

INTRODUCTION

I [Josiah Quincy] well remember the dramatic force he [Gilbert Stuart] threw into his anecdotes. One of them, I remember, related to an Irishman who had acquired a castle by a fortunate speculation, and thereupon sent for Stuart to paint the portraits of his ancestors. The painter naturally supposed that there were miniatures or drawings whose authority he was to follow; but, on arriving at the castle, he was told, to his great surprise, that nothing of the kind existed. “Then how the deuce am I going to paint your ancestors, if you have no ancestors?” asked Stuart with some temper. “Nothing easier,” rejoined the proprietor. “Go to work and paint such ancestors as I *ought* to have had.” The artist relished the joke, and, setting to work, produced a goodly company of knights in armor, judges in bushy wigs, and high-born ladies with nose-gays and lambs. “And the man was so delighted with ‘his ancestors who came after him,’” remarked Stuart, aptly quoting the saying of Shakespeare’s *Slender*, “that he paid me twice what he agreed to.”¹

Like their more modern counterparts, medieval patrons found it both appropriate and strategic to surround themselves with images of their ancestors. And like Stuart’s Irishman, they did not shy away from inventing the ancestors they “ought to have had.” From the twelfth century onward, genealogical images and image cycles proliferated. Indeed, self-definition in genealogical terms was everywhere in the high and later Middle Ages; one historian has noted “the tendency, ubiquitous in medieval society, to see areas of feeling and experience through kinship colored glasses.”² Yet art historians have hardly

remarked on the frequency of these expressions of genealogy in visible form, although artistic representations with genealogical content appeared singly and in groups, on walls and in books, sculpted and painted. Clearly such imagery was effective in meeting a need.

Stuart's anecdote does not specify the functions that the Irishman's painted genealogy was intended to fill. At one level, the paintings of the patron's imaginary ancestors might have been intended to play a purely decorative role, filling blank spaces on walls in an otherwise empty castle. But the patron's use of "ought" seems to suggest other functions as well, ones that genealogical imagery also played in the Middle Ages. His painted ancestors presumably explained the status that guaranteed his right to the castle. The images of his supposed forefathers provided an identity for the patron, defining him in relation to figures whose achievements, even if unreferenced in the portraits, had presumably merited their representation. Even more, however, portraying numbers of his ancestors gave the patron a visible lineage, locating him in relation to a past that extended back in time according to the number of ancestors portrayed, a line whose very length was intended to convey both age and impressive strength.

One of the goals of this book is to show how widespread genealogical imagery was; another is to elucidate a variety of situations in which it functioned. The popularity and flexibility of the genre guaranteed its use not only for the portrayal of families but also for successions of officeholders. For groups in which an office was inherited, family and position coincided over long periods of time. The kings of France or England, for example, descended through multiple generations of a single dynasty before that family was replaced by another, which then in turn descended down through multiple generations, if all went well and the requisite heirs were born. Because medium, placement, and function might determine the form of genealogy chosen, this study will examine examples of both ramified charts, including trees properly speaking, and more linear portrayals of succession in which family members or officeholders appear next to one another.³ In many of the genealogical cycles examined here the individual elements are linked by placement (on the wall, on the page, at the beginnings of chapters) and similarity (in pose, in size); repetition is one of the features that makes them legible as a genealogy. Large-scale stone tombs with life-size effigies, for example, could be arranged one after another to display family lineage, but the freestanding nature and size of the objects required that a linear genealogy rather than a tree form be used.⁴ While there is no direct match between, say, tree-form genealogies and family groups, on the one hand, or linear sequences and officeholders on the other, tree-form genealogies are more likely to be used for families, where side branches showing the descent from multiple children may be of importance; the ramified form conveyed such subtle family relationships.⁵ Nor is it a given that women appear only in those

genealogies that record family lineage. While that is the obvious place, one that records their roles as wives and mothers, the status of their natal families sometimes allowed their inclusion to make a strategic political statement. More frequently they appear in both family trees and linear genealogies, including genealogies of kings, in cases where they served as powerful regents for young sons or where they helped to justify the accession of a new dynasty to the throne.

In portraying a continuous progression of figures over time, visual genealogies control or attempt to control the viewer's engagement with the work, his reading of the sequence. The sense of a genealogical chart or sequence would have been accessible even to an illiterate viewer, since it starts at a defined beginning and proceeds through a series of steps to an equally clearly defined end, often the present at the time the cycle was created. Unlike a single figural sculpture or a narrative scene, where the eye may proceed from head to foot or foreground to background or simply wander around, the genealogy guides the viewer's eye, telling her how to read it. In this way it is similar to narrative, proceeding through logical moments in a prescribed and necessary order from beginning to end. If it is in large scale, the visual genealogy may actually propel the viewer physically through space in a guided way, as she proceeds from one member of the group to the next. Unlike narrative, however, the genealogy proceeds in obvious units of equal size and thus with an even pace. In this way, genealogical imagery has an unnatural structure: units are made regular, although the lives or reigns of the figures portrayed were of different lengths. A short-lived generation or a brief rule receives the same amount of space as a long-lived patriarch or a ruler with a half-century term in office. These units of apparently like length advance the story, which is, at the simplest level, the progression of the units. The continuous steps in a genealogical tree or a linear sequence map time onto space or, put another way, a visual genealogy provides a spatial representation of time. Unlike typological imagery, which also flourished starting in the twelfth century, genealogical imagery portrays continuity by articulating the elements that connect the distant past to the present. Unlike narrative, in which characters who appear repeatedly carry the story, in genealogical representation it is the structure of repeated elements and their connections that move the limited "story line" along. Genealogy reads like a stripped down narrative in which the only verb is "begat" or "succeeded." The form, regularly repeating similar units, becomes part of the subject. A schematic or figural genealogy with its regular units proceeding at a steady pace, creating a systematic chronological matrix, imposes order on a past that was irregular, even messy.

By starting with a prestigious ancestor – virtually always a male – and extending through his descendants or successors, the genealogical chart or sequence of images calls upon the authority of the past to justify the line that

descends from that ancestor. As much as they show attitudes toward the past and the family, genealogical images also imply continuity into the present and the possibility of virtually infinite extension into the future. The length of the line is taken as a measure of its strength, its strength being an indication of its ability to continue in the same fashion, without interruption, linearly and indefinitely. Genealogical imagery thus becomes a controlling and predictive device and a strategy ideal for use at moments of stress or threats to the line, its continuation, or its rights.

As with the often political functions of genealogical imagery, the politics of representation is not always straightforward. As Alain Erlande-Brandenburg has noted, “Man chooses his past.”⁶ Just as a map may omit villages smaller than a certain size or infrequently traveled roads that join only these smaller agglomerations, these maps of human descent too, in the interests of finiteness and legibility, and sometimes the expression of a particular political point, may pass over side branches, dead ends, or those related only by marriage. This selectivity figures history in the interests of the patron or intended audience as linear, straightforward, and easily explainable. Even where complexities are included, they are smoothed over or ironed out by the way in which they are subjected to the overall, predetermined structure.

In mapping time as it is embodied in a single family or office, genealogical imagery explains the continuous relationship between the past and the present and, by implication, between these and the future. It provides a simplified narrative of succession without particulars or nuance, omitting contextual detail in the interest of expressing its main point with crystalline clarity.

Some definitions are in order. For the purposes of this study, “genealogy” will refer to any program, textual or figural, in which at least three successive “generations” are depicted in such a way as to make the connection between them apparent. I put “generations” in quotation marks here because, as noted earlier, genealogies of office also figure in this investigation. There is no good translation in English for the handy German term *Amtsgenealogie*.⁷ The awkward “genealogy of office” expresses the idea literally and will be used here together with the German original. Although the adjectival form seems more satisfying linguistically, “official genealogy” works better for genealogies that express the sanctioned ideology of the portrayed group about its lineage. The decision to include successions of officeholders and family descent in a single study arises from the fact that similar forms could be and were used to express progression in both kinds of groups. “Tree” here will be used in the same way that we now say “family tree”: to indicate a diagram, a stemma, that shows relationships between family members where members of a single generation typically appear on a single horizontal and are attached to parents in a separate line, typically above them, and to children, who also occupy their own register, most often below. I do not insist that these “trees” display an arboreal metaphor with roots and leaves.

Linear genealogies share their visual aspect with – and may initially be hard to distinguish from – groups of contemporaries or near-contemporaries, which will be referred to here as “series.” A cursory look at the mid-fourteenth-century busts in the triforium of the cathedral of St. Vitus at Prague or the contemporaneous panel paintings representing the professors of the University of Vienna that hung in the cathedral there fails to reveal whether these cycles represent successors or contemporaries and thus whether the element of time that characterizes a genealogy properly speaking is present.⁸ The apostles represent perhaps the most frequently portrayed series in the period under discussion here. When they appear together in such narrative scenes as the Last Supper, for example, other aspects of the iconography identify them as a group. When they appear as isolated elements in a linear series, however, identifying them may be a bit more difficult. At the Sainte-Chapelle, for example, the apostles stand against the piers that support the structure, an arrangement that would be reused for the linear genealogy of the French kings some fifty years later in the Grand’ Salle at the opposite end of the palace.⁹ Also at the Sainte-Chapelle, the Old Testament tribal leaders in a linear series in the lower section of the Numbers window represent contemporaries rather than a sequence of holders of a single office.¹⁰ In some cases, such as the Grand’ Salle, inscriptions indicate the genealogical intent; in others, where the individual figures are not labeled, knowledge of history or a textual source is necessary.

Other series do incorporate an element of time in that they include figures from different eras, but they intend no continuity from one figure to the next and thus lack the concept of succession crucial for our definition of genealogy. The *neuf preux* or nine worthies, for example, portray three triads of famous men arranged chronologically within their subgroup – three pagans (Alexander the Great, Hector, and Julius Caesar), three Jews (Judas Maccabeus, David, and Joshua), and three Christians (Godefroy of Bouillon, King Arthur, and Charlemagne) – and united by their heroic deeds.¹¹ Here again, neither blood nor office links these figures, however; their connection remains a conceptual one rather than a step-by-step progression of connected figures through time.

The earliest works examined in this study date about 1100 and coincide with social and political changes that created new perceptions about the nature of the family in northern Europe. Evinced in the composition of dynastic chronicles in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, the development of heraldry, and the use of patronymics, this changed sense of family will be examined in more detail in a subsequent section. The latest monuments considered in detail here appeared shortly before 1400, by which point many of the forms and uses of this genre were well established. This in no way implies that genealogical imagery had lost its expressive force by this time; for the last two decades historians of early modern art have been studying such works in the sixteenth century.¹² Historians and scholars of literature too have

turned their attention to genealogies, sometimes including images. The former, in particular, have studied the importance of family groups, including their self-identity and the ways in which they expressed it.¹³

PRECEDENTS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The new interest in imagery with genealogical content in the early twelfth century hardly represents the first flurry of such activity. Brian Rose dates the earliest examples of dynastic commemoration in the fourth century BCE. The largely destroyed tomb of the Satrap Mausolus at Halicarnassus in western Anatolia, raised about 350, “seems to have been the first attempt at an unabridged dynastic presentation”;¹⁴ it included as many as thirty-six figures of Mausolus’s dynasty. The justly acclaimed statues traditionally identified as the ruler and his wife Artemesia, now at the British Museum, may in fact represent not the deceased himself and his spouse but members of this dynastic group.¹⁵ Although reconstructions differ, the figures seem to have ringed the rectangular building, standing in the interstices between the columns that supported the pyramidal roof. Thus visible from all sides, they would have impressed with their number.

Similar in conception, although truncated in length, was the Philippeion, begun by Philip of Macedon in 338 BCE at Olympia and finished by his son Alexander after Philip’s death in 336. Round in shape, the structure was supported on columns. Inside, five statues depicted a shortened genealogy: Philip, his wife and parents, and his son and successor. Constructed of gold and ivory, the same materials used for the cult images of Zeus at Olympia and Athena at the Parthenon in Athens, these statues claimed superhuman status for the figures they represented. At ancient Palmyra, in present-day Syria, third- and second-century limestone plaques commemorating the dead were decorated with idealized bust-length portraits.¹⁶ They were typically inscribed with the name of the dead and a genealogical notation – son of Y or daughter of M – although some contained more detailed genealogies stretching over several generations. These panels were then used to close individual niches in huge family columbaria; the grid-like pattern of the niches would have heightened the genealogical aspect.¹⁷

Better known and more likely of relevance for the recurrence of this interest in twelfth-century Europe are the dynastic preoccupations of the Romans. Pliny describes how well-placed Roman families kept masks of their male ancestors in the atrium, the central space of the house.¹⁸ Made of wax, the masks were stored in cupboards that protected them from dust. The masks were also used in more public displays of lineage, specifically in funerals. The bier carrying the deceased naturally served as the centerpiece of the funeral procession, followed by the living family members. At the front of the cortege, actors

who resembled longer-dead family members in height and appearance wore their clothing and masks, creating a genealogical framework that described the place of the deceased and the living who followed.¹⁹ The *ius imaginis* reserved both these practices, the keeping of masks and their use in public processions, for noble *gentes*.²⁰ These customs seem to have survived into the Empire only for the imperial family; an impersonation of Aeneas led the funeral procession for Drusus II in 23 CE, followed by the kings of Alba Longa and Romulus and then the ancestors of the Julian and Claudian dynasties.²¹

These manifestations of dynasty were not genealogies properly speaking; they were selective, representing only those male family members who had held high public office.²² True genealogies, stemmata in diagrammatic form, decorated the walls near the *armaria* that contained the ancestor masks in the atrium.²³ These included painted portraits of family members – men and women – that were connected by cords or painted lines to indicate their affiliations. Starting about this time, more permanent and more public statements also portrayed the imperial genealogy. Rose observes that the funerary procession for Drusus “was, in essence, a reproduction of the decorative program in the Forum of Augustus.”²⁴ At the center of the hemicycles behind the colonnades flanking the great open court before the Temple of Mars Ultor, dedicated in 2 BCE, giant gilt bronze statues represented, on the left, Aeneas with his father and son, and on the right, Romulus. The former was accompanied by marble statues of the Alban kings, the latter by those of the most important men, the *summi viri*, of the Republic. The *summi viri* continued in the niches on the straight walls under both sides of the colonnade.²⁵ At the center of the forum, a statue of Augustus presented him as the logical descendant of both groups. The much larger forum of Trajan, built between 107 CE and 113 CE, took up this program again in a similar position in the great forecourt, where on each long side thirty *clipea* framed in rich foliage held over-life-size busts. Remains of those of Livia, Agrippina the Younger, Vespasian, and Nerva, “suggest that the series commemorated the imperial families of the first century and a half of the Empire.”²⁶ Here again the emperor, represented as an equestrian, stood at the center of court. Alexander Severus installed a variation, with statues of the deified emperors, in the Forum Transitorium in 235 CE.²⁷

A short genealogy of single figures portraying the natural parents of Germanicus, his wife, brother and sister, and numerous children stood atop the arch erected in his memory after his death in 19 CE, and Rose hypothesizes a similar group atop an arch erected for Drusus II in Rome as well.²⁸ Rose further notes the resumption of statuary groups under Caligula in 37 CE, in which family members “who could serve as links to Augustus and the Julian family” were preferred, and cites the addition of statues of new emperors to existing groups in the provinces under the Flavians.²⁹

The Roman concern with the visual representation of genealogy is particularly interesting in light of the phenomenon known as the Renaissance of the twelfth century. In his 1927 book that popularized the term for an English-speaking audience, Charles Homer Haskins argued that fields as diverse as law, science, and philosophy were invigorated by a new interest in and knowledge of the achievements of the ancient world and fueled by access to texts and monuments either newly discovered or newly available in the west.³⁰ Other scholars have extended Haskins's argumentation to architecture and sculpture, looking at, among other things, the revival of large-scale architecture in stone with vaulting forms hardly used in large spaces since Roman times and the integration of stone sculpture into the fabric of the building.³¹ Contemporaneous literary sources document a new interest in antique architecture and sculpture in their own right.³²

Although neither genealogy nor genealogical imagery makes it into Haskins's list of chapters, it is worth considering whether the sudden, even explosive flowering of interest in imagery with genealogical content in the twelfth century might also be a part of a look back to ancient models. Richard Krautheimer's important 1942 article shows that, already in the late eighth and ninth centuries, Charlemagne and his artists had knowingly adapted features not from Roman architecture in general but specifically from the monuments of Early Christian Rome: "The aim of the Carolingian Renaissance was not so much a revival of Antiquity in general as a revival of Rome, or specifically of one facet of the Roman past: the Golden Age of Christianity in that city."³³ Carrying the aura and the political meanings not simply of hoary antiquity but of a specific moment in time, these references helped characterize Charlemagne's own empire and further his political goals. Objects and styles imported from these same Early Christian sites, along with works in other nonfigural media, helped give rise to the idea of a "Carolingian Renaissance," another source for the so-called Renaissance of the twelfth century. In Chapters 1 and 3, we will see a similar kind of knowledge and adaptation of both Roman Early Christian and Carolingian monuments. With the Jesse Tree (Figs. 9–10) appearing in an elaborated form that stressed genealogy in the middle of the twelfth century and illustrated family trees included in German chronicle manuscripts as early as the beginning of the century, it seems possible that this genealogical interest too may bespeak the concern in reviving the past seen both in other visual media and in nonvisual endeavors.

GENEALOGY AND FAMILY IDENTITY ABOUT 1100

Medieval interest in the structure of the medieval family can be documented at least as far back as Isidore of Seville (ca. 570–636). In his *Etymologiae*, he notes the derivation of the word *familia* (family) from *femur* (loin) in a passage that

describes at great length the various relationships between family members.³⁴ David Herlihy explains that by about 700, so shortly after Isidore, these families were comparable and commensurable, that is similar regardless of social status and urban or rural location. They conceived of themselves as cognatic groups, “ego-focused, in the sense that all lines stretch out and are measured from the place which the ego holds in the descent group. This means that the composition of the kindred is redefined for each new generation, as its focus settles upon a new person, a new ego. It does not continuously accumulate members over time.”³⁵

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, this definition of family began to change. Superimposed upon the older form of cognatic relationships, the new patrilineal attitude toward family was “ancestor focused . . . trac[ing] its line of descent back to a particular ancestor. Like all ancestor-focused descent groups it tends to grow with each generation.”³⁶ In his groundbreaking work on kinship structure in the Middle Ages, Georges Duby too observes the succession of these two ways of considering family: “the memory of ancestors only became definite at the time when the structure of relationship was modified and took on a clear-cut agnatic form centred on a landed ‘household’, an inheritance, a bundle of rights clearly defined and attached to a patrimony.”³⁷

The exact date to which one could trace this change in the conception of kinship structure from cognatic to agnatic depended on the status of the family in question, with higher status families able to track their ancestry further back than those of lesser ranks. Looking back from the twelfth century, counts remembered or could document their beginnings as far back as the early tenth century, families of castellans to about 1000, and knights to the mid-eleventh century or slightly earlier.³⁸ Duby words it eloquently:

Before those dates there was no lineage, nor awareness of genealogy properly speaking, and no coherent remembrance of ancestors. A member of the aristocracy considered his family as . . . a horizontal grouping, spread out in the present, with no precise or fixed limits, made up as much of *propinquii* as of *consanguinei*, of men and women whose bonds were as much the result of marriage alliances as of blood.³⁹

Duby relates these shifts in self-perception to political and legal changes, specifically to increasing autonomy and the ability to possess and hand down property.⁴⁰

Beyond the point where family relationships could be realistically traced, an originating ancestor was frequently invented to serve as the beginning of the line.⁴¹ Often a Carolingian, this figure might also be drawn from the Bible or myth. This *Urahn* was typically chosen to confer status on his descendants. Securing the beginnings of the line, according to Duby, “reveals a constant

anxiety to represent the family as going back to its most distant origins, in a lineage, a regular succession of heirs who transmit the patrimony from one male to another.”⁴² Whether in verbal or pictorial form, the genealogy insists on the length and strength of the line and puts special emphasis on the place where it began.

The first genealogies were written for the counts of Flanders and those of Anjou, starting as early as 951–56, at “literary centres with Carolingian roots.”⁴³ Beginning about 1160, genealogical writing became more popular, spreading from the centers where texts had been written for these two dynasties.⁴⁴ Not only did genealogical literature start to be produced in other regions and for patrons of lower status, but monastic production gave way to composition at courts of princes by members of the secular clergy. The texts also became more detailed, elaborating the deeds of ancestors to make them correspond to those of the heroes of epics.⁴⁵ At this same date, epics were expanded into cycles with genealogical structures. The various texts of the William of Orange cycle are a case in point. By about 1200, the *Chanson de Guillaume*, written in the second quarter of the twelfth century, had been elaborated with material that related earlier and later episodes and lives of other family members; while all the cyclical manuscripts include a basic canon of ten *chansons*, an additional fourteen are known in this group.⁴⁶ By the twelfth century, genealogical thinking was so pervasive that the historian Gabrielle Spiegel refers to it as a “perceptual grid,” one of the ways of structuring history, and the literary historian R. Howard Bloch sees it as a “mental structure” related to changes in grammar and an interest in etymology.⁴⁷

Duby notes that “the making of these [family] genealogies often seems to have been prompted by the necessity of legitimizing some power or authority . . . The drawing up of documents of this kind was apparently intended to confirm claims to sovereignty or to prove the rights of heirs after contested successions.”⁴⁸ Diagrammatic and pictorial genealogies also appear at what I call “moments of stress.”

Twelfth-century texts show great concern with how groups were formed and differentiated from one another,⁴⁹ and genealogical texts and image cycles were only two of a larger number of devices that developed more or less simultaneously for marking family identity. Once a family defined itself patrilineally, this new consciousness manifested itself in a number of ways. Surnames began to be used to identify family members. These might indicate genealogical filiation or might derive from the name of the family seat. Such *cognomena* appear in the Midi as early as the end of the tenth century and spread north in the eleventh; by the middle half of the twelfth century even knights used surnames, which “came to constitute a central symbol of the unity of lineage, an indicator of race, and a mnemonic key to genealogical consciousness.”⁵⁰ Heraldry also appeared in the twelfth century, first as