Introduction

CHAPTER 1

Fatherless antiquity? Perspectives on "fatherlessness" in the ancient Mediterranean

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The modern study of the family was born in crisis, a response to the unmistakable and disturbing changes in family life precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. Although research into the family has changed profoundly in aim and method since the early nineteenth century, the original, underlying sense of crisis has persisted, reinterpreted with every succeeding generation.[1] In the 1990s the crisis in the family was articulated and popularized as a crisis of "fatherlessness." In the United States one critic thus decried the rise of a "culture of fatherlessness," fearful that fatherhood itself was close to extinction in a newly "fatherless America."[2] Fatherlessness, however, is not a uniquely American condition: similar concerns have recently been raised in Western Europe.[3]

Any discussion of fatherlessness fundamentally resolves into a debate over the importance of household form and composition. Household form greatly affects family relations and the interdependency of kin members, helping to define the roles each member plays in the family. The sudden disappearance of any family member necessarily results in multiple dislocations and readjustments, particularly when that member is as central to a family as the father. Father-absence was, in fact, the point of departure for much of the twentieth-century study of the father, a field that blossomed in recent decades with studies of fathers and fatherhood from

[1] For quick discussions on the intellectual and historical background to family studies, see Bridenthal 1982; Casey 1989; and Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1992.

[2] Blankenhorn 1995; cf. Horn, Blankenhorn, and Pearlstein 1999.

[3] Although the idea may be traced back beyond the psychoanalytic and critical theory traditions, these are the most influential traditions informing the modern concept of fatherlessness. See Nobus 2003; cf. Horkheimer's "Autorität und Familie" (first published in 1936, now collected in Schmidt 1985; translation available in Horkheimer 1982); Mitscherlich 1963 (now available in translation: Mitscherlich 1993); Trowell and Etchgoyen 2002. For concerns about fatherlessness in Europe, see, e.g., Matussek 1998; 1999; 2006; and Nobus 2003.

a variety of perspectives, multidisciplinary and multicultural.[4] Indeed, for many scholars the absence of the father remains an important, even defining, aspect driving contemporary family dynamics.

The second part of the twentieth century also witnessed a renewed interest in the ancient family, with great attention paid to the ancient father in particular.[5] Much of this work concentrated on the ideology of patriarchy and fatherhood, or alternatively on the effects of a father's presence, including his relationship to, and power over, his family, and the sentimental ideals of conflict and concord in ancient family life. It is remarkable, however, that despite a perennially high rate of father-absence in all ancient societies (as we shall see below), ancient fatherlessness has not been investigated in its own right, leaving us no true counterpart to the modern research on fathers and father-absence.[6]

This volume neither offers a complete overview of the experience of all fatherless children in antiquity nor traces a history of fatherlessness over the centuries. Rather, in bringing together into one place for the first time a cross-section of thematic and methodological approaches to ancient father-absence, it seeks to lay a foundation for an initial approach to fatherlessness in the ancient Mediterranean world. Broadly speaking, the chapters herein explore the various disturbances associated with a father's absence and the coping strategies employed to alleviate the effects of those disturbances. It is therefore not a book about orphans or even children per se, but rather more generally about family dynamics and the ways in which ancient people compensated for the loss of a father. The contributors discuss marriage patterns, child-rearing, surrogate fathers, the position of women and children in ancient societies, and the personal, emotional, economic, and social consequences of father-absence. At another level, the combination of persistent father-absence and patriarchy in the ancient world ensured that the ramifications of father-absence went beyond individuals and their families

[4] See the review of the literature and the various chapters in Marsiglio *et al.* 2000 and Lamb 2004. On early studies of fathers and father-absence, see Lamb 2000 and Lamb and Lewis 2004.

[5] The secondary literature on the ancient family is vast. The most recent views and bibliography can be gleaned from the following: Wiedemann 1989; Golden 1990; Rawson 1991a; Dixon 1992; Cohen 1993; Perdue 1997; Pomeroy 1997; Rawson and Weaver 1997; Gardner 1998; Nevett 1999; Nathan 2000; Neils and Oakley 2003 and Rawson 2003. For the ancient father generally, see J. Martin 1984. For the Greek world, see Finlay 1980; Strauss 1993; French 1999; Wöhrle 1999 and Shapiro 2003. For the Roman world, see Lee 1979; Hallett 1984; W. V. Harris 1986; Lacey 1986; Thomas 1986; Eyben 1991; LeMoine 1991; Stevenson 1992; Arjava 1998; Shaw 2001; and Cantarella 2003.

[6] The notable exception is the work of Richard Saller. Otherwise, such scholarship as there is on ancient father-absence is scattered and technical. More recently fatherlessness has been considered indirectly as the background for work done on widows and orphans, e.g. Weiler 1980; Krause 1994–5; McGinn 1999; and Hanson 2005. Cf. discussions of replacement strategies, e.g. Bremmer 1976; 1983, and 1999.

to involve whole communities and sometimes even the state, ultimately finding expression in literature and politics, as several of the contributors show.

In exploring ancient fatherlessness, however, we must be on our guard against mechanically importing assumptions implicit or latent in the concept into a social and historical context where they may be inappropriate or misleading. The masterful discussions of Beryl Rawson, Keith Bradley, Richard Saller, and Suzanne Dixon of what it means (and has meant) to study the ancient "family" all stand as clear warnings in this regard: language is implicated in method and prescribes the limits of historical inquiry.[7] It is therefore important to recognize that "fatherlessness" is not a neutral term: it is a category born of rhetorical art, not sociological science, a watchword for a movement that advocates the importance of fathers per se – not just the number of "parents" in the home, but the presence of biological fathers.[8] As such, "fatherless" is a label that has been applied to an array of different family forms in recent years with the purpose of organizing them into a single phenomenon seen as inherently detrimental to the children who experience it and to society as a whole. In this formulation, fatherless families include families headed by divorced, widowed, or single mothers by choice, as well as those headed by lesbian couples and mothers raising children with the help of stepfathers, boyfriends, or relatives. In other words, "fatherlessness" is a consciously polemical interpretation of the rise of the single-mother family and the concomitant expansion of economic and social freedoms women have gained over the last century in the United States and Western Europe.[9]

The number of children now growing up in such homes is indeed striking. To take the United States as one particularly well-researched example, in 2001 there were approximately 18.5 million children, or a quarter of all American

[7] Rawson 1986; Bradley 1991a: 1–12; Saller 1994: 74–101 (cf. Saller 1984); and Dixon 1992: 1–35.

[8] For an excellent collection of the major viewpoints involved in this movement, see Daniels 1998; cf. Nobus 2003; Pleck 2004. At its core, the intellectual underpinnings of the contemporary fatherhood movement are rooted at least as much in concerns about the meaning and future of marriage as in the fate of fathers. Thus it has not been surprising to see the ground shift once again in the last decade in the United States to the issue of same-sex marriage and domestic partnerships (anticipated by Siverstein and Auerbach 1999). For the evolving academic and political interest in marriage both in the United States and elsewhere, see the *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66.4 (2004), which contains the proceedings of the 2003 National Council on Family Relations Conference in Vancouver, "The Future of Marriage" (Amato 2004 offers an introduction to the papers), as well as the recent additions of Amato 2007 and Blankenhorn 2007.

[9] On the rise of the single-mother household, see, e.g., McLanahan and Sandefur 1994 and McLanahan and Carlson 2004; cf. Bradshaw *et al.* 1999 and Lerman and Sorenson 2000 on the associated rise of the nonresidential father.

children, growing up in homes with only one biological parent, and the overwhelming majority of these parents were mothers (78 percent).[10] Many, if not most, of these children knew who their fathers were, but the extent to which their fathers participated in their lives and contributed to their upbringing varied greatly.[11] Most of these families are the products of divorce, but increasingly also of the separation of unmarried couples.[12] In fact, over 30 percent of all births in the United States at the turn of the millennium were out of wedlock, up from 6 percent in 1960. Such families have been called "fragile families," because they are significantly less stable than families in similar circumstances headed by married couples.[13] As of 2001, 2.1 million children (or 3 percent of the total population of children) lived in "fragile families," but given the typical rate of dissolution, a great number of them will have subsequently joined the ranks of those living in single-parent homes. All together then, there were at least 23 million children in 2001, or nearly one-third of the children in the United States at the time, already living apart from their fathers or at risk of doing so in the near future.

These numbers are of particular and immediate concern because there appears to be a relationship between being raised in single-mother homes and certain negative outcomes, such as increased risks of lower academic achievement, teen pregnancy, criminal behavior, and idleness as young adults as compared with children raised by continuously married parents.[14] Perhaps more surprising is the fact that this correlation has been shown to hold true even for children raised with the aid of surrogates such as grandparents, stepfathers, or unmarried partners, while it is much weaker for

[10] Unless otherwise noted, the following statistics come from Kreider and Fields 2005. It is important to note that the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) does not take into account marital status when tabulating "two-parent" homes, while the Current Population Survey (CPS) does. Hence, there are more children in two-parent households in SIPP than in CPS (see Fields 2003). As we are primarily concerned with the living arrangements of children rather than the parents' marital status per se, we shall rely on the SIPP numbers. For Europe, see O'Brien 2004.

[11] Cherlin 1992: 79–80; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 96–8; Bradshaw *et al.* 1999; Lerman and Sorenson 2000; McLanahan and Carlson 2004: 376; and Amato and Sobolewski 2004. But see the recent methodological critique of Pasley and Braver 2004 with regard to measuring involvement of nonresident fathers.

[12] The divorce rate in the United States appears to have held steady in the 1990s after climbing precipitously between 1950 and 1970. The nature and relationship of divorce, marriage, and cohabitation is changing in both the United States and Europe. See Cherlin 1992; Bramlett and Mosher 2002; and Amato 2007.

[13] McLanahan and Carlson 2004. This stands in distinct contrast to much of Western Europe, where cohabitation is more common and stable, and has seen much higher rates of out-of-wedlock births than the United States for much of the twentieth century. See Seltzer 2000; Smock 2000; Simmons and O'Connell 2003; S. Brown 2004; Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Seltzer 2004.

[14] Angel and Angel 1993; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Amato 1994; Hoffmann and Johnson 1998; cf. Amato and Sobolewski 2004.

children raised by widows.[15] Finally, this relationship has been observed to operate, though varying in degree, in families of every race and socio-economic stratum.[16] To this extent modern "fatherlessness" is a sociological phenomenon with a measurable impact on children and their mothers that even those who celebrate the new freedom that single-motherhood represents for women must confront. On the other hand, most sociologists do not believe that what is being detected in this correlation is necessarily the absence of the father per se (and therefore only remediable by his return in his "traditional" capacity), but rather a host of associated effects connected to his absence (and so remediable by other means). The relationship between poverty and father-absence, for instance, remains a particularly controversial matter.[17] Again, there is no evidence to suggest that the children of same-sex couples are at any disadvantage purely on the basis of not having two parents of different sexes or two parents to whom they are biologically related.[18] For these reasons and others, many have seen the popular and politicized formulation of "fatherlessness" as essentializing and overinclusive, and most sociologists prefer to speak in terms of father-absence instead of fatherlessness.[19]

In rejecting the idea of fathering as a natural role based on sex, most sociologists do not deny that there is a biological component to fathering, but instead emphasize the ways in which this biological relationship is mediated by culture, often resulting in strikingly different ways of being a father. Michael Lamb, the foremost authority on contemporary fathering, has consistently maintained this position, gathering over the last thirty years numerous studies of fathers from different cultural milieus.[20] For Lamb,

[15] McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 64–78; cf. Biblarz and Gottainer 2000 and Hofferth and Anderson 2003. There are a significant number of children in these categories in the United States: 4.5 million children (or 6 percent of the total population of children) live with their mother and partner, step or adoptive, married and unmarried. 2.5 million (3 percent) live with a single mother and at least one grandparent. Widows, however, have been a declining percentage of mothers over the last century. This is a finding that conservative critics tend to point up, e.g. Popenoe 1996: 151–2.

[16] McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: esp. 56–63.

[17] See, e.g., McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 79–94 and the responses of Crowder and Teachman 2004 and Gupta, Smock, and Manning 2004. Cf. Knoester and Haynie 2005 on the relationship between family structure and youth violence, and Pong, Dronkers, and Hampden-Thompson 2003 on the relationship of family structure to educational attainment. Some researchers even find family structure to be relatively unimportant in predicting well-being, e.g. Lansford *et al.* 2001.

[18] Tasker and Golombok 1997; Silverstein and Auerbach 1999; Stacey 2003. This is a finding that conservative critics have typically ignored or discounted, e.g. Blankenhorn 1995: 171–84 and Popenoe 1996: 147.

[19] See the criticism of Stacey 1998 and Silverstein and Auerbach 1999 (but see also the debate engendered by Silverstein and Auerbach's criticism in the subsequent volume (55) of *American Psychologist*: 678–84).

[20] Lamb 1987; cf. relevant chapters on fathering in different cultures in Lamb 2004.

what most fathers across different cultures share is not an essential nature, but three vital familial functions, namely the provision of economic, social, and emotional support for the mother and her children.[21] These are, in fact, the three main areas in which most researchers see the effects of father-absence, and the correlated negative outcomes of father-absence mentioned above have generally been interpreted as owing to deficits of paternal economic, social, and emotional support.[22] For instance, with respect to economic impact, the influential analysis of McLanahan and Sandefur found that families typically lose about half of their income when fathers leave.[23] As for paternal social support, these same authors related it to the idea of "social capital," or the store of useful knowledge contained in human relations.[24] In other words, when fathers leave, they take with them not only their money, but also their personal skills, knowledge, and connections. Finally, they found that without the emotional and parenting support of a father, single mothers raising a family alone often become stressed and that this stress sometimes translates into worse outcomes for the children.[25]

While both sides of this debate over the meaning and implications of the rise of the single-mother household have often defended their positions by placing them in a historical context, few if any have reached back beyond the nineteenth century. Yet, as we mentioned above, there is one very good reason to do so: demographic studies strongly suggest that the proportion of children raised by a mix of relatives, stepparents, and single mothers was at least as high, if not higher, in every pre-modern society before the so-called "demographic transition" than it is today.[26] The last twenty-five years of work on the demography of the Roman world in particular has resulted in a consensus with respect to certain structural features of its population, such as an average life expectancy in the ancient Mediterranean at birth of approximately twenty to thirty years and the tendency of non-elite males to marry comparatively late in life, at twenty-five to thirty years of age.[27] Men

[21] Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda 2004. Cf. Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, and Dufur 1998 and Stolz, Barber, and Olsen 2005.
[22] McLanahan and Sandefur 1994.
[23] McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 79–94; cf. McLanahan and Carlson 2004. See n. 17 above for critical responses to these correlations.
[24] McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 3–4, cf. 116–33; Amato and Sobolewski 2004, 342–4; cf. J. Coleman 1988.
[25] McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 98–115 (note that argument over the importance and role of divorce in child welfare is particularly contentious).
[26] On the "demographic transition," see Parkin 1992: 71–2; cf. Friedlander, Okun, and Segal 1999.
[27] The bibliography on ancient demography has grown tremendously in this period. Some of the most important works are the following: Hopkins 1966; Saller and Shaw 1984; Shaw 1984; 1987; 1996; Hansen 1986; Saller 1987; 1994; Parkin 1992; Bagnall and Frier 2006 (1st edn. published in 1994); Scheidel 1996; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c.

thus became fathers for the first time relatively late in life, and this resulted in a comparatively large generation gap between fathers and their children. The combination of high mortality and late marriage meant that a striking number of fathers died before their children reached adulthood.[28] In fact, model life tables suggest that perhaps as many as one-third of all children in every social and economic stratum over the entire ancient Mediterranean would have lost their fathers before they reached age fifteen. Another third lost their fathers before they reached age twenty-five. Therefore, unlike modern fatherlessness, which is the product of parental separation, ancient fatherlessness was rooted in paternal death, which was pervasive and endemic, not merely the occasional or exceptional by-product of environmental catastrophe or war.[29]

While the causes of modern and ancient father-absence are radically different, the rough similarity of scale of the two phenomena suggests that a comparative approach might produce interesting results. Before proceeding, however, it must be acknowledged that the above description is in both cases a simplification: in the ancient and modern worlds multiple demographic regimes may be detected at work in different socio-economic strata and geographic regions.[30] This in turn results in different rates of fatherlessness between the various sectors of society. But our point here is, first, that in both cases there is no sector or strata or class that does not experience some significant level of fatherlessness and, second, that, given the causes, the experience of fatherlessness is likely to be fundamentally similar at all levels, though again its effects probably varied in degree according to wealth and status (as indeed has been shown in the modern context by McLanahan and Sandefur). The first comparative insight, then, comes in the simple recognition of fatherlessness in antiquity as a phenomenon. If we follow most sociologists and dismiss the overly broad definition of fatherlessness based on some essential, timeless paternal role, we are left with a more limited version of the phenomenon based on the basic

[28] Cf. the Denis, Desjardins, and Légaré 1997 and Légaré and Naud 2001 studies of the effects of similar rates of paternal death in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Canada.

[29] Saller 1994: esp. 181; cf. Saller 1987. On the relationship of war to ancient demography and society, see J. K. Evans 1991; Rosenstein 2004; and Scheidel 2007a; cf. Scheidel 1996: 117–24. Fatherlessness in the twentieth century has been intimately associated with war, see Griswold 1993: 161–84 and Blankenhorn 1995: 50–60; cf. Lamb 2000: 28–9. Fatherlessness by divorce or separation surpassed fatherlessness by death in the United States only in the 1970s (Cherlin 1992: 25). Divorce also separated some children from their parents in antiquity, but the children usually continued to live with their fathers (Rawson 1986: 32–7; Rawson 2003: 225–32).

[30] Scholars of both periods have been sensitive to this fact, though of course the ability to differentiate between regimes is obviously much greater and more precise in the modern context. On the importance of status to ancient demography, see, e.g., Parkin 1992; Saller 1994; McGinn 1999; on regional mortality patterns in ancient Italy see Sallares 2002.

functions that most fathers play in the life of the family, economically, socially, and emotionally as spouses and parents. As discussed above, the research into this more limited version of fatherlessness tends to show that having biological fathers around to perform these functions matters, even if the exact nature of the relationship is debated. The combination of a structural father-absence based in demography and the generally patriarchal cultures of the ancient Mediterranean almost certainly meant that most societies would have experienced at least this limited form of fatherlessness as a phenomenon with a measureable impact on families and children.

Such a recognition recommends to us a convenient framework for thinking about the effects of ancient father-absence: routine paternal death meant that ancient families regularly suffered and compensated for the loss of a father's economic, social, and emotional support. Although affective relationships, such as that between a father and his children, have a history in themselves, we should not find it surprising to discover that ancient fathers cared for their children and that it was this love that in part drove them to take an active role in the moral, vocational, intellectual, and religious development of their children.[31] When they were gone, the mother thus missed an important partner and support when it came to parenting. Unfortunately, our sources only occasionally allow us to hear of the emotional strain that widowed mothers must have routinely experienced as a result.[32] Most ancient fathers in the Mediterranean also typically acted as heads of household, representing an important connection between the family and the rest of the community. As a consequence of the father's social role in such cultures, the social capital that families lost with his death was particularly important. Finally, the loss of a father in antiquity necessarily entailed some economic disruption, and those children who could not rely on an inheritance or family support faced considerable economic challenges with social repercussions. Destitute fatherless boys who were not lucky enough to be adopted or taken in by relatives would have had to resort to work from an even earlier age than might otherwise have been the case.[33] Moreover, time and money for even a rudimentary education would be

[31] Hallett 1984: 99–149; Golden 1990: 94–7; Eyben 1991; Saller 1994: 102–32, 100–14; but see Bradley 1991a (esp. 125–55) on the strength of emotional and affective ties in the Roman family.

[32] See Hübner (this volume).

[33] On adoption, see Corbier 1999; cf. Marsman 2003: 322 for the ancient Near East. In most ancient families children were important producers even while their parents were alive. Child labor contributed to the home economy as well as providing training for the child in preparation for his or her adult life. In the Roman world the normal age of apprenticeship seems to have been between twelve and fourteen years of age (see Bradley 1991a: 103–24). For the relatively recent change in the child's role in the family economy, see de Regt 2004.

tight to non-existent.[34] The situation for destitute orphaned girls, however, could be even worse. They too had to earn a living, and if they could not continue in the family trade, they might have to find work as a domestic servant or, in the worst-case scenario, as a prostitute. Their poverty would also be a barrier to the respectability conferred by an honorable marriage, as they would have difficulty in raising the required dowry. Without a dowry the chances of finding a willing husband were negligible.

As a functionalist account, this limited version of fatherlessness allows for the expression and mix of paternal roles to be defined by culture. Thus, while all three of these basic paternal functions were inevitably disrupted by death, the extent of disruption depended greatly on the composition of the household, itself the product of particular family circumstances and the prevailing cultural patterns of family formation.[35] For instance, among the aristocratic families of the later Roman Republic neolocality upon marriage seems to have been the norm (i.e. when the newly wed couple moved out of their parents' households in order to set up their own), so such households appear to have consisted of conjugal units with their children, so-called "nuclear" families.[36] In light of their epigraphic study, Saller and Shaw extended this conclusion from the city of Rome to the Western half of the Roman Empire, at least among the levels of society that participated in the epigraphic culture.[37] In nuclear households the father usually held the position of head of household; in the absence of adult sons still in the home, his death usually turned life for his family upside down. In Classical Greece, on the other hand, Gallant has seen the joint family type as predominant.[38] In this type of family the father usually is either subordinated to his own father if the latter is still alive, or if he has died, then the father is on equal rank with his brothers, perhaps living with several of them and their wives in a joint household. In joint families there is thus the potential for several "fathers" in the home in the form of uncles or adult cousins, so a fatherless child could probably rely on other adult male household members to mitigate the disruption caused by a father's death. For instance, economic provision might not be as completely interrupted as it was for those living in

[34] This was not the case for the wealthy, who found various ways to finance their educations to the highest levels even after the death of a father. See Cribiore (this volume).

[35] See, e.g., Bradley 1991a: 125–55; cf. Dixon 1999: esp. 218. Some scholars suggest that losing a father might even impact on a child's survival rate to different degrees depending on the family type, social structure, and remarriage. See Van Poppel 2000 and Gullickson and Hammel 2004.

[36] Veyne 1978; Saller and Shaw 1984; cf. Dixon 1992: 1–35. This is not undisputed: see Bradley 1991a; 1991b; D. Martin 1996; and the discussion of McGinn 1999: 625–30.

[37] Saller and Shaw 1984; cf. Saller 1984 and Shaw 1984.

[38] Gallant 1991: 27–30; cf. Cox 1998: 141–3.