THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MATERNAL UNCLE AND GRANDFATHER
IN ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREECE AND EARLY BYZANTIUM

It is a striking fact that in many patriarchal and patrilineal societies a special relationship exists between a mother's brother (MoBr) and his sister's son (SiSo), and between the mother's father (MoFa) and the daughter's son (DaSo). Social anthropologists have been studying this relationship for more than fifty years. Some hundred years ago Bachofen drew particular attention to this tie. The boldness of Bachofen's theories condemned his studies to the dusty shelves of libraries, but his analysis of the avunculate and the importance that was attached to the maternal grandfather is still of interest. He restricted himself to a few examples from Greek mythology, Homer, Pindar, and Thucydides; but the material is certainly richer and will reward further examination. The period over which we can follow the avunculate, moreover, can be extended to early Byzantium. My investigation continues an earlier study in which I surveyed the Indo-European evidence. I found that the special position of the maternal (as against paternal) uncle and grandfather,

1) This article is an expanded version of my contribution to a panel on kinship at the 1981 Am.Philol.Assoc. Convention in San Francisco. For information and comments I would like to thank W.Burkert, Richard Buxton, Fritz Graf, Albert Henrichs, and Charles Segal who also corrected the English. I use the following abbreviation:
Davies = J.Davies, Athenian Propertied Families (Oxford 1971).


3) J.J.Bachofen, Antiquarische Briefe. Vols. I, II (Basel 1880. 1885), reprinted in Johann Jakob Bachofen Gesammelte Werke, Vol. VIII, ed. by J. Dörmann and W.Strasser (Basel/Stuttgart 1966) 5-414. This volume contains some further hitherto unpublished "antiquarian" letters on this subject, but Bachofen's legacy to the university library of Basel still contains papers amounting to about ten thousand pages which may never see the light of the day.


which had been noted among many non-literate peoples, also occurred among
the Indo-Europeans. Subsequent studies of the Roman, Germanic, and Celtic
texts. 6) The present article will present in
detail the Greek evidence. Being the first to do so since Bachofen it can
hardly lay claim to completeness. We may safely assume that more evidence of
this nature lies hidden in all kinds of Greek texts.

I

In one of his still inspiring essays Louis Gernet discussed the phenomenon
of fosterage, the education of boys outside the parental home. 7) It is clear
from Gernet's material that in all cases in which a family relationship
existed or was specified, it was the maternal grandfather - never the paternal
one - who raised the child. In some cases the MoFa voluntarily undertook to
raise the boy: Iphidamas reached maturity in the house of his MoFa in Thrace
(IIiad XI.221f.); 8) Neoptolemos grew up on the island of Scyros at the court
of Achilles' father-in-law Lykomedes; 9) Theseus was raised by his MoFa
Pittheus in Troizen. 10) In other cases the stay with the MoFa was occasioned
by sheer necessity. When the Messenian king Kreshontes was murdered, his
youngest son Aipytos managed to escape to his MoFa, the Arcadian king Kypselos,
who raised him. 11) Similarly, Adrastus had to flee to his MoFa, the king of

In general, fosterage took place between the end of infancy and the be-
ginning of adulthood, when the young aristocrat returned home for the last
puberty rites, sometimes his investiture rites. In a number of cases, how-
ever, the DaSo stayed on at his grandfather's court and succeeded to the
throne. It seems likely that in most of these examples the king had no son
of his own. Herodotus (7.61; also see Apoll. 2.4.5) tells us that Perseus
left his son by Andromeda with her father Kepheus, since the latter had no

Bremmer, The Importance of Kinship: Uncle and Nephew in 'Beowulf', Amsterdam
parentalia come testo antropologico: l'avunculato nel mondo celtico e nella
famiglia di Ausonio, Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici

7) L.Gernet, Droit et société dans la grèce ancienne (Paris 1955) 19-28. For
Indo-European parallels, see Bremmer (note 5); add Orkneyinga Saga 13; Geoffrey
of Monmouth Historia Regum Britanniae 2.4; Hálfdanar saga svarta c.3.

8) In the extended family the paternal grandfather would be in the home.
1 (1944, 115-122) 119 = Kleine Schriften (Berlin/New York 1981) 651 observed
that there is no Indo-European term for paternal grandfather: he is just the
matipo.

9) I.Espermann, Antenor, Théano, Antenoriden (Meisenheim 1980) 74f.
completely overlooked the parallels for this fosterage.

10) II. XIX. 326f.; Soph. Ph. 239-244; Strabo 9.5.16; Apollod. Ep. 5.11.
11) Plut. Thes. 4; Paus. 1.27.7.

12) For all sources, see O.Musso, Euripide: Cresfonte (Milan 1974).
male offspring. Similarly, Leukippos, the king of Sicyon, bequeathed the throne to Peratos, his Dasa, because he only had a daughter (Paus. 2.5.7). In Sicyon Polybos gave the throne to his Dasa Adrastus, who in turn left the throne to his Dasa Diomedes. In these cases the Dasa apparently was believed to succeed his grandfather at his death, but in Thebes Cadmos gave the throne to his Dasa Pentheus when still alive, and a similar situation is presupposed in Euripides' second Hippolytos, where Theseus evidently received the Trojan throne during Pittheus' life. Finally, Hippothous, who had been exposed after his mother had been impregnated by Poseidon, requested the kingdom of his MoFa Kerkyon as his rightful inheritance from Theseus (Hyg. Fab. 187).

This right of the Dasa to the throne seems to be reflected also in those legends in which a king exposes a Dasa who is prophesied to succeed him one day. The best known Greek case is perhaps Perseus, but outside Greece we also have Cyrus, Romulus and Remus, Gilgamesh (Ael. Na. 12.21), and

13) Adrastus: Her. 5.67; Menachmos FGrH 131 F 10; Paus. 2.6.6; Schol. Il. II. 572. Diomedes: Eustathius 238, 22-26. Gernet (note 7) 24 rightly concluded from Il. V.412 that Diomedes, like Iphidamas (above), had married his maternal aunt. Gernet. Anthropologie de la grèce antique (Paris 1968) 344-359 (Mariages de tyrans, 1954) and J.-P. Vernant, Mythe et société en grèce ancienne (Paris 1974) 73f. [with more examples of the MoSi/SiSo marriage] consider this early Greek matrimonial strategy as typically aristocratic. However, in Classical Greece aristocracies tended to avoid this type of marriage. P. Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge 1977) 58-71 has shown that in uncertain political and economic situations families tend to direct their efforts towards the maintenance of the family, not its expansion. The uncle/aunt - niece/nephew marriages therefore strongly point to the Dark Ages when these endogamic strategies will have been shared by aristocrats and peasants alike.


15) As is observed by W. S. Barrett, Euripides: Hippolytos (Oxford 1964) 33, 157. In order to avoid competition with Phaedra's children, Theseus sent Hippolytos to Troizen to be raised by his MoFa and to succeed him to the throne (Paus. 1.22.2). According to Diod. Sic. 4.62, Hippolytos was educated by Theseus' MoBr's (below §2).

16) For Perseus, see more recently N. Werre-de Haas, Aeschylus' Dictyulci (Leiden 1961) 5-10 (with all literary evidence); J. H. Oakley, Danae and Perseus on Seriphos, AJA 86 (1982) 111-115 (with full archeological bibliography).

17) Her. 1.107-122; Just. 1.4-6; G. Widengren, La légende royale de l'Iran antique, in Hommages à G. Dumézil (Brussel 1960) 225-237. A. Alfeldäi, Die Struktur des vorrutschischen Römertstaates (Heidelberg 1974) 137-141.

18) The literature on the legend of Romulus and Remus is extensive, see most recently G. Binder, Die Aussetzung des Königskindes Kyros und Romulus (Meisenheim 1984); H. Strasburger, Zur Sage von der Gründung Roms, SB Heidel.
berg, Philo.-hist.Klasse 1968,5 (Heidelberg 1968); J. Puhvel, Remus et frater, History of Religions 15 (1975) 146-157; Alfeldäi (note 17), 114-119; B. Liou-
Habis. This particular type occurs only in classical authors, although exposure legends are found from China to Southern Africa. In the examples mentioned so far the DaSo succeeded to the throne because the MoFa did not have a (living) son. In addition, there are two more cases where the DaSo inherited the throne, although a living, legal son existed. These instances are highly interesting since apparently later tradition felt compelled to explain the particular reason why the existing son was passed over, thus showing that it considered this succession an oddity. The local Trozenian author Herophanes, whom Jacoby dates in the early Empire, observed that Hermione, the founder of Hermione, could never have been the son of a legitimate son of Phoroneus, but that his father must have been one of Phoroneus' bastards; otherwise the Argive throne would never have gone to Argos, the son of Phoroneus' daughter Niobe (Paus. 2.16.1).

A similar concern appears from a Homeric scholion which relates a William Tell-like legend to explain why Sarpedon succeeded his MoFa Bellerophon whereas Glaukos, the son of Bellerophon's son, went to Troy (Il. VI. 199f.). In the last instance Bachofen naturally saw a survival of the great matriarchal times, since Herodotus 7.3 relates that the Lycians took their names from their mother. But Simon Pembroke has definitely shown from inscriptions that the Lycians did no such thing. The Greeks, on the other hand, used the netronymic to denote natural children. Herodotus' report therefore most


21) Paus. 2.34.5 = Herophanes FGrH 605 F 1. We have thus the following stemma:

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   Phoroneus
   |    |    Hermon  Argos
    |    Niobe x Zeus


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For this reason, see Pembroke (note 4). W. H. Merriam, "The Material, Donors' Wyckoff, 1920.


II

We will return below (§ 3) to this problem and close our discussion of the
Mēs with an example that brings us to the MēBr, the maternal uncle. When
Odysseus is recognised by his scar, we hear the story of his youth. Just after
Odysseus' birth his MēFa visited his house where Eurykleia put the new-born
baby on the grandfather's knees. Autolykos gave Odysseus his name and asked
his parents to send him to his house when he had reached puberty in order that
Odysseus may receive presents (Od. 19.401.412). Gernet saw in this episode a
later development in which fosterage proper had already disappeared but the
tie with the MēFa still remained in force.28 This particular visit, however,
occurs at the moment of reaching puberty, whereas in the case of fosterage
the boy always left his MēFa when he had reached puberty.

Gernet, moreover, neglected an important aspect of Odysseus' visit. Twice
during the episode the sojourn is defined more precisely as taking place with
Autolykos and his sons, Odysseus' maternal uncles (Od. 19.394, 414, 418f.).
Also, it is the uncles who accompany Odysseus on the fateful hunt in which he
had received his scar.29 Similarly, during the Calydonian hunt Meleager was
accompanied by the brothers of his mother Althaea.30 A third hunt is even
more interesting since it implies a mistaken MēBr/SiSo relationship which
nevertheless confirms our point. Theano was the foster mother of Boeotus and
Aēolus, the natural sons of Melanippe, who regarded Theano as their true
mother. However, when Theano had children of her own, she arranged to have
her foster children killed by her own brothers. From Euripides' Melanippe
Desmotis a messenger's description of the actual ambush, which took place
during a hunt, has been preserved in a Berlin papyrus. When Aēolus and Boeotus
recognised the attackers as their MēBr's (as they still erroneously thought),
they exclaimed: "Brothers of our dear mother, what are you about, that we
catch you slaying those whom you should treat so least of all? For God's sake
do not go!" 31)

In these cases the supervision by the MēBr most likely had an initiatory
significance, as probably also in other cases where a SiSo accompanied his
MēBr into war. I note two examples: the most important commander of the
Myrmidon fleet after Achilles was his SiSo Menestheos (Il. XVI. 173-176;
Strabo 9.5.9). In the Delphic gymnasion - the place of education par excel-
ence - Pausanias (10.10.2) saw among the statues of the commanders of the army


29) Od. 19.429-431. For the initiatory significance of the wound in the
thigh, see Bremmer, Heroes, Rituals and the Trojan War, Studi Storico-

30) Il. IX. 529ff.; Bacch. 5.97ff.; F. Bömer on Ov. Met. 8.273 (with full
bibliography). The initiatory significance of the hunt is well stressed by

Literary Papyri III (Loeb), 114f. For the legend, see Hyg. Fab. 186.
that marched against Thebes besides Adrastus' one also that of his SiSo Hippomedon. The educational activity of the MoBr, however, was not restricted only to war. Bachofen opened his study of the avunculate with Daedalus' murder of his SiSo Talos. Apollodorus (3.15.8, tr. Frazer) gives the fullest account: "Daedalus had fled from Athens, because he had thrown down from the acropolis Talos, the son of his sister Perdix; for Talos was his pupil..."33)

We also have some other cases which are indicative of a good relationship between a MoBr and his SiSo. When Apollo wanted to persuade Hector he appeared in the shape of his MoBr Asios (II. XVI. 717). At the end of the Trojan War Prism sent for his SiSo Eurypylus.34) Creon purified his SiSo Amphitryon of the killing of Electryon, and he helped him in his war against the Teleboans. Kypselos' son Holaios accompanied the Heraclidss to Messene where he installed his SiSo Aepytos (Paus. 8.5.7). Finally, when Atreus had killed Chrysippos, he fled to his SiSo Eurytheus in Mycenae (Thuc. 1.9.2). Against all these examples of a close tie with the MoBr we have only one example of a similar tie with the paternal uncle: Heracles and Iolaus.36)

The educational activity of the MoBr which is testified for mythological times survived into the historical period. Pindar twice mentions boys who gained important victories in the same contest as their maternal uncles.37) In the eighth Pythian (35-38) he tells us that in the wrestling matches Aristomenes followed in the steps of his ματραδελεκούς Theognetos who won at Olympia and Kleitomachos who was an Isthmian victor. From the fifth Nemean (41) and sixth Isthmian (57) we learn of the Aeginetan couple Pytheas and Phylakidas and their MoBr Euthymenos who all were victorious in the trial of strength. The connection can hardly be fortuitous, since we learn from the fourth Nemean (79-81) that Tinasarchos asked Pindar for an ode on his deceased MoBr Callicles; and in the seventh Isthmian (24) Pindar sings that Strepsiades shares his glory with his homonymous uncle.

32) According to some traditions Tydeus was the son of Periboia, the sister of Kapanes; Apollod. 3.6.3; Paus. 9.8.7, 10.10.3; Hyg. Fab. 70. In the Germanic world the MoBr was regularly accompanied by his SiSo in battle, see Bremmer (note 6), 33 note 55; add Håkonar saga qbdá c. 29; Magnúss saga blinda 7. 10. The iniatory role of the MoBr which is prominent in many Indo-European traditions - exempli gratia I mention the legend of Caeculus of Praeneste, the tale Peredur of the Welsh Mabinogion, and the Germanic Volssungasaga - deserves further investigation.

33) Cf. Ov. Met. 8.241 huic (Daedalus) tradiderat ... docendam progeniem germana suam (with Bömer ad loc. for full bibliography).

34) Tümpel, RE VI (1907) 1348 with all sources.

35) Apollod. 2.4.6; Schol.Lyc. 932.

36) Roscher, Mythol.Lex. II.1 (Leipzig 1890-97) 285-289 with all sources.

37) D.Roussel, Tribu et cité (Paris 1976) 52f. notes the importance of the maternal family in Pindar but neglects the importance of the MoBr's educational activities.
All these examples become more comprehensible if we assume that the MoBr had an active hand in his SiSo's education, and that for the young nephew the MoBr functioned as the model par excellence for imitation. This relationship also seems to have been a factor in the lives of some celebrated men: Bacchylides was the SiSo of Simonides,38 Aeschylus was the MoBr of the tragedian Philokles (TGrF 24 Philokles T 2), the orator hemocrates was the SiSo of Demothenes (Davies, p.142), Speusippus succeeded his MoBr Plato as head of the Academy,39) and, finally, Callimachus had a homonymous SiSo who was an ἐγκόμος (Suda K 228). We have perhaps one other example. Besides the great Euripides, we have two other tragedians with the same name. Regarding the first (TGrF 16 Euripides I), it is said that he was "older than the famous one." Regarding the second (TGrF 17 Euripides II), the Suda (E 3694) informs us that he was τοῦ προτέρου ἀδελφοῦ. Snell (ad loc.) translates ἀδελφός as filius fratis eius, but he may well have been a SiSo. We have seen several examples of poets being related to each other as MoBr and SiSo,40) and we also know that sometimes sons were named after their maternal uncle.41)

If it was natural that the MoBr served as the example for the boys during their youth and apparently also had an active hand in their education, it is understandable that this role could reflect itself in laws concerning adoption or guardianship. And indeed in the laws of Chersones the administration of the estate was entrusted to the father's family (below) but the upbringing of the orphans to the mother's family, which in practice must normally have meant the MoBr or MoPa (Diod. Sic. 12.15). In Syracuse, Dionysius II claimed that he was the legal guardian of the son of his half-sister Arcte (Plat. Ep. 7.345C), and in Gortyn the maternal uncles were entrusted with the bringing up of an heiress (Gortyn Code VIII. 51ff., XII.13 Willets). In fact, we find this activity already attested in mythological times. The island of Thera was colonized by Procles and Eurysthenes together with their guardian MoBr Theras (Paus. 3.1.7, 4.3.4). Creon functioned as guardian and regent for Ptolemaec and Polyneices (Soph. CT. 1418).42)

38) For the evidence, see H.Maaehler, Die Lieder des Bakchylides I (Leiden 1982) 6.


40) Besides the poetic couples mentioned, also note the couple Pacuvius (SiSo) and Ennius (MoBr): Plin. MH. 35.19.

41) Besides the already mentioned examples of Strepsiades and Callimachus, note also Cimon's son Peisianax (Davies, p.305). Dem. 39.32, 63.77. Naming practices are neglected in the studies mentioned in note 2, but among the American slaves' nephews were regularly named after their maternal uncle, see H.Gatman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925 (New York 1976) 200f. For a Germanic example, see Bremmer (note6) 25.

42) A Germanic example: Haralds saga inn hárfragra c. 1.
In the fourth century we still find examples of a good relationship between MoBr and SiSo. When Aeschines (2.78) reminded the jury of his family history, he mentioned the political behavior of his father and his MoBr Cleoboulos, and concluded: "The sufferings of the city were therefore a household word with us, familiar to my ears." Andocides (3.29) proudly mentions that a permanent accord was established with the Great King thanks to the diplomacy of his MoBr Epilycus. In Demosthenes' Against Olympiodorus Callististratus did not risk coming into court and saying "unpleasant things of one who is a brother of my wife and the uncle of my children" (Dem. 48.8, tr. A. Murray, Loeb). Theomnestus, in the Against Neaira, related how he was reproached for not seeking vengeance for the injuries done to his sister's children (Dem. 59.12). And in Isaeus' third oration on the estate of Pyrrhus (3.26, 29ff.) the maternal uncles of Pyrrhus all declared that they were summoned as witnesses to his wedding with the sister of Nicodemus. Finally, an example from Rhodes: the condottiere Mentor gave important commands to his SiSo (Diod. Sic. 16.52.4).

We even have cases where two men, because they were related and eminent in an (almost) identical field, were assumed to be MoBr and SiSo, whereas actually they were related in quite a different way. Regarding Panyassis and Herodotus, the Suda (Π 248) gives two different genealogies. According to one they were cousins; according to the other they were maternal uncle and nephew:

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I
Polyarchos  Lyxes
Panyassis  Herodotus

II
Polyarchos
Panyassis
Rhoio(Dryo) = Lyxes
Herodotus
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As Jacoby observed, the fact that in the second stemma the mother's name is mentioned is suspicious, as the only purpose served is determining the exact nature of Herodotus and Panyassis's relationship. Apparently, a later tradition considered the MoBr and SiSo's relationship as the more appropriate one for these two eminent authors.

Our second example is Pericles and Alcibiades. Alcibiades' mother was Pericles' cousin, but Diodorus (12.38.1), Valerius Maximus (3.11 ext. 1) and the Suda (A 1280) all call Pericles the maternal uncle of Alcibiades. 44) The

43) Jacoby, RE Suppl. 2 (1913) 217. J. P. Tzschirner, Panyadis Halicarnasssei Heracleadis Fragmenta (Bratislava 1842) 14 combined the two traditions by making Dryo the sister of Panyassis. This is rightly rejected by V. J. Matthews. Panyassis of Halikarnassos (Leiden 1974 10), but his main argument that an uncle/niece marriage was unlikely does not hold. Besides the examples adduced by Gernet and Vernant (note 13), see also Lys. 32.4; Is. 10.5; Dem. 44.10, 59.2, 22.

44) The whole problem has been misunderstood by P. J. Bicknell, Studies in Athenian Politics and Genealogy (Wiesbaden 1972) 79.
designation is absolutely wrong, but again, it is important that later traditions expressed the relationship between the two politicians in this particular way.

The evidence we have does not allow us to follow up this theme in later centuries. Yet, when in earlier Christian times the hagiographical biographies supply us again with detailed information about the saint's education, the role of the MoBr immediately appears to be prominent. Sabas, Euthymos, Kyriakos, Eusebios, Nicholas of Zion - all are educated by their MoBr. And we may perhaps even assume that this good relationship has lasted in some parts of Greece until the present time, for among the Sarakatsani of Northern Greece the MoBr is still the favourite uncle.

Against this evidence, we have not a single passage which stresses the good relationship of a person with his parental uncle. We noted already that in Lysias' Against Diogeiton the speaker never drew attention to the fact that Diogeiton was the paternal uncle, and we inferred from this silence that maltreatment by the paternal uncle was not very shocking. We have two more examples that there was not much love lost between TaBr and BrSo. Aeschines (1.103) tells us how Timarchos shamefully neglected his paternal uncle Arignotus, and Demosthenes mentions the bad treatment of Nicias by his BrSo Stephanos (Dern.45.70, cf. Davies, p.438). Plutarch (M.4920) even ends his essay on brotherly love with the exhortation: "It is an uncle's duty to rejoice and take pride in the fair deeds and honours and offices of a brother's sons and to help to give them an incentive etc. etc." Apparently, it was still not usual in his time that a paternal uncle was very concerned with his brother's sons.

How do we explain this preference for the SiSo. From Bachofen to modern social anthropologists, scholars have consistently and (I believe) rightly maintained that the secret of the close relationship lies in the close relationship between a sister and her brothers. Through her marriage a woman leaves

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45) But it is important to note that as soon as we have extensive information about someone, as is the case with Libanius, the prominent position of the maternal family is striking, cf. Lib. Or. 1. Libanius was even going to marry his MoBr's daughter (Or. 1.95), as was Andocides (1.177f.).

46) For these and other examples, see E. Patlagean, Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance 4<sup>°</sup>-7<sup>°</sup> siècles (Paris 1977) 122-124. Note also the couple Marcianos/Alypios: Theodoretus Hist. Rel. 3.14, 18.


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her own family and in a way surrenders herself to the mercy of her in-laws. In this situation her father and especially her brothers are her only support against the potential difficulties with her husband and kin. The care extended to the sister also extended to her children, and thus the sister would return to her brother when the husband had passed away.

From Lysias' saucy story about the struggle for the favours of a Plataean boy, we learn that Simon, when drunk, even dared to enter the women's rooms where the speaker's sister and his nieces lived (Lys. 3.6). Andocides was persuaded to testify against the Hermecopidae by his father's sister Charmides, "who had been brought up with me in our home since boyhood." 49 And in Isaeus' first oration (1.15) the speaker relates that after their guardian's death he and his brother were taken into the house of their MoBr who educated them, and, he claimed, even wanted to adopt them on his death-bed. We need not discuss this claim, but the idea will not have appeared improbable in itself to the jury, for among the 27 examples of adoption that we know of in Athens there are indeed 4 cases of the adoption of the SiSo and one of the SiDa. 50

There is one other factor to be taken into consideration. As Dover has shown, the relationship with the father and the mother was largely dominated by obedience and respect in Athens. 51 We may indeed seriously wonder whether among the upper classes of Athens and elsewhere in Greece there can have been much bonding between father and son, since the father was usually out on the streets and left the education of his children to others. 52 The obligatory respect also extended to the older generation and will have included the father's father. However, the MoFa and MoBr were somewhat outside the family and were therefore able to develop an affectionate relationship with the children of their daughter or sister. 53 Moreover, since girls married


50) For the full list. see Gernet (note 7), 129f. The possibility is also mentioned in Is. 1.22; Dem. 40.10. I am indebted for a discussion of these figures to Professor H.T.Wallinga.


52) For the father-son relationship, see the studies in S.Bertman (ed.), The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Greece and Rome (Amsterdam 1976); L.L.Nash, Concepts of Existence: Greek Origins of Generational Thought, Daedalus 1978, no.3(1-21), 9-12; Segal 1982 (note 26), 186.

53) The importance of the MoFa and MoBr being outsiders in the paternal family is also stressed by C.Lévy-Strauss, Structural Anthropology I (Harmondsworth 1972) 31-54 and Réflexions sur l'atome de parenté, L'Homme 13 (1973) 5-30; V.Turner, The Ritual Process (Harmondsworth 1974) 105. It is of course not impossible that in occasional cases father and son have a good relationship, whereas normally the good relationship is with the MoBr. But such exceptions can sometimes be satisfactorily explained. For example, H.Teitler, Ausonius and his Mother's Brother, Journ. Indo-European Stud. 7 (1979) 133-139 suggests that the good relationship of Ausonius with his father falsifies the general rule that such a relationship is unlikely if the one with the MoBr is
young, the maternal uncles would be much closer in age to a boy than his paternal uncles. The MoFa and MoBr were probably also the only males who would have access to the women's quarters when the children were young. Lysias (3.6) says that his sister and nieces lived so κοινωνίας that they "are ashamed to be seen even by their male relatives." This must imply that normally the kinsmen, surely her brother(s) and father, could visit her. And the younger Alcibiades was accused of entering his sister's house "not as her brother but as her husband" (Lys. 14.28). It is this difference in attitude between a father and a MoBr which explains why the sage Thales, when asked why he adopted his SiSo but did not have any children of his own, answered, "because I love children!"55)

III

In Greece, then, a boy often had a close relationship with his MoFa and MoBr. Already Radcliffe-Brown, in his seminal article (note 2, 29f.), had observed that the MoBr and MoFa "are the objects of very similar behaviour patterns." This similarity reflected itself also in Greek vocabulary.56)

The lexicographer Pollux (3.16, 23) mentions a Lallwort nēnōn for which he gives the meaning "mother's brother and mother's father..."57) Similar words, such as English nanna, "mother's mother," Hungarian néné, "sister," or Italian nipò, "baby boy," occur in many languages all over the world, and nearly always have an overtone of endearment, as surely nēnōn had in Greece.58) The word is never used by high literature but only occurs in lexicographers and inscriptions. The earliest occurrence of nēnōn we owe to a palmary emendation by Adolf Wilhelm who restored nēnon, in the epigram that Chrysippus' SiSo had inscribed good. However, Ausonius' father was an immigrant in Gaul and therefore probably less integrated into Gaulish society; consequently, he will have spent more time with his own family.

54) For the age of girls at marriage, see S. Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves (New York 1975) 64.

55) Diog. Laert. 1.26: the adoption is also mentioned by Plut. Solon 7.


57) Nēnōn also occurs in IG XII.3.1628: I. Creticae II.XII.5. According to Eustathius (on Il. XIV.118), nēnōn means paternal and maternal uncle, but in his time the difference between the two uncles had lost its significance in many places. cf. E. Patlagean, Structure sociale, famille, chrétien à Ryszance (London 1981) chapter VII, 77-79.


A varia lectio in Tollux (3.16) gives the reading nónnos, which survives in modern Greek as "godfather.\footnote{60) Still another variant of nónnos is nánna which Hesychius (s.v.) explains as "maternal and paternal uncle." but the related nánne only means "maternal aunt" (Hesych. s.v.).\footnote{61) In this case again the popularity will have derived from the close association of the mother with her sister; among the Romans the matertera also was the favourite aunt.\footnote{62) Nónnos, nénnos and nánna (nánne) are related to personal names such as Nonnos, Nennaos, Nannion, Nanno, Nana and the like,\footnote{63) names which were especially popular in Anatolia, although some of these names owed their existence to the longlasting influence of the Sumero-Akkadian goddess Nanâ.\footnote{64) Finally, there are the kinship terms nín(n)e, neine, and próninno = terms which are typical for Northern Greece.\footnote{65) They are normally translated as "grandmother", although próninno more likely means "great-grandmother.\footnote{66) In this case, too, however, it would be probably more accurate to translate, "maternal grandmother," since a mother and her own mother are often mentioned}"


However, in an inscription of Doura-Europos nónnos evidently means "father, see F. Cumont, Fouilles de Doura-Europos (Paris 1928) I, 310. The female nòna occurs in a Christian inscription of Cyzicus: H. Grégoire, Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure I (Paris 1926) no.16.\footnote{60) However, in an inscription of Doura-Europos nónnos evidently means "father, see F. Cumont, Fouilles de Doura-Europos (Paris 1928) I, 310. The female nòna occurs in a Christian inscription of Cyzicus: H. Grégoire, Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure I (Paris 1926) no.16.}

61) Nánne has been recognized by A. Wilhelm, Ciechische Epigramme aus Kreta (Oslo 1950) 32 in a bad Greek poem (now Peek, Griech. Vorschriften, 1159) on a boy who had fallen into a pit (for a similar accident, cf. IG XIV. 2067; CIL VI. 29195; Theodoratus Hist. Rel. 2.17); SEG XII. 321. J. and L. Robert, Bull. Ep. 1965, p.185 also recognized the term on an Egyptian stele to which attention had been drawn by H. Petersen, CPh 59 (1964) 170 note 53. For aunts in Greece, note that Dionysos especially reproaches ἀδελφής μητρός, ὃς ἡμαῖστ' ἐχρήσα (Eur. Bacch. 26).\footnote{61) Nánne has been recognized by A. Wilhelm, Ciechische Epigramme aus Kreta (Oslo 1950) 32 in a bad Greek poem (now Peek, Griech. Vorschriften, 1159) on a boy who had fallen into a pit (for a similar accident, cf. IG XIV. 2067; CIL VI. 29195; Theodoratus Hist. Rel. 2.17); SEG XII. 321. J. and L. Robert, Bull. Ep. 1965, p.185 also recognized the term on an Egyptian stele to which attention had been drawn by H. Petersen, CPh 59 (1964) 170 note 53. For aunts in Greece, note that Dionysos especially reproaches ἀδελφής μητρός, ὃς ἡμαῖστ' ἐχρήσα (Eur. Bacch. 26).}

62) Hallett [note 6], chapter IV, who compares i.a. Persing Sat. 2.31ff.; Cic. Div. 1.47, 104 and Or. 2.1.2; add Passio SS Perpetue et Felicitatis 5.3.\footnote{62) Hallett [note 6], chapter IV, who compares i.a. Persing Sat. 2.31ff.; Cic. Div. 1.47, 104 and Or. 2.1.2; add Passio SS Perpetue et Felicitatis 5.3.}


together. 67) In England nanna also typically means the mother's mother. 68)

The existence of nēnōs and the absence of a similar word to denote the
paternal uncle and grandfather thus confirms what our evidence indicated: in
ancient Greece, as among many other peoples, a special relationship existed
between the MoFa and MoBr and their DaSo and SiSo. In Western society such
relationships no longer exist, but we may recall that our use of the term
"uncle" as a term of endearment derives from the Latin avunculus "MoBr," and
thus still testifies to the special tie that once shaped the life of so many
a Greek boy.

APPENDIX: SOME PERSIAN EVIDENCE

In addition to the detailed studies of the Roman, Celtic, Germanic (above,
note 6), and Greek evidence, I append here the few passages on the MoBr/SiSo
relationship in Persia which our classical authors furnish. In his Cyropaedia
Xenophon mentions Cyrus as having great pleasure in gratifying his MoFa
Astyages and his MoBr Cyaxares (1.3.11). His uncle also accompanies Cyrus on
the hunt (1.4.7) and is very close to him (2.4.5f.), even though later Cyrus'
success makes him jealous (5.5.5ff.). The Lesbian Phainias (fr. 25 Wehrli2 =
Plut. Arist. 9) described the 3 Persian prisoners who Themistocles allegedly
sacrificed as the sons of Sandake, the sister of the Persian king. Many
centuries later, Procopius (Pers. 1.23) noted that Chosroes cruelly suppressed
a conspiracy and "among those killed was even Aspebedes, the brother of his
mother"; the murder of the MoBr apparently was the height of cruelty.

However, these passages cannot be taken as unequivocal information about
Persian kinship relationships. Although recent research has demonstrated that
Xenophon's description of Persian matters is much more trustworthy that he is
normally given credit for, 69) we cannot be sure whether his description of the
Cyrus/Cyaxares relationship was not influenced by the Greek MoBr/SiSo
relationship. And whatever Phainias and Procopius' value is for the Persian
evidence, 70) they certainly tried to raise the pathos of their Greek readers
and thus are additional witnesses for the special position of the maternal
uncle in Classical Greece and Early Byzantium.

Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht

Jan Bremmer

66) Cf. promāmme (LSJ s.v.); Latin proavus.
67) P.Michig. 466.44: P.Oxy. 496.5: P.Erlang. 85.10. For these and more
examples, see C.Spicq, 'Lois, ta grand'maman' (Il Tim. 15. Rev.Biblique
84 (1977) 362-364.
70) Although the name Sandake appears to be Iranian (*S/Ş/Canda-ka-), as
Professor Rüdiger Schmitt (letter 23-7-1982) informs me, the legendary
character of Themistocles' sacrifice has now conclusively been shown by
A.Henrichs, in Entretiens Fondation Hârdt XXVII (Geneva 1981) 208-224; for
the prisoners being the SiSo's of the Persian king, see Henrichs, 217 note 2.