lead to closer ties and improved relationships as new roles as husband, wife and in-law are explored; intimacy after marriage very often depends on how well one sibling gets on with a sibling's spouse.[37] Although the formation of the new married couple can close off sibling relationships for a time, once the married sibling has children and the roles of uncle and aunt become available, new claims are made on the unmarried siblings and family conduits reopen.[38] When a marriage ends, divorce or widowhood frequently reactivates emotional and supportive ties between siblings.[39] Sibling rivalry dissipates with age and geographical distance as brothers and sisters find different roles for themselves and for each other.[40] The death of the parents – whether early in the child's life, leaving a sibling group vulnerably dependent on others or on each other, or late, when adults must agree to negotiate the division of the parental legacy – remains a crisis point in family relations.[41] Dissent exacerbates tensions between siblings when arrangements for ageing parents have to be made.[42] More harmoniously, elderly siblings share reminiscences, validating one another's perceptions of the past, of their selves and of society and they act as one another's memory-keepers.[43]

[34] Goetting, 'Developmental Tasks', pp. 705–6.; cf. Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, pp. 322–4.

[35] Lee, Mancini and Maxwell, 'Sibling Relationships in Adulthood', p. 433.

[36] H. S. Mosatche, E. M. Brady and M. R. Noberini, 'A Retrospective Lifetime Study of the Closest Sibling Relationship', *The Journal of Psychology* 113 (1983), 237–43 (p. 241).

[37] Allen, 'Sibling Solidarity', p. 181; I. A. Connidis, 'Life Transitions and the Adult Sibling Tie', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54 (1992), 972–82.

[38] See Connidis, 'Life Transitions'.

[39] Ibid., p. 973.

[40] Allen, 'Sibling Solidarity', p. 180.

[41] Goetting, 'Developmental Tasks', pp. 707–8.

[42] Compare Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of Leir and his daughters Gornorilla, Regau and Cordeilla when the king's extreme old age produces a crisis in the sisters' relationships: Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of* De gestis Britonum, ed. N. Wright, trans. M. D. Reeve (Woodbridge, 2007), ch. 31.

[43] Goetting, 'Developmental Tasks', p. 710, and cf. V. G. Cicirelli, 'Feelings of Attachment to Siblings and Well-Being in Later Life', *Psychology and Aging* 4 (1989), 211–16.

Psychologists regard birth order as highly significant both in terms of social roles and individual personality development. A biologically given fact – being older, younger or middle – becomes culturally elaborated.[44] While social convention often reifies the normative power and ability of the elder brother, folk-narratives correspondingly compensate for the elder's advantages, particularly under primogeniture. The youngest brother is endowed with qualities of courage and resourcefulness; these allow him to succeed despite lacking the social position and skills of his older sibling.[45] These popular stories address situations when there is a lack of fit between the ideological and actual characteristics of the older brother; those who are structurally marginal – younger brothers, younger sisters – possess 'cleverness, visionary insight, audacity, irresponsibility and social and geographical mobility [which] go[es] beyond what is ordinarily prescribed and tolerated'.[46]

'Studying the course of sibling relationships over time highlights the continuity of the family of origin' concludes Ingrid Connidis, 'focusing our attention on the process and effects of adding and losing members and subsystems. This affirms the systemic nature of families, characterized by interdependence, reciprocity, conflict, feedback, and readjustment.'[47] Medieval, like modern, birth families endow children with identities and rights that persist even after marriage and the formation of new family systems entail new obligations and affective ties. Medieval sibling narratives, as we shall see, focus particularly on the effects of adding and losing members: whether through the murder of a brother or the marriage of a sister, reaction to the new situation highlights exactly the issues of reciprocity and conflict Connidis identifies.

Siblings in Culture

'Siblings always *matter*. How siblings should relate to each other, what to call them, and what resources they are to have and share is important to all cultures. These matters are not left culturally undefined', notes Thomas Weisner.[48] Cross-cultural psychologists study how brothers and sisters interact and signify within different cultures, observing external socially determined processes rather than internal psychological motivations. Such observations, when drawn from non-industrialized cultures, frequently yield insights into family organization

[44] B. Sutton-Smith and B. G. Rosenberg, *The Sibling* (New York, 1970); M. Jackson, 'Ambivalence and the Last-Born: Birth-Order Position in Convention and Myth', *Man* 13 (1978), 341–61 (p. 341).

[45] Jackson, 'Ambivalence', pp. 346–51.

[46] Ibid., p. 349.

[47] Connidis, 'Life Transitions', p. 981.

[48] T. S. Weisner, 'Comparing Sibling Relationships across Cultures', in *Sibling Interaction across Cultures; Theoretical and Methodological Issues*, ed. P. G. Zukow (New York, 1989), pp. 11–25.

in medieval Europe.[49] Sibling caretaking in non-industrialized societies tends to be institutionalized. 'Older siblings feed and comfort babies, keep younger siblings out of mischief and discipline them, assign various household and gardening chores to them and generally supervise their behavior', comments Victor Cicirelli, evoking the patterns evident in medieval sources dealing with siblings in peasant households.[50] The parents' time is thus freed for work while the siblings learn the skills they may need in case of family catastrophe; they become intimately involved in socializing and training the young.[51] This role is not without risk; sibling caretaking in medieval societies might end in disaster. Younger children often died through the carelessness of their older siblings, sometimes to be revived by the intercession of a saint, but, more often than not, to be registered as victims in coroners' rolls.

Siblings become more salient to their brothers and sisters at different stages of the life-span. Often social interaction occurs only within same-sex groups, and brothers and sisters occupy complementary social roles. In Oceania, for example, the brother is regarded as the sister's protector and the sister as her brother's spiritual mentor: parallel ideas of reciprocity can be found between saintly sibling pairs in the medieval Church.[52] While sisters are typically close, brothers tend to display more rivalry, especially where the oldest is empowered to make decisions on behalf of the whole group: similar affective patterns occur in medieval Europe. Brothers begin to take an interest in their sisters when the time comes for them to marry. In South Asia brothers often defer their own marriages until they have provided their sister's dowry through labour, a pattern not dissimilar to the dowry culture of late-medieval Italy. Brothers are also obliged to police the welfare of a married sister and her children; if a marriage ends, the sister may return to the brother's home or seek his protection. Brothers find themselves allied in economic or survival activities, tending to be more rivalrous where they work or fight side by side. Seniority entails authority; the eldest brother either shares or takes over the power of the patriarch and his younger siblings are mandated to obey; often the older sister takes on the role of mediator between the older brother and his disaffected siblings.[53]

Relationships between brothers, sisters and their affines have been central to anthropological analyses of kinship after Claude Lévi-Strauss: bonds within and between groups are mediated by the 'exchange of women'. Even more than fathers, brothers make or break marriage negotiations and alliances.[54] Analysis of sibling relationships thus becomes subordinated to the question of whose

49 V. G. Cicirelli, 'Sibling Relationships in Cross-Cultural Perspective', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56 (1994), 7–20.

50 Ibid., p. 9, here with reference to the Kwara'ae of the Solomon Islands.

51 Weisner, 'Comparing Sibling Relationships', pp. 16–17.

52 F. J. Griffiths, 'Siblings and the Sexes within the Medieval Religious Life', *Church History* 77 (2008), 26–53.

53 Cicirelli, 'Sibling Relationships in Cross-Cultural Perspective'.

54 C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. R. Harle Bell and J. R. von Sturmer, and R. Needham (London, 1969), p. 50.

sister a man will marry, resulting in an emphasis on in-law relations which chimes with the anxieties about affinal bonds evident in medieval literature and discussed in chapter seven below. The social and cultural importance of brothers-in-law is flagged up by the response of the Samoan Arapesh tribe, questioned by Margaret Mead about the possibilities of brother–sister incest. Echoing Augustine's view of the desirabilty of exogamy, they apparently retorted, 'Don't you realize that if you marry another man's sister, and another man marries your sister, you will have at least two brothers-in law, while if you marry your own sister you will have none? With whom will you hunt, with whom will you garden, whom will you go to visit?'[55] The brother-in-law relationship is the most fractious in medieval literature, a site of creatively dramatic tensions of loyalty, erotic attraction and strategic interests. The imperative to marry the sister outside the group – indeed according to ecclesiastical law, well outside the extended kinship: beyond the sixth degree of relatedness – multiplies the possibilities of affinal solidarities and fractures. Their apprehension of their common destiny, facing 'the hard fate of exiles, theoretically for ever, in foreign households, often different in language and customs', as Lévi-Strauss observes, creates solidarity among sisters.[56] While the assumption that the woman loses her rights and responsibilities within her birth family on her marriage, that she does indeed share 'the hard fate of exiles', has informed much analysis of Western medieval social customs – as chapter one will show – a sister's actual emotional ties to her brothers and her birth family vary significantly by social class and by geographical region. Feminist responses to the 'exchange of women' principle have noted the lack of agency ascribed to the sister in Lévi-Strauss's analysis (see for example the influential critiques by Sherry Ortner and Gayle Rubin).[57] In medieval, as in non-industrial, cultures, sisters are often able to work strategically to manage sibling and affinal relationships. As Jack Goody argues, 'exchange of women' is in fact an exchange of 'rights in women', and the woman too receives certain rights – to food, medical care, sexual attention – even if the exchange is unequal. Wives do not cease to be members of their natal lineages and certain rights continue to subsist to them. As we shall see in chapter one, although the exercise of these rights may depend heavily on geographical proximity, they nevertheless do not cease to exist simply because a married sister has moved away.[58]

55 Ibid., p. 485, citing M. Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York, 1935), p. 84. See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XV.15; http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/civ15.shtml.

56 Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, p. 306.

57 S. B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford CA, 1974), pp. 68–87; G. Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology*, ed. Reiter, pp. 157–210; S. B. Ortner and H. Whitehead, 'Introduction: Accounting for Sexual Meanings', in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. S. B. Ortner and H. Whitehead (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 1–27.

58 J. Goody, 'The Labyrinth of Kinship', *New Left Review* 36 (2005), 127–39 (p. 131).

Siblings in Christianity

The theories discussed above invite careful comparison between modern Western sibling experience, contemporary findings for non-industrial societies, and the family narratives preserved in medieval texts. Also available to medieval authors who wanted to consider sibling relations were a broad range of theoretical models, patterns and analogies. To the learned social strata, classical literature (usually transmitted through Latin) offered such examples as the fraternal strife which led to the fall of Thebes (considered in chapter four), the complex family relations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or the conflict of Romulus and Remus at the foundation of Rome. More widely known and discussed, no doubt, were the Bible's authoritative gamut of sibling behaviours and emotions. Genesis emphasizes recurrent patterns of competition and rivalry between pairs or larger groups of brothers. From the primal murder of Abel by Cain (Genesis 4) and Abraham's willingness to dismiss Ishmael and his mother in favour of the late-born Isaac (Genesis 21), to Jacob's swindling his brother Esau out of their father's blessing (Genesis 25, 27), the envy of Joseph's brothers for their father's favourite and Joseph's forgiveness and protection for those same brothers (37, 42–5), Genesis consistently shows one brother as chosen and one as lacking in favour, both in the eyes of his parents and in the sight of God. Laban tries to pretend that his daughters Leah and Rachel are interchangeable, but Jacob labours seven extra years to secure the sister on whom his heart is set; those same sisters compete fiercely with one another in childbearing (Genesis 29–30). Exodus models a more cooperative fraternal relationship: Moses and Aaron stake out distinctive roles as political leader and priest respectively when they lead the children of Israel to the promised land. Later Old Testament books illustrate the powerful 'better-than-brother' relationship of David and Jonathan (I Samuel 18) and the incest of Amnon and Thamar (II Samuel 13). With wonderful concision and vividness the New Testament presents the Prodigal Son's elder brother's resentment (Luke 15), the annoyance of Martha at her sister Mary's avoidance of housework (Luke 10) and the hope of both sisters that Jesus might restore their brother Lazarus to life (John 11). These stories provided templates for medieval thinking about normative sibling behaviour: love and loyalty were expected, envy and disloyalty feared and reproved. Christian teaching in sermons, Bible commentaries, pictorial depictions of biblical story in stained-glass or tapestry, or in the dramatization of key episodes from the Old and New Testaments in mystery-play cycles reinforced social beliefs about sibling solidarity and the dangers of sibling rivalry.

Official Christian ideology demands the rejection of the biological family in favour of Christian kinship. This tenet is drawn from Luke 14. 26: 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple'. The logic of Christ's demand belongs to the days of the early Church, when families might genuinely be split by competing religious beliefs (providing the material

of many early Christian martyrdom stories). In the early-medieval period, the family was recognized as an important vector of conversion; the outright rejection of kin ties was generally regarded as unnecessary once societies had become fundamentally Christian.[59] The Church regarded all men and women as brothers and sisters, reiterating the importance of the sibling relationship as the lifelong model for peer relations. Sibling bonds thus provided the fundamental metaphor for the ideal organization of social groups, whether in the monastery and convent or in chivalric orders; *pseudo-parentés* distinct from actual, often troubling, family ties were thus created.[60] The cross-sex sibling bond was regarded as a key model for right gender relations in early Christian thinking: brother and sister represented an ideal model for married couples. If a husband is able – as Clement of Alexandria was one of the earliest Church Fathers to urge – to overcome and control his sexual desire for his wife, then the marital relationship will become as God would wish it: like that of brother and sister, as innocent as Adam and Eve were before the Fall.[61] More than a millennium later, Chaucer's Parson recommends: 'Man sholde loven hys wyf by / Discrecioun, paciently and atemprely; and / Thanne is she as though it were his suster'; a similar sentiment is voiced in his 'Merchant's Tale'.[62] In the later-medieval period, exempla were promulgated which warned that a sister might embody at best distraction, at worst temptation for her brother.[63] Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris in the early fifteenth century, confessed that visits from his sisters induced troubling sexual fantasies in him.[64] Normal cross-sex sibling affection thus falls victim to pervasive Church misogyny.

While the proper functioning of sibling relations came to be regarded as central to the good order of medieval society, the perversion of sibling ties was imagined as a threat not only to the family, but to the whole social fabric. Didier

59 The choice to join a monastic order could entail a sundering of family ties, understood by other family members as a betrayal; see A. Barbero, *Un santo in famiglia: vocazione religiosa e resistenze sociale nell'agiografia latine medievale* (Torino, 1991), p. 217.

60 D. Lett, 'Les frères et les sœurs, "parents pauvres" de la parenté', *Médiévales* 54 (2008), 5–12 (p. 9).

61 See E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 30 for discussion of Clement of Alexandria.

62 Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Parson's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson (Oxford, 1988), line 861, p. 318, and note, p. 963; cf. also 'The Merchant's Tale', line 1454, p. 156. L. Patterson, in 'The "Parson's Tale" and the Quitting of the "Canterbury Tales"', *Traditio* 34 (1978), 331–80, notes that this framing of marital chastity represents Chaucer's own addition to his source in both passages (pp. 365–6).

63 *Index exemplorum*, ed. F. C. Tubach (Helsinki, 1969), no. 4424, p. 337, in which a woman begs her brother, a monk, to come to see her after many years of separation. He visits, accompanied by two fellow-monks, but tells her that, because she is a woman, they can never meet again.

64 B. P. McGuire, 'Late Medieval Care and Control of Women: Jean Gerson and his Sisters', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 92 (1997), 5–37 (p. 33, n. 98) and B. P. McGuire, 'Jean Gerson and the End of Spiritual Friendship: Dilemmas of Conscience', *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Haseldine (Stroud, 1999), pp. 229–50. See also F. Ledwige, 'Relations de famille dans la correspondance de Gerson', *Revue historique* 271 (1984), 3–23.

Lett observes how extreme sibling behaviour tropes social breakdown: 'Les deux principaux dangers qui menacent les frères et les sœurs, et partant, mettent en péril la societé toute entière: le fratricide et l'inceste' ('the two principal dangers which threaten brothers and sisters, and beyond, putting the whole of society in danger [are]: fratricide and incest').[65] Incest and kin-murder are indeed symptomatic of the onset of apocalypse in the medieval imagination. In the Old Norse mythological poem *Vǫluspá*, composed around the year 1000, the onset of *ragna rǫk*, the end of the world, is signalled by the disruption of sibling relations:

> Brœðr muno beriaz   oc at bǫnum verðaz,
> muno systrungar   sifiom spilla;
> hart er í heimi,   hórdómr mikill.

> ('Brother will fight brother and be his slayer, / cousins will violate the bond of kinship;/ hard it is in the world, there is much adultery'.)[66]

So too, Boccaccio relates how in plague-ridden fourteenth-century Florence normal sibling love and caretaking evaporated:

> era con sí fatto spavento questa tribulazione entrata ne' petti degli uomini e delle donne, che l'un fratello l'altro abbandonava . . . e la sorella il fratello e spesse volte la donna il suo marito.

> ('men and women alike were possessed by such a visceral terror of this scourge that a man would desert his own brother . . . a sister her brother, and often a wife her husband').[67]

Whether as portent of catastrophe or as symptom of disaster, the fragmentation of sibling relationships figures social breakdown, heralding worse calamities as to come.

Summary

Although sibling murder and sexual transgression tend to occur – or to be documented as occurring – only in exceptional circumstances, both in modern and medieval culture, the sibling emotions which give rise to such extremes are, in Lévi-Strauss's phrase, 'good to think with'. Sibling interaction is not

[65] Lett, 'Les frères et les sœurs', p. 10.

[66] *Vǫluspá* st. 45, in *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, ed. G. Neckel and H. Kuhn, 4th edn (Heidelberg, 1962); *The Poetic Edda*, trans. C. Larrington (Oxford, 2014). This and other examples of the trope may derive in part from Matthew 10. 21 which warns the Apostles of the difficulty of their mission: 'and the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death'.

[67] *Decameron*, Introduction; Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Waldman, p. 10.

only about itself; siblinghood's social centrality allows writers to engage both with major literary themes and with urgent historical questions: with feud and reconciliation, with faith, morality and ethics, and with the justice of inheritance and marriage settlements. Medieval sibling narratives gesture towards the social and psychological pressures operating within and upon the medieval family; they highlight the anxieties and satisfactions which may not be so easily read out of other kinds of texts. 'It is ironic that laymen more than family experts acknowledge the importance of the sibling bond, and that artists more than researchers have succeeded in capturing its essence', suggested Jane H. Pfouts as the 'sibling turn' was beginning to manifest itself in social-science research.[68] Jack Goody writes that although the 'emotional tone and reciprocal rights characterizing such critical relationships' are seldom manifest in documents related to inheritance, 'the plots of many plays and novels make the point in a more dramatic way than is available to the historian and the social scientist'.[69] Literary narratives thicken and nuance our understanding of the sibling web, bringing together the historical specificity of medieval social practices and enduring – even universal – psychological patterns of thinking, feeling and acting.

The following chapters explore precisely that 'essence of the sibling bond', 'the emotional tone and the reciprocal rights of siblings', which Pfouts and Goody identify as most clearly visible in works of the imagination. They make use of the psychoanalytical and psychological concepts outlined above to bring into focus the specific and the universal, the outlandish and the familiar in brother–sister relationships. Chapter one analyses what can provisionally be claimed for historical sibling bonds in the medieval period. The two chapters which follow focus on love and loyalty: chapter two investigates fraternal solidarity and affection, while chapter three uncovers the particular dimensions of sisters' love for their siblings. Chapter four begins with the primal story of Cain and Abel, unpacking the horror of fratricide and the causes of fraternal hatred; chapter five fleshes out hostility between sisters, and conflict between sisters and brothers. Incest, that most unsettling of transgressions, is the subject of chapter six. Chapter seven deals with in-law relationships, investigating how sibling emotions spill over into relationships with affines, underpinning and threatening in-law alliances. The final chapter's examination of fictive sibling bonds – foster- and sworn-siblinghood – shows how a better-than-brother relationship, transcending the ambivalences of the blood-tie, becomes possible with a freely chosen friend. The conclusion draws together the thematic principles which guide sibling interactions in the medieval Imaginary, identifying recurrent sibling crises across a full range of genres and contextualizing the profoundly experienced emotional responses and distinctive behaviours which generate sibling drama.

[68] J. H. Pfouts, 'The Sibling Relationship: A Forgotten Dimension', *Social Work* 21 (1976), 200–4 (p. 200).

[69] J. Goody, *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200–1800*, ed. J. Goody, J. Thirsk and E. P. Thompson (Cambridge, 1978), p. 1.

1

The Medieval Sibling in History

Introduction

It is still too early to write the history of the medieval sibling, a history of the kind that has, in recent years, been written of medieval marriage and of the medieval family. The expanding field of the history of childhood has largely been shaped by an earlier historiography which saw as its primary challenge a correction of the views of Ariès, Stone and deMause. These historians argued that medieval parents did not make a strong emotional investment in their children: a detachment thought to be rooted in the high mortality rates for infants and young children. Attentive analysis of parent–child relations were the primary means of refuting these arguments, and thus vertical relationships came to be privileged, while sibling or lateral relations have been comparatively overlooked.[1] Other medieval historians have examined in close detail the documentary evidence in archives and have pored over marriage contracts and wills to uncover the patterns in dowry and inheritance customs across medieval Europe, again focusing largely on parent–child relationships. Piecing together primary and secondary material from archival evidence, individual microstudies, such as the work of Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber for late-medieval Tuscany, or the investigations of the Carolingian polyptych evidence for tenth-century France, scholars have now found it possible to write the history of the family in its vertical relationships, and the history of medieval marriage across Europe.[2] The sources for writing histories of lateral relationships exist in the same archives and document collections, and in other sources as yet unexamined, but these have not yet come under sustained scrutiny. Some welcome beginnings have been made; for example, Isabelle Réal's research on Frankish society in the sixth to ninth centuries, and the work of Didier Lett and those French scholars who

[1] See B. Hanawalt, 'Medievalists and the Study of Childhood', *Speculum* 77 (2002), 440–60, for a full discussion of these arguments and their refutation.

[2] D. Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200–1430* (New Haven and London, 1967); D. Herlihy with C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven and London, 1985); P. Toubert, 'The Carolingian Moment (Eighth–Tenth Century)', in *A History of the Family*, ed. A. Burguière *et al.* I: 379–406; *To Have and to Hold: Marrying and its Documentation in Western Christendom, 400–1600*, ed. P. L. Reynolds and J. Witte jr (Cambridge, 2007); *Medieval Families: Perspectives on Marriage, Household, and Children*, ed. C. Neel (Toronto, 2004).

have followed him in close interrogation of sibling relations through a range of case studies.[3] However, until medieval European archival material has been analysed at the micro level with sibling questions in mind, the larger narrative, *qua* history, of brothers and sisters will remain occluded.

Yet sibling relations *are* traceable where legal documents exist, for example when brothers determine their sisters' marriage arrangements, or when the eldest brother receives homage from his younger brothers for property they hold in fief from him. Memorial runestones communicate the family relationships which obtained between those who commissioned them and those who are commemorated. Chronicles and other historical writings recount the behaviour of royal and aristocratic sibling groups; saints' lives, canonization materials and coroners' records furnish valuable insights into more ordinary families and their day-to-day activities, or discuss the consequences when actual kinship is replaced or overlaid by spiritual siblingship. Exemplary material used in sermons or other religious writing provides a glimpse of normative sibling relations: brothers rebuke sisters for their vanity; sisters take feckless brothers into their homes; brothers try to influence brothers' choice of career, while sisters compete for academic success. As Ronald Finucane argues, in reference to depositions about miracles, 'While the "miraculous" core may be unbelievable, the incidental or circumstantial details – the *nonessentials* [his italics], as far as most witnesses . . . and parents were concerned when reporting these cases are of primary importance'.[4] Siblings can be glimpsed getting on with their lives in the interstices of texts whose ostensible subject is something quite different.

This chapter will trace some of the evidence for the nature of medieval sibling relationships across the lifespan, drawing on the kinds of historical sources listed above. What follows is an overview of the factors that influenced sibling experience, organized across the lifespan, interspersed with snapshots of siblings in accounts drawn from historical or quasi-historical sources from medieval Europe (defined as roughly 500–1500).

Individual medieval families and social organization in different parts of Europe varied just as much as modern Western families. Full sibs, step and half-sibs, foster-siblings and adopted children, legitimate and illegitimate siblings might grow up together and maintain close relationships in later life, though the high childhood mortality rate would cull around a third of those born. The rights and responsibilities of brothers and sisters varied substantially between those parts of southern Europe where the common law had developed from the *lex Romana* and the areas of northern Europe which had not come under Roman rule and which had developed indigenous law codes. Additionally, marriage patterns in northwest and southern Europe contrast markedly with one another over the period. In the south, girls were very soon married after puberty; in

3 Réal, *Vies de saints, vie de famille*; Lett, *Frères et sœurs: histoire d'un lien*, and the special journal issue *Frères et sœurs – Ethnographie d'un lien*, *Médiévales* 54 (2008), ed. D. Lett.

4 R. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 3.