

## *Introduction*

The historian, in his capacity as a former or informer of the civic sense in others, has for a long time restricted himself to the study of public life. Even when he has set out to analyse the structure of the economies of past times, and the situations and social conflicts to which they have given rise, he has done so from a political point of view. The history of domestic life and of institutions has been left to the sociologists and the legal historians.

If, nowadays, historians are beginning to discuss the family, this is perhaps because the problems of private life have irrupted into the sphere of current events, and the respective rights and duties of husband and wife, their authority over their children, and the possibilities of divorce, contraception and abortion have become affairs of State. In the face of a transformation of moral conduct that is more evident with every day that passes, some people are, in effect, calling upon the State to preserve traditional morality, others are demanding that it accelerate certain 'necessary' changes, while yet others are trying to make these changes a weapon in an all-out war against the prevailing political system. How, then, can a historian conscious of the political conflicts of his own time fail to be interested in the 'private life' of our forefathers?

This is especially true because to make a clear-cut distinction between private and public life – a distinction so fundamental in our liberal societies – is of limited relevance to the analysis of the old-style monarchical societies. In the latter case, the family as an institution had many of the characteristics of a public institution, and the relations of kinship served as a model for social and political relations.

The authority of a king over his subjects, and that of a father over his children, were of the same nature, as we shall observe: neither authority was based on contract, and both were considered 'natural'. The king and the father were accountable for their governance to God alone. Both normally acted for the best interests of their family, however unfortunate this might turn out to be for their subjects or their children. How can one comprehend the marriages that took place in past times if one considers marriages as a purely private affair, in which the only objective is the happiness of the spouses? How can one understand the War of the Spanish

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Succession, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, or the Italian wars, if one reasons only from the point of view of the interests of State?

It is true that there was in foreign as in domestic policy a logic of sovereignty that imposed its criteria on the princes of past times just as it imposes them on the States of the present day, impelling them to fight all other powers that might cast a shadow over their own power. We should not conclude, however, that there was nothing but vanity and hypocrisy in such formulas as 'my brother' or 'my cousin', which princes in former times used when they addressed another prince or some great lord of their realm. These formulas are highly significant: they constitute one indication, among many others, of the fact that relations of kinship helped to mould political relations; and, conversely, they provide information concerning the ties of fraternity and cousinhood for the historian of family relations.

Furthermore, particular families played a major role in political life. It was normal, when one possessed a share of the public authority, to govern with the aid of one's relations and for their profit. The greatest servants of the State – Richelieu, for example, or Colbert – did not decline this privilege. On the other hand, when the magnates were removed from power, they did not hesitate to take up arms against the king, with the collusion of their kinsfolk and clients.

The history of the Ancien Régime cannot, of course, be reduced to that of conflicts between families: some wars can be explained as being essentially confrontations between ideological fanaticisms, and others as class struggles; and sometimes ideological confrontations and class struggles closely combined. But this was not always the case. Rather than distorting the evidence in order to find, in all the conflicts of former times, the class nature of each party to the conflict, one might at times be better advised to investigate the ties of kinship, alliance or clientele which always bound them to a greater or lesser extent. Even when a group was ostensibly defending class interests, it often happened that the latter were in fact merely a mask for family interests.

For these reasons, too, and for others, the analysis of political, economic and social life under the Ancien Régime would seem to require that one take into consideration the structure of the family and the relations of kinship. There is, however, a further consideration: to us, who transfer into the public domain the problems of our private life and who are conscious of the upsetting of our traditional moral values, it is important in itself to know about the family life of our ancestors, more important, fundamentally, than the vicissitudes and the anachronistic annals of public life in olden times. Rather than the family affairs of the great, which constitute the thread of these events, it is the structures of the private lives of the masses that arouse our curiosity. In what ways did the families of past times differ from, and in what ways did they resemble, those of

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today? What, precisely, do we know about their dimensions? About the age and the ties of kinship of those who composed those families? About the relations between husband and wife? About the attitude of parents towards their children? About the role of the family in the upbringing of children?

With regard to all these points, research is in progress, and the results will probably make more explicit or modify the ideas developed in this book. Nevertheless, it appears to us necessary to carry out, here and now, a preliminary evaluation of our knowledge as regards the family in former times – principally French families of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is because, for some years past, historians have perceptibly modified the image that had been presented by sociologists and legal historians. They have made fresh enquiries; they have approached the traditional questions on the basis of fresh documentary evidence and using new methods of analysis; and they have reached conclusions that are at times directly contrary to those that had been considered as firmly established.

However, it must be borne in mind that each of these sources, each of these methods, allows us to discover only one aspect, only one dimension of the real structure of the family in former times. The ‘families’ reconstructed by the French demographers on the basis of the registers of baptisms, marriages and burials are nothing more than a demonstration of the fertility of couples; they tell us nothing at all about the dimensions of the domestic group. The ‘families’ which British historians discover in censuses of households are merely, as it were, a snapshot of the occupants of accommodation in a given locality at a given moment. Neither of these sets of results could simply replace the images which, on the basis of different documents – less numerous but providing fuller information – legal historians and sociologists had presented of the families of past times.

Today, therefore, it is necessary to achieve a synthesis between the old images and the new ones, for the benefit of an educated public which is showing an increasing interest in these questions. The synthesis will be critical, provisional and at times speculative – let us acknowledge this here and now – but it will, perhaps, be useful to those specialists who, each on *his own path*, work without always considering what is happening on the neighbouring paths. Displaying a curiously provincial attitude, British historians and those of the Paris Basin attempt to relegate the extended family to the museum of sociological myths, in complete ignorance of the censuses held in southern France which confirm its existence. Many historians, both in France and in Britain, also confuse the extended household with the *lignage*, and the *lignage* with the *race* or the ‘household’, without taking account of the distinctions which legal historians have,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29449-2 - Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality  
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nevertheless, shown to have existed between these different concepts.\* Moreover, the distinction that the ethnologists have established between the notion of *lignage* and that of kindred is not always familiar to the historians. What has probably happened is that the historians of the family, like the demographers and the sociologists, have been too exclusively interested in the domestic family 'cell', and have not shown enough interest in the systems of kinship and alliance with which the ethnologists, by contrast, are obsessed.

It is true that the concept of the family is not entirely free from ambiguity. Let us attempt, therefore, to define it, before we begin our study of the actual facts of family life.

#### THE CONCEPT OF THE FAMILY

Nowadays the word 'family' refers to different things. In the widest sense of the word, it is 'the entirety of persons mutually connected by marriage or filiation', or 'the succession of individuals who descend from one another', that is to say, 'a line', 'a *race*', 'a dynasty' (*Petit Robert* dictionary). There is also, however, a narrower sense, in much more common use, which the dictionaries usually put in first place and which is the only one, generally speaking, taken into account by the sociologists. In this sense, the word designates 'related persons living under the same roof', and 'more especially, the father, the mother and the children' (*Petit Robert* dictionary). These two elements defining the family in the narrower sense can be reconciled in so far as, and only in so far as, it is rare, in our society, for persons other than the father, the mother and the children to live together in the same house.

This apparently was not the case from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. If one consults the older English and French dictionaries, one finds that the concept of the family was divided between the notions of co-residence and kinship, which one finds amalgamated in the definition that has become most current today. In former times, the word 'family' more often referred to a set of kinsfolk who did not live together, while it also designated an assemblage of co-residents who were not necessarily linked by ties of blood or marriage.

It was the *notion of co-residence* which was mentioned first in the older English dictionaries. That of Samuel Johnson (1755) gives, as the first sense of the word 'family', 'those who live in the same house' and, as a synonym,

- \* *Lignage* is used here in its medieval and early modern sense, very different from its current meaning. The most approximate modern English translation would be 'branch'. *Race* is also used in its medieval and early modern sense. The most approximate modern English translation would be 'stock'.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29449-2 - Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality

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'household'. Abel Boyer, in the first edition of his *Dictionnaire royal françoys et anglois*, understood by the word 'famille' 'all those who live in the same house, under the same head'; and he gave as English equivalents 'family' and 'household'. Similarly, Cotgrave, writing in 1673, translated *famille* as 'a family or household', and 'family' as 'famille, maisonnée', even though he went on to add other equivalents corresponding to other senses of the word. Not one of these dictionaries restricted the concept of the family to those who, living in one house, are united by ties of kinship. Moreover, usage confirmed the fact that the servants and other domestics were part of the family. Thus, Samuel Pepys wrote in 1660, at the beginning of his famous *Diary*, 'I lived in Axe Yard, having my wife, and servant Jane, and no more in family than us three.'<sup>1</sup>

This sense of 'household' (especially common in English) is also found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French. It is this definition which appears as the principal one in the entry under 'famille' in the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1694): 'Toutes les personnes qui vivent dans une même maison, sous un même chef.' Moreover, as early as 1690, Furetière had clearly stated that, in this sense, the word 'famille' is understood to mean a household composed of a head and his domestics, be they women, children or servants. This definition reappeared in all subsequent editions of his dictionary, and in all those of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, published between 1704 and 1771. One observes, incidentally, the classing of the wife and children together with the servants in the concept of 'domestiques'. Furthermore, it sometimes happened that the word 'famille' designated only the domestic staff, as a collective noun, even including at times those who did not live with the master. Thus, the dictionaries of both Furetière and Trévoux noted that among the people of quality, one understands by the term 'famille' all the domestic servants, all the major and minor household officials. The use of the word in this sense was probably no longer very frequent in the eighteenth century, because from 1740 onwards dictionaries find it necessary to situate this usage geographically, e.g. when speaking of the Grandees of Italy (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*), and to illustrate it by such examples as 'the family of a cardinal' and 'the lower family [*basse famille*] of the Ambassador (of France in Italy)'. Nevertheless, it was still the case in the second half of the eighteenth century, both in France and England, and whatever the social milieu concerned, that the members of the family were held to include both the kinsfolk residing in the house and the domestic servants, in so far as they were all subject to the same head of the family.

The concept of kinship, without any indication of co-residence, was, on the other hand, given a prominent place in all the French dictionaries and most of the English ones. Nicot, writing in 1606, gave only this sense;

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Furetière and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, a century later, recognized other senses, but always placed this one at the beginning of their entries under the word 'famille'; Richelet, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* and the English dictionaries put it second or third. 'It is used in this sense of those who are of the same blood in the male line' (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*); 'all those who descend from one and the same stock and who are, consequently, of the same blood' (*Encyclopédie*); and of 'those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor; a house, kindred, lineage' (Murray). The *Encyclopédie* adds a significant nuance of meaning when it asserts that the word 'famille' is usually understood to mean the entirety of several persons united by ties of blood or of affinity. Moreover, the dictionaries give as synonyms of the word 'family' understood in this sense, 'race', 'house' (*maison*); 'descent', 'extraction' (*extraction, naissance*); 'stock' (*souche, tige*); 'branch', 'parentage', 'issue' (*lignage, parentage, parentelle*).

When one speaks of 'house', in this context, this does not imply co-residence. At that time (the beginning of the eighteenth century), the House of France had a branch established on the throne of Spain, as the House of Austria had had before it. This was too well known for the authors of the time to consider it worth mentioning. On the other hand, it did seem to them important to emphasize the differences in usage of the words 'family' and 'house'. 'In France [the word *famille*] is hardly ever used except for the Houses of the *noblesse de robe* or the bourgeoisie. . . It would be speaking improperly to say of a great lord "he is of the family of. . .", to describe his descent. One must say, "he is of the House of. . ."' (*Furetière, Trévoux*). *Famille*, according to the Abbé Girard, 'is more properly used of the bourgeoisie, and *Maison* of people of quality'. Certain usages, however, cannot be explained in this way: 'One says, in speaking of birth, that someone is of an honourable family and a good house, one speaks of a Royal Family, and of a reigning House' (*Trévoux, 1771*).

In the *Encyclopédie*, the Chevalier de Jaucourt took up arms against the affectation implied in the use of the word 'house'.

It is vanity that has imagined the word *house*, in order to mark even more blatantly the distinctions effected by fortune and chance. Pride has therefore decreed in our language, as in past times among the Romans, that the titles, the great dignities and the great appointments continuously held by people of the same name should form what one calls the *houses* of the people of quality, whereas one describes as *families* those of citizens who, clearly distinguished from the dregs of the populace, perpetuate themselves in an Estate, and transmit their line from father to son in honourable occupations, in useful employments, in well-matched alliances, a proper

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upbringing, and agreeable and cultivated manners; thus, taking everything into account, the *families* are worth just as much as the *houses* . . .

'Families', therefore, were not to be found among the 'dregs of the populace', any more than 'houses' were. The 'family', like the 'house', was a social assemblage characteristic of the *élites*; and a kinsman by blood, if he did not have the social status and the culture required of the members of the family, would doubtless be excluded from it. This is suggested, too, by the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* in 1771: 'Families are formed by matrimonial alliances, by polite behaviour, by conduct distinguished from that of the lower orders, and by cultivated manners, which are passed on from father to son.'

Were these social criteria in the definitions very long established? One may well doubt it, because they do not appear before 1750. Moreover, one has to wait for the fifth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1798) to learn that one 'calls an *Enfant de famille* a young man of honourable birth'. Previously, all French dictionaries had applied to the term *fil de famille* the legal definition: 'a young man living under the authority of his father and his mother'. This would carry complete conviction were it not for the fact that Cotgrave, as early as 1673, had translated *Enfant ou fil de famille* as 'Youths of good houses, rich young men (whose parents are living)'. Perhaps this was because the child of the poor man, living as a domestic servant under the authority of a master, was not included in the legal definition of a 'son of the family'.

'The word *family* is understood in an even narrower sense', according to the French dictionaries: 'that of the nearest kinsfolk. In this sense, it is used of people of quality as well as of the bourgeoisie and the people' (Furetière, Trévoux). This sense of the word approximates so much more closely to the sense in which the word is used today that it was given after that of 'household'. But who were these kinsfolk? What were the criteria and the limitations of their proximity? The few dictionaries that concern themselves with this question give different answers, of varying degrees of explicitness. 'In this sense, under the name of the *Royal Family*, one includes the children and grandchildren of Kings', according to Furetière and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. The Academy understood in this restricted sense 'all those of the same blood, such as children, brothers, nephews'. This did not prevent it from reproducing verbatim Furetière's entry under the heading 'Royal Family'. To Richelet, 'family' signified essentially 'the father and the mother with the children'. The same definition was given by the Chevalier de Jaucourt in the *Encyclopédie*.

Is it possible to discern any progression in this third sense of the word, any tendency to separate from the rest of the extended family the father,

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the mother and the children? The sense of close kinship was not emphasized by Nicot (1606 and 1621), or Cotgrave (1611 and 1673), or the Abbé Boyer (1702). It does not appear in France until 1680, with the first edition of Richelet's dictionary. After that date, it appears in all the great French dictionaries. In England there was an analogous, though later, development: this sense of the word 'family' is still missing from Johnson's Dictionary (1755), but it is given by Murray, in the nineteenth century, with the first indisputable example dating from 1829. Moreover, the evolution of the concept of the family is illustrated by the definitions that are given of the 'Holy Family'. In all the editions of Furetière, from 1690 to 1732, in the first five editions of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (published between 1704 and 1752) and in the first two editions of the Academy dictionary, the Holy Family is held to include 'Our Lord, the Virgin, Saint Joseph and Saint John'. Subsequently, the presence of Saint John was not automatic, and it seems to have raised a problem: the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* in 1771, and those of the Academy in 1740, 1762, 1798 and 1835 describe the Holy Family as 'a picture representing Our Lord, the Virgin, Saint Joseph and *sometimes* Saint John'. There is a fresh nuance in Littré (1863), who observes: '*The Holy Family*, Joseph, the Virgin and the infant Jesus. A *Holy Family*, a picture representing the Holy Family, sometimes with Saint John.' Today, in the *Petit Robert* dictionary, Saint John has disappeared altogether.

At the same time as this reduction in the members of the family, there occurred the conflation of the two concepts of kinship and co-residence, which were still dissociated as late as the mid eighteenth century. Instead of listing the different senses of the word 'family', the Chevalier de Jaucourt, writing in the *Encyclopédie*, made efforts to unite them in one whole. According to him, the family is a

domestic society which constitutes the first of the accessory and natural states of Man. Indeed, the family is a civil society established by Nature: this society is the most natural and the most ancient of all societies; it serves as a foundation for the national society; for a people or a nation is nothing more than an entirety compounded of several families. Families are established by marriage, and it is nature herself that invites men to form this union; from it are born children who, perpetuating the families, maintain human society in being, and make good the losses which death causes in it every day.

One sees at work in this preamble the ideology of the Enlightenment: it was probably needed to mask the separation – which was frequent in the circles where one could read the *Encyclopédie* – between close kinship and the assemblage of co-residents. If the family has been established by Nature, then such a separation is without significance. It is only once these



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29449-2 - Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality

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principles are established that Jaucourt goes on to distinguish two senses of the word 'family', with a plethora of justifications that reveals the innovative character of his interpretation.

In a narrow sense, it is composed, firstly, only of the father of the family; secondly of the mother of the family who, according to the almost universally accepted interpretation, becomes a member of the family of her husband; thirdly, of the children, who are, as it were, formed of the substance of their father and mother, and ineluctably belong to the *family*. However, when one considers the word *family* in a broader sense, one includes in it all the kinsfolk; for although, after the death of the father of the family, each child establishes his or her own family, nevertheless all those who descend from the same stock, and who are in consequence issue of the same blood, are regarded as members of the same *family*.

One has to wait until the nineteenth century for the concepts of co-residence and of close kinship to be united in concise formulas, in definitions whose very succinctness bears witness to the fact that they no longer constitute any problem. 'Persons of the same blood living under the same roof, and more especially the father, the mother and the children', in the words of Littré, writing in 1869. Even so, he still puts this definition in fourth place; and the Academy dictionary, in its sixth edition, suggests that this interpretation was still not widely accepted in 1835: 'The word is *sometimes* used of kinsfolk who live together, and, more especially, of the father, the mother and the children, or even of the children alone.' The concept of the family, therefore, as it is most commonly defined today, has only existed in our western culture since a comparatively recent date.

This conceptual analysis provides us with several working hypotheses. It suggests that the concept of the *lignage* was more deeply rooted among the élites than among the people; that in France, as in England, what united the members of a domestic group – kinsfolk and servants – in one 'family', was their common dependence on the 'father of the family'; and that, in both countries, the father–mother–children triad acquired an ever-increasing independence with respect to the *lignage* and to the servants, until in the nineteenth century it became the fundamental nucleus of our society. It is true that the chronology of the transformations of the concept of the family, as defined in the dictionaries, probably suffers from a time-lag with respect to the actual evolution of the institution itself. There is no lack, however, of other indications of the lateness of this evolution. In the eighteenth century, it was 'Enlightened' opinion that militated in favour of the intimacy of the family circle, and that interpreted the family as a 'natural society' and made of it the privileged haven of felicity. In contrast

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978-0-521-29449-2 - Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality

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to this, since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been innovative writers who have attacked the family, and conservative opinion which has defended it.

We are not, however, thereby prevented from giving a privileged place in our historical researches to the relations between spouses and between them and their children, because it is these relations that lie at the heart of our preoccupations today. It is, however, important to emphasize that what was referred to in past times as the 'family' was not identical with the father–mother–children triad, and that one cannot study this triad, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without taking into account its relations with *lignage* or kindred on the one hand, and the domestic staff on the other.