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 Bachofens 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 This volume contains some further hitherto unpublished "antiquarian" letters on this subject, but Bachofen's legacy to the university library of Basel still contains papers amounting to about ten thousand pages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 material corroborated my conclusion.\(^6\) 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\(^8\) - 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 (Iliad XI.221f.);\(^9\) Neoptolemos grew up on the island of Scyros at the court of Achilles' father-in-law Lykomedes;\(^10\) Theseus was raised by his MoFa Pittheus in Troizen.\(^11\) In other cases the stay with the MoFa was occasioned by sheer necessity. When the Messenian king Kresphontes was murdered, his youngest son Aipytos managed to escape to his MoFa, the Arcadian king Kypselos, who raised him.\(^12\) Similarly, Adrastus had to flee to his MoFa, the king of Sicyon (Schol. Pind. Nem. 9.30a).

In general, fosterage took place between the end of infancy and the beginning of adulthood, when the young aristocrat returned home for the last puberty rites, sometimes his investiture rites. In a number of cases, however, 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

---


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. E.Risch, Betrachtungen zu den indogermanischen Verwandtschaftsnamen, Mus.Helv. 71 (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, Theano. Antenoriden (Meisenheim 1980) 74f. completely overlooked the parallels for this fosterage.

10) II. XIX. 326f.; Soph. Ph. 239-244; Strab. 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 DaSo, because he only had a daughter (Paus. 2.5.7). In Sicyon Polybos gave the throne to his DaSo Adrastus, who in turn left the throne to his DaSo Diomedes. In these cases the DaSo apparently was believed to succeed his grandfather at his death, but in Thebes Cadmos gave the throne to his DaSo Pentheus when still alive, and a similar situation is presupposed in Euripides' second Hippolytos, where Theseus evidently received the Trozenian throne during Pittheus' life. Finally, Hippothous, who had been exposed after his mother had been impregnated by Poseidon, requested the kingdom of his MoBr's Kerkyon as his rightful inheritance from Theseus (Hyg. Fab. 187).

This right of the DaSo to the throne seems to be reflected also in those legends in which a king exposes a DaSo 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; Menaichmos PGrH 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 grêce antique (Paris 1968) 344-359 (Mariages de tyrans, 1954) and J.-P. Vernant, Mythe et société en grêce 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 MoPa 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 M. 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. Alföldi, Die Struktur des vorr骏rischischen Rûmerstaates (Heidelberg 1974) 137-141.

Habis. 19) This particular type occurs only in classical authors, although exposure legends are found from China to Southern Africa. 20)

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 Hermion, 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). 21)

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 (II. VI. 199f.). 22) 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. 23) The Greeks, on the other hand, used the rnetronymic to denote natural children. 24) Herodotus' report therefore most

---


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

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoroneus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```


The Importance of the Maternal Uncle and Grandfather

The relationship of fosterage.

Greek's relationship with his daughter's child was better than that of a grandparent with his grandchild, we may infer provisionally that a

son's child's bond with his maternal uncle and his maternal great-grand-

father. 27) Since he did not find a single passage that stresses the relationship

between the two, we cannot decide whether the primary emphasis was on the
great-grandfather or the great-grandmother. The latter's role, however, was

never called attention to the extent that the former's was.


dughter's child. And in like ways again it is the speaker's

expression that shares with them, as was natural, seeing that we were the sons of this

doctrine's author. But the many activities that the son's
darkest are the many activities that the son's

can have, and they are still

for historical sources of our documentation are somewhat more informative, and even

was one of the hostesses (Philochoros Polychoros 328 f. 11.).

the cases we have tested very kindly, we were only natural, they belong to

us, and they were used very kindly with this kindness in word

and deed" (Paus. 2.16.2). We may suspect a closer concern in the

sentences involved, regarding the mythological material, we only have the case

of the Oikonomos, but none of the cases used so far requires anything akin to

our evidence shows that a maternal great-grandfather could be greatly interested

likely derives from the Greek tendency to picture their neighbours and their
II

We will return below (§ 3) to this problem and close our discussion of the MoFa with an example that brings us to the MoBr, the maternal uncle. When Odysseus is recognised by his scar, we hear the story of his youth. Just after Odysseus' birth his MoFa 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 MoFa 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 MoFa 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, 418 ff.). 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 MoBr/SiSo relationship which nevertheless confirms our point. Theano was the foster mother of Boeotus and Aeolus, 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 Aeolus and Boeotus recognised the attackers as their MoBr'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 so!" 31)

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

30) Il. IX. 529 ff.; Bacch. 5.97 ff.; F.Bömer on Ov. Met. 8.273 (with full bibliography). The initiatory significance of the hunt is well stressed by R.Lonis, Guerre et religion en grèce à l'époque classique (Paris 1979) 202.
31) Eur. fr. 495 N² - 664 Mette (Lustrum 23/24, 1981/82), tr. D.Page, Greek Literary Papyri III (Loeb), 114 ff. For the legend, see Hyg. Fab. 166.
that marched against Thebes besides Adrastus' one also that of his SiSo Hippomedon. 32) 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 (Il. 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 Heraclids to Messene where he installed his SiSo Aepytos (Paus. 8.5.7). Finally, when Atreus had killed Chrysippus, 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. 35)

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. 36) In the eighth Pythian (35-38) he tells us that in the wrestling matches Aristeomenes followed in the steps of his ματραδελεούς 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 Timasarchos 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 Kypselos; 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 Hákonar saga qbda c. 29; Magnúss saga blinda 7. 10. The initiatory role of the MoBr which is prominent in many Indo-European traditions - exempli gratia I mention the legend of Caeculus of Praeoneste, the tale Pererud of the Welsh Mabinogion, and the Germanic Volksangasaga - deserves further investigation.

33) Cf. Ov. Met. 8.241 huic (Daedalus) tradiderat ... docendam progeniem germanna 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 Hemocharis was the SiSo of Democtheres (Davies, p.142), Speusippus succeeded his MoBr Plato as head of the Academy, 39 and, finally, Callimachus had a homonymous SiSo who was an ἐπιτομος (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 '6 Euripides I), it is said that he was "older than the famous one." Regarding the second (TGrF '7 Euripides II), the Suda (Ε 3694) informs us that he was τοὺς προτέρους διδακτικούς. Snell (ad loc.) translates διδακτικούς as filius fratris 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 Charondas 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 MoFa (Iod. Sic. 12.15). In Syracuse, Dionysius II claimed that he was the legal guardian of the son of his half-sister Arete (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 Ptolemaic and Polyneices (Soph. CT, 1418).42

38 For the evidence, see H. Maehler, Die Lieder des Bacchylides 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. Gatsman, 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: Haraldr 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 Cleoboullos, 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 Epilucus. 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 Neaera, 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, 29f.) the maternal uncles of Pyrrhus all declared that they were summoned as witnesses to his wedding with the sister of Nicodemos. 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:

```
I
Polyarchos | Lyxes
Panyassis   | Herodotus
```

```
II
Polyarchos
Panyassis
Rhoio (Dryo) = Lyxes
Herodotus
```

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 Panyassos's relationship.\(^{43}\) 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 (3.1 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, Panyassos Halikarnassos Heracleadis Fragmenta (Bratislava 1842) 14 combined the two traditions by making Dryo the sister of Panyassis. This is rightly rejected by V.J. Matthews, Panyassos 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. Sēbas, Euthymos, Kyriakos, Eusebios, Nicholas of Sion—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. Aesches (1.103) tells us how Timarchos shamefully neglected his paternal uncle Arignotus, and Demosthenes mentions the bad treatment of Niclas 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 her brother's family for among Greece: Bachofen (ed. 1966), 157-186; M. Golden, Aspects of Childhood in Classical Athens (Oss. Toronto 1981) 267-285.

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 SiSo Charmides "who had been brought up with me in our home since boyhood." 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.

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. 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. 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.

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.
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 κοινώς 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!"

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. The lexicographer Pollux (3.16, 23) mentions a Lallwort nēnños for which he gives the meaning "mother's brother and mother's father..." Similar words, such as English nanna, "mother's mother," Hungarian néné, "sister," or Italian nino, "baby boy," occur in many languages all over the world, and nearly always have an overtone of endearment, as surely nēnños had in Greece. The word is never used by high literature but only occurs in lexicographers and inscriptions. The earliest occurrence of nēnños we owe to a palmary emendation by Adolf Wilhelm who restored nēnnon, 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 spend 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) Nēnños also occurs in IG XII.3.1628: I. Creticae II. XII.5. According to Eustathius (on Il. XIV.118), nēnños 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, chrétienté à Byzance (London 1981) chapter VII, 77-79.

The Importance of the Maternal Uncle and Grandfather

on his uncle's statue: 59) 

A varia lectio in Tollux (3.16) gives the reading nónnos, which survives in modern Greek as "godfather." 60) Still another variant of nónnos is nānna which Hesychius (s.v.) explains as "maternal and paternal uncle," but the related nānnē only means "maternal aunt" (Hesych. s.v.). 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. 62) Nónnos, nónnos and nānna (nānnē) are related to personal names such as Nonnos, Nennaus, Nannion, Nanno, Nana and the like, 62) names which were especially popular in Anatolia, although some of these names owed their existence to the longlasting influence of the Sumero-Akkadian goddess Nana, 64) Finally, there are the kinship terms nin(n)e, neine, and prōnninos = terms which are typical for Northern Greece. 65) They are normally translated as "grandmother", although prōnninos more likely means "great-grandmother." 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


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

61) Nānna has been recognized by A. Wilhelm, Griechische Epigramme aus Greek (Oslo 1950) 32 in a bad Greek poem (now Peek, Griech.Versinschr. 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 ἀδελφεσιν μητρός, ᾧ ἥμετ' ἐχόρη (Eur. Bacch. 26).

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


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

The existence of nēnnos 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 (2.4.5ff.), 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.