History of Family, Women, and Children in Late Medieval Europe

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While study of family, women, and childhood seemed to be a new frontier of scholarship in the last quarter of the twentieth century, family and women were important subjects in the late nineteenth century as well. A brief consideration of these earlier works gives a context for understanding intellectual and political influences on the subject matter and how similar or different these are from the current day. In writing this reflective essay, I have not tried to be comprehensive in citing all recent studies, but rather have identified some of the major areas of contribution and what their future might be in the twenty-first century.

History of the Family

It is instructive to start with something of a quiz: Can you guess the origin of this quote on the history of the family? 'Up to the beginning of sixties, a history of the family cannot be spoken of.' The quote has nothing to do with Peter Laslett and *The World We Have Lost* (1965),[1] rather it is the preface to the fourth edition (1891) of Frederick Engels' *The Origin of the Family*. The rest of the quote is a give away about the state of the research at the end of the nineteenth century: 'This branch of historical science was then entirely under the influence of the decalogue. The patriarchal form of the family, described more exhaustively by Moses than by anyone else, was not only, without further comment, considered as the most ancient, but also as identical with the family of our times. No historical development of the family was even recognized.'[2]

What made the study of the family new in the nineteenth century was an outgrowth of Darwinism and, to a certain extent, im-

1. Laslett 1965.
2. Engels 1902, p. 13.

perialism. Darwin moved the history of the family away from the Old Testament into the realm of biological development and adaptation of the species thus separating it from religion. Imperialism gave educated Europeans and Americans a view of primitive cultures that they had only surmised reading Homer as students. Indeed, one of the curious intellectual developments among the European intelligentsia was that, rather than abandoning the old myths and looking at new evidence, they increased scrutiny of the old myths. Using observation of primitive societies, they looked for evidence of European family origins in Greek literature. Perhaps the most recognized among these efforts was Freud's analysis of the dysfunctional family of Oedipus.

As Engels pointed out, however, the real breakthrough of the late nineteenth century was less the reinterpretations of the Greek myths than the anthropological and linguistic observations of the American ethnographer, Lewis Morgan (1877), on the Iroquois.[3] His work destroyed the idea of patriarchy as the natural form of social organization. Using his work, Engels fostered the study of the family through the many editions of his work in the late nineteenth century. He was also highly influential in the beginnings of women's history in the 1970s, because he was one of the few well-known authors who expressed views on the origins of the family that gave women prominence in that institution.[4] He popularized the notion of matriarchy and of alternative familial organization patterns.

The other great contributor to the nineteenth-century history of the family was Edward Westermarck, a Finnish professor who had part of his career in London. Strongly influenced by both anthropology and Darwinism, he wrote a three-volume study of *The History of Human Marriage* in 1871.[5] Westermarck drew on what was becoming a vast literature on primitive societies and on bird and animal behavior.

Westermarck's approach is far more critical than that of many of the authors he was reading. He used, for instance, Brehm's *Bird Life,* but mocked his enthusiasm for the sexual and familial fidelity of birds, noting that Brehm 'enthusiastically declares that "real

3. Morgan 1877.
4. Tilly and Scott 1978.
5. Westermarck 1921 (reprint of 1871 edition).

genuine marriage can only be found among birds."' Westermarck perceived the problem of analogy of human behavior with animals: a desire to take moral lessons from animals or to impute to animals the behavior the observers desire in humans.

Least we are quick to laugh at the nineteenth-century moral ascriptions from animal to human behavior and vice-versa, we must not forget that E. O. Wilson in the second half of the twentieth century founded the school of socio-biology that also carries with it moral imperatives taken from nature, this time insects.[6] Socio-biology has been popular with historians and with anthropologists who use history to form theories of human behavior. The 'selfish gene' has been used to explain polygamy and monogamy. In polygamous unions, the dominant male makes sure that his genes will be perpetuated by keeping a large portion of the females to himself. But he does not want ordinary females, but rather those that are most attractive. In this way his genes will be enhanced in his offspring as well as being passed on in the next generations. The economy of perpetuating a large household and many offspring, of course, presents its own constraints and for that reason it is possible for only a few men in elevated economic circumstances. It also has the problem of raising aggression in other males who are thereby deprived of mates. Monogamy, on the other hand, cuts down on sexual aggression and provides a more viable economic unit. Those interested in socio-biology should follow articles in the *Journal of Evolution and Human Behavior*.[7] For historians interested in the parallels of primate behavior and humans see Richard Trexler's work and an edited volume, *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*.[8] The most informed of the anthropologists using historical materials is Sarah Blaffer Hrdy in a variety of articles, but in particular in *Mother Nature*.[9]

While the study of the family got off to a fine start in the late nineteenth century, social history in general dropped out of favor after the first quarter of the twentieth century. The First World War and the Russian Revolution did much to kill social history. Once socialism and Marxism moved from an orderly critique of

6. Wilson 1978.
7. See also Betzig 1986 and Betzig, Mulder and Turke, eds. 1988.
8. Trexler, ed. 1994.
9. Hrdy 1999.

society to revolution, it fell out of favor with many of the Western European intelligentsia. Furthermore, the shaky road of democracy and the rise of fascism diverted historian's interests to political history. Questions about why democracy evolved in some countries and not in others became the central issues of historical writing. Economic history survived more as a history of capitalism than of the working class, but social history became less important in general. Family history went into limbo until long after World War II.

Not all medieval historians gave up on social history. Josiah Cox Russell published his *British Medieval Population* in 1948, using the methodology of sociologists and demographers.[10] George Homans published *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* in 1941 using structural anthropology as his framework of interpretation.[11] Sylvia Thrupp published *Merchant Class of Medieval London* in 1948 adapting Lewis Namier's prosopography of parliamentarians to the merchant class.[12] As a medievalist I delight in pointing out that medieval historians were the first to revive scholarship in social history. In addition to new theories, their work was novel in relying on primary source materials derived from archives.

Family history came into prominence again because of contemporary political issues: the baby boom following the Second World War and an increase in intra-familial tensions leading to high divorce rates. The new interest in family history was encouraged by two new developments of the modern world. The government began to supply money to scholars to undertake large research projects and the computer made it possible to amass and manipulate quantities of data. Historical demography became more feasible with funding and computers. Thus David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, with funding from both the United States government and France embarked on the large scale project on the Florentine *catasto* of 1427 to write *Tuscans and Their Families* (French 1978 and English 1985).[13] Meanwhile, the British government had funded the Cambridge Group for the Study of Demography and Family History. Scholars in this group produced a number

10. Russell 1948.
11. Homans 1941.
12. Thrupp 1948.
13. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985.

of important studies on demography with Richard Smith leading the way in medieval demographic studies.[14]

In addition to the macrocosm level of large data sets derived primarily from tax records, medievalists began to look at the microcosm through village and family reconstitution. Peasant studies came into their own in the 1960s and 70s. Ambrose Raftis, inspired by Sylvia Thrupp's use of prosopography and his background in anthropology, began his large project of village and family reconstitution for Ramsey Abbey villages. He and his students at Toronto produced a number of books and articles that investigated social structure in villages and interfamilial relations.[15] A parallel development occurred in England in village studies and family reconstitution as, for example, Zvi Razi's demographic study of Halesowen.[16] Although there have been trans-Atlantic skirmishes over who had the better reconstitution technique, one cannot take away the originality of Raftis. While all the studies have contributed to a greater understanding of peasant society than Homans' static, structuralist approach of 1941, the trans-Atlantic feuds have been a hindrance in an assimilation of all that we now could know about peasant communities. The dismissal of arguments has been detrimental to the overall accumulation of knowledge.

History of the family began to move away from the early interest in demography and family reconstitution in the 1980s. This is not to say that these are dead issues. Quantitative methodologies have much to offer and should be used where data is available. One of the dead ends has been lack of data including continuous manorial court rolls and records suitable for demographic analysis. It is regretful that some legal and cultural historians, I tend to think of them as an a-numeric group, took an ideological stance against quantitative history and falsely eschewed it. Where the data are robust, quantitative methodologies produce the best results and are a counter to purely impressionistic readings of repetitive materials.

Family history became part of the current trend toward cultural history. One could point to a number of examples of this change,

14. Smith, ed. 1984. See also Hollingsworth 1969; Levine 1987; Lee, ed. 1977.
15. Raftis 1964 and 1974; DeWindt 1972; Britton 1977. I have selected only a few of the many publications from the Toronto school of village reconstitution.
16. Razi 1980; Poos 1991.

but, personally, I find the shift that Christiane Klapisch-Zuber made the most interesting. A rereading of David Herlihy's foreword to her *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* indicates the radical change that occurred by 1985. He speaks of the problems for medievalists of moving from the sure footing in quantitative history and toward the shaky ground of interpretive and ethnographic history.[17]

A perusal of the Klapisch-Zuber's essays gives an indication of the subject matter one finds in the newer family history. Kinship and family friends have become increasingly important as we try to establish the network of people that offered mutual aid to get ahead or to overcome crises. Childhood and child rearing have become major issues of family history, even evolving into a whole field of study on their own. The nursing of children including maternal breast feeding as opposed to hiring of wetnurses has given rise to a number of monographs. Other subjects Klapisch-Zuber broached were attitudes toward fathers as well as fathers' attitudes toward children, the problem of stepparents, and the relations of husband and wife. Family history is now more all encompassing than simply establishing the formation of marriage, the types of family structure, and the age of marriage. Historians now want to look at the culture behind these facts.

Family history has not come to an end in the twenty-first century. It is still as vital as it was in the late nineteenth century. Family values and the problems of dysfunctional families have given rise to studies on domestic violence, child abandonment, foundling homes, and the problems of old age. It would take another radical political change to eliminate family history from its current popularity.

Women's History

Unquestionably, women's history had a major impact on the study of family history. Women's history, like family history, had its origins in the social awakening of the late nineteenth century and it

17. Klapisch-Zuber 1985. This is a collection of essays formerly published by the author, but the collection has had a major impact on research on women, family, and children. Other books that added culture to quantification were Mitterauer and Sieder 1977 and Flandrin 1976.

too was revitalized in the late twentieth century. In the early 1970s, following on the heals of the struggle for civil rights for Afro-Americans in United States and the protests against the Vietnam War, American women examined their roles in both these movements and found a need for their own liberation. In Europe the 1968 student uprising had a similar effect. Historians immediately took on the cause looking to the past for examples of women's leadership roles and finally looking for women's experiences in general. For discussions of the early historiography of women's history from the Renaissance through the 1970s, I recommend the essays in *Women in Medieval History and Historiography* (1987) edited by Susan Mosher Stuard.[18]

As with history of the family, I would like to take a book from about a century ago to give a context to the late twentieth-century studies. Alice Clark in *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919)[19] explored women's role in the pre-industrial family economy. Growing up in a politically liberal household that espoused women's rights, Clark gained an interest in the working conditions of women. Like others in the Fabian Women's Group, she was interested in the way that the industrial revolution had changed women's role in the family and espoused the idea of a degradation of the women's importance as co-producers of the family well being and economic viability. She pointed out that in the pre-industrial era the whole of the dairy industry including the keeping milk cows and goats, milking them, making butter and cheese was all women's work and marketed by them. The cloth industry, including wool, linen, and silk thread, relied on the spinning of women. She also pointed to the number of ways in which women contributed to the general economy including housework, childrearing, nursing, and teaching – tasks to which it is admittedly difficult to give a monetary value.

The economic issues that Clark raised have received considerable attention in recent years. By reconstituting the families in the village of Brigstock from manorial court rolls, Judith Bennett, a product of the Toronto School, was able to explore the role that women played in peasant society and economy in *Women in the Me-*

18. Stuard, ed. 1987.
19. Clark 1919 (reissued 1982).

dieval English Countryside.[20] Her conclusions show a mixed picture. She found that, while 'conjugality reinforced gender stereotypes by encouraging the authority of husbands and the dependency of their wives' in the public sphere, widows and adolescent girls did not necessarily conform to these assigned gender roles. Women's participation in the household economy was very dependent on their age and life cycle experience. Adolescent girls might earn wages and acquire a certain ability to negotiate their marriage with some land and savings. Married women passed through the period of childrearing (if they had children) and as the children grew they entered into some domestic occupation such as brewing that permitted them to contribute to the household economy and use the available labor of maturing children in this endeavor or to relieve them of some of their other work such as herding, tending children, and gathering fruits, nuts and herbs. As widows they ceased brewing and might take charge of agriculture thus giving them some degree of independence as heads of household. The latter was not an unencumbered position, but it was one that allowed the greatest legal freedom that a woman would know in the medieval countryside. The close connection between life cycle and work patterns is more pronounced for women than for men in the medieval rural and urban environments.

A number of scholars have published on women and work in the medieval urban environment. David Herlihy attempted a summary of scholarly knowledge about women's work in *Opera Muliebria.*[21] The most valuable chapter in that book is his study of the Paris *Books of the Taille, 1292-1313.* These tax records list not only the people but also their occupations. Women appeared in 172 occupations in 1292, but the number had declined to 130 by 1313. Women appeared in a number of different positions such as money lenders, mint workers and so on, but they predominated in the less prestigious ranks of household servants, food provisioners, retailers, workers in silk and linen, and clothiers. Using church court records, P. J. P. Goldberg in *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in the Medieval Economy* has studied the variety of women's work in medieval York showing provincial urban parallels.[22]

20. Bennett 1987.
21. Herlihy 1990, pp. 127-53.
22. Goldberg 1992.

While women's participation in work and crafts will continue in importance, the more nuanced scholarly contributions now investigate the position of women in urban power structures. Martha C. Howell in *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*[23] showed how guild and urban regulations became more restrictive in the late fifteenth century, so that increasingly women in the Low Countries and elsewhere were excluded from craft and trade positions that carried prestige and power in the market place. Men replaced women as masters of women's guilds in Paris and guilds restricted men from employing women outside their family to aid them in production of goods. Judith Bennett in *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England* has traced a similar pattern in the brewing industry in which, over the fifteenth century, women lost status in brewing to the increasingly large-scale brewing done by men. Women, who had started out as brewsters, wholesalers, and retailers of ale and beer, were reduced to the role of retailers or home-producers of ale and beer in the sixteenth century.

The strikingly new direction that the study of medieval women in the economy is now taking is away from women and work and toward women with property connections. The economic influence of the infusion of money and real estate at the formation of marriage has been overlooked in the discussion of capital formation in the medieval period. But the exchange of that amount of wealth among the upper classes and the influence of even the smaller amounts of wealth on the formation of marriages at the peasant and working class levels are beginning to receive attention. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber pointed out the tremendous influence that the dowry had on women both at marriage and in the subsequent lives of the widows and their children in Florence. The exchange of wealth was one-sided with the young women (early teens) bringing to their husbands (in their thirties) a considerable wealth in dowry at their marriage and then remaining with the husband's kin for a long widowhood.[24] Anthony Molho in *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* went on to add even more information about the way the marriage alliances worked in Florence.[25] But what might describe the economic impact of the marriage of

23. Howell 1986.
24. Klapisch-Zuber 1985.
25. Molho 1994.

women in Florence, who had little control over their dowry, does not describe what happened in Venice where women kept a considerable discretionary control over this property. Widows' wills indicate that they had leeway in disposing of their goods to benefit female relatives.[26] In any case, the use of dowry alone meant that women entered marriages at a young age and did not remarry or could not have enough independent control over their dowry to make decisions about remarriage.

While in Italy and much of the European Mediterranean women had long since lost the enjoyment of the dower (that portion of the husband's property which he promised to his wife for her life use in the event that he predeceased her),[27] in northern Europe it remained a part of every marriage settlement. Marriages in northern Europe were still contracted with dowry and dower on the part of the bride and groom. The bride's family and friends gave the traditional dowry of goods, money and perhaps some real property toward the marriage while the groom and his family promised at marriage to endow the bride with a portion of the real estate or other property (a third to a half of that which he possessed at the time of the marriage) for her maintenance during her widowhood. In the northern European pattern, the property usually became communal property under the control of the husband, but for the benefit of the whole family. The widow could not alienate the dower property, but she could take it into another marriage. She had free choice over a marriage partner in the second marriage. The substantial amount of property that changed hands at marriage and remarriage, therefore, could have a major impact on the economy and on social structure.

Martha Howell in *The Marriage Exchange* has examined the customs of Douai and of late medieval Flanders in general. In this region of southwestern Belgium and northern France custom favored the conjugal unit at the expense of both the lineage and the family.[28] The property brought together in marriage belonged to the couple and, at the death of one of them, passed to the survi-

26. Chojnacki 2000.
27. Hughes 1978.
28. Howell 1998. This book is an excellent place to start in looking at the complexities of medieval marriage contracts, dower and dowry because the author has situated the case of Douai within the broad context of existing studies of marriage in medieval and early modern Europe.

vor. Usually the children of the marriage received portions of the property, but in Douai this was not strictly necessary. Custom, however, shifted in Douai giving the husband a greater control over the conjugal property. The widow lost the position of manager of her property and that belonging to her former husband. Her legal and practical control over property came closer to that of other regions of northern Europe. The stronger emphasis on patriarchy gave rise to the use of wills and contracts to limit the ability of women to take control of conjugal property.

Parallel with the patterns that emerged in Flanders are those in medieval London. My own research has shown that London's late medieval laws were generous to widows granting them not only the third of the husband's real estate for life use if they were widowed, but also the guardianship of their minor children. This meant that a widow with minor children potentially had control over two-thirds of her former husband's estate. It is not surprising that widows were in high demand for remarriage because this infusion of wealth into an aspiring artisan's or merchant's fortunes would provide capital and perhaps social standing to further his career. While widows were always in demand for remarriage in London, following the Black Death in 1349 the number of widows remarrying increased substantially. The effect of this circulation of wealth with the remarriage of widows was to create strong horizontal ties among status groups at the expense of patrilineages. But like the experience in Flanders, by the end of the fifteenth century custom had changed and widows had less control over the fortunes of their orphaned children's property and less control over their remarriage.[29]

The capital associated with women in the dower and dowry had profound effects on the social structures of the urban places studied. In Florence and Venice, the young age of marriage, the control that the husband had over his wife's dowry and the children of the marriage meant that women tended not to remarry. The patrilineage was enriched and preserved by the money women brought to the marriage. Patrilineage was so important in these two cities that men kept genealogies to know their privileges in society. The pattern of dower and dowry in London and Douai produced the opposite effect. Widows had control over their dower wealth

29. Hanawalt 1993(b) and 1994.

and could also claim their children as well as the inheritance of children until they reached the age of majority. Widows were in great demand for remarriage. But this meant that the horizontal ties among craftsmen and merchants became more important than the vertical, patrilineal model. Men wanted to keep wealth within their social strata. Yet another model prevailed in Ghent. The wife brought a dowry and received a dower on the death of her husband. She could take the dower into a new marriage, but she did not have control over the children, who remained with the father's family. In Ghent the patrilineage was carefully preserved even though the widow remarried.[30]

Because widows generally had more freedom than married women or adolescent girls, more documentation exists of their activities as business women, vowesses, nuns, heads of family and networks of friends, and single parents. Most books on women contain chapters on widows and in addition there are collections of essays such as *Upon My Husband's Death* edited by Louise Mirrer.[31] This book includes essays about widowhood in late medieval Europe and explores both literary and historical materials.

Those studying the history of women have been eager to move outside the context of women in a family environment and to explore women as nuns, mystics, and as single women.[32] Religion, particularly mystical exercises, gave women a measure of freedom from male domination that they could not otherwise achieve. Caroline Walker Bynum in *Jesus as Mother* and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* has been the most prominent of the authors in this area.[33] She and other authors point out that by controlling their intake of food and using a feminization of religion women mystics were able to form their own spiritual life. Bynum's work has been very influential and has led to a number of other books using the same mystical and visionary materials.[34] The problem is that the texts for these studies are limited and after one hears the stories of saintly women eating puss and other revolting physical torments, one does not need to read another book using the same striking data.

30. Danniel 1989.
31. Mirrer, ed. 1995.
32. Bennett and Froide, eds. 1999.
33. Bynum 1982 and 1987.
34. Elliott 1993; Newman 1995.

It gets old quickly even if new interpretations and readings offer originality.

But women in religion will remain important to the study of women's history because there is so much information on nunneries, lay women and their piety, and women in their local parishes. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's book, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society,* is an example of this broader approach to women's religious experiences that will be more typical of future studies.[35] The Beguines, lay women who lived pious lives either in communities of their own or among lay people, are discussed in a study by Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries.*[36]

The potential for the study of women is not lagging and documents abound for more studies of single women making their way as never married, poor women, prostitutes, female felons, female victims of violence, and so on. Women's history has been lively and it will continue to be so. Furthermore, no longer will social history be creditable if it is written without including women as a large part of the discussion.

Women's history and feminist studies have added a theoretical component to history as well as literature and philosophy. While some of the theory has been partisan and, fortunately, short lived, it has added a dimension to our historical thinking that has moved us beyond a dry empiricism. It has also given us a broader concept for gender history. Thus some of the questions and theoretical concerns first explored in women's history have opened up a new field of gender history in which men and maleness have become a focus of study. Gay and Lesbian theory, also an offshoot of feminist theory have made major contributions to historical and literary interpretation in the last few years. To return to biology, one of the issues that will confront gender history in the future is the increasing knowledge of genetics. The nature versus nurture arguments will become more important as we know more about humans' genetic makeup. Biology is not necessarily destiny, but it does put some constraints and parameters on culture alone, as Robert S. McElvaine shows in *Eve's Seed.*[37]

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35. Schulenburg 1998.
36. Simons 2001.
37. McElvaine 2000.

The History of Childhood

Like the history of women and family, the history of childhood saw a major development of interest in the late twentieth-century. The earlier interest, sparked by Freud, Piaget, and Erikson among early twentieth-century psychiatrists and psychologists, encouraged a biographical, psychoanalytical approach as one sees in David Hunt's book on *Parents and Children in History* from 1970.[38] More influential was Philippe Aries's *Centuries of Childhood* from 1960.[39] In this book, translated into English in 1962, he argued that people in the Middle Ages did not recognize a particular life stage of childhood nor distinguish the teenage years from those of adults. The statement from his book that is most quoted among scholars of the Middle Ages is: 'In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as a child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society.'[40]

Medieval scholars read his use of evidence for this startling conclusion and found that he based it on reading back sixteenth and seventeenth century writers, such as Molière and Montaigne, into earlier periods and that his use of medieval evidence was limited and did not accord with their knowledge of the same sources. Ariès's dismissal of a medieval concept of childhood led to a reexamination of the sources that historians already knew, such as art, sermon literature and other church writings, poetry, ages of man literature, and advice books. It also pushed historians of the period to look for other sources on children and the parent and child relationship that had not previously been used, such as saints' miracles, coroners' inquests into accidental deaths, private letters and papers, and other social-history sources. The research of the last forty-five years has provided a rich account of childrear-

38. Hunt 1970.
39. Ariès 1960 and 1962.
40. Ariès 1962, p. 128.

ing practices in the medieval period, the sentimental attachment of parents to their children, the culturally defined period of adolescence and how it changed over the 500 years that comprise the first section of Ariès's book.

The literature on the subject is vast and I only want to note some of the recent highlights of the ongoing research into the history of childhood. The work on the history of childhood has been international, but I find most interesting that of French historians who have been particularly involved in refuting Ariès recently. Since much of Ariès's evidence was based on artistic representation, one of the first attacks was made by Pierre Riché and Danièle Alexandre-Bidon which presents both literary and educational texts showing that medieval writers were not only aware of the life stage of childhood, but also that they commented favorably on the games that children played, their obvious interest in their own bodies, and their early attempts to walk and talk.[41] The visual imagery shows pictures of children nursing, playing games, interacting with adults, and being disciplined. Archaeological artifacts found in France, such as dolls, toys, bowls and feeding tubes for children, cradles, and other objects reinforce the pictorial representations. Sally Crawford has done a similar study using archaeology in *Childhood in Anglo Saxon-England.*[42]

In addition to investigating the evidence that Ariès misinterpreted or used with too little reflection, historians have used entirely new sources for understanding medieval childhood. I have used the medieval English coroners' inquests into the accidental deaths of children to form an idea of child development, care of infants, and attitudes toward children and their nurturing. I have used other records such as the court of orphans in London, apprentice contracts, and court cases to provide evidence for a discussion of child rearing and adolescence.[43] Following my lead in using the coroners' rolls, are two new studies based on the miracle stories that were collected for the beatification of a holy person. Miracle stories, like coroners' inquests, are full of detail such as the activities of the young victims, adults and children who were present or near, the first finder of the child, the one who prays to the saint,

41. Riché and Alexandre-Bidon 1994; Alexandre-Bidon and Closson 1985.
42. Crawford 1999.
43. Hanawalt 1977, 1986 and 1993(a).

the grief of the parents, and even such incidental information as that of a female child of three is still nursing at her mother's breast. In an extensive new study of the miraculous cures of saints Didier Lett, *L'enfant des miracles: Enfance et société au moyen âge*[44] has analyzed miracle stories of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. His evidence shows that, contrary to Aries's thesis, ages of children and precise language describing children of different ages are characteristic of miracles recorded in both French and Latin.

Lett did not do an analysis of the type of children's activities that led to the necessity of miraculous intervention, but another study by Ronald Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* has analyzed the activities of children in miracle stories when they had accidents.[45] The miracle stories parallel the coroners' inquests in showing that children were playing with balls, or trying to get a feather or flower out of a body of water, or were climbing on logs or tables and had a fall. Play persists as the primary cause of accidents. By the ages of three and four children are imitating their parents in their play and have accidents that reflect future gender roles. In both coroners' inquests and miracle tales, play predominates well beyond Ariès's eight-year limit.

The tenacity of Ariès's picture of medieval childhood, adolescence, and attitudes toward childhood in modern textbooks of psychology and social work as well as in daily parlance will keep medievalists busy with continued documentation of childhood and childrearing in the Middle Ages. Part of the reason for the robustness of the negative view of medieval childhood comes from our folk culture that lumps everything that is undesirable as being 'medieval' whether or not the practices had anything to do with the Middle Ages. Another part seems to come from an innate Whiggism on the part of modern scholars of childhood who would like to think that we are more enlightened than parents and writers on childhood in the Middle Ages. Not only are medievalists motivated to overcome this barrier among social scientists, they continually find new sources of information on the history of childhood that gives us a more intimate view of the life period than we ever thought possible.

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44. Lett 1997.
45. Finucane 1998.

Conclusion

A final consideration about the future of these three fields of research comes from an amusing and reflective article by Bernard Cohen, 'History and Anthropology: The State of Play' that appeared in the *Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History* in 1980.[46] In it he explains how historians can be sure that the field of research on which they have embarked will be a lasting one and permit them to progress in academia. He points out that the first step to a lasting place for a subject is a 'big book' which the revisionist can then attack. The revisionists attack the 'big book' and make their reputations in reinterpreting the sources or adding new sources to change the interpretation. Certainly, Aries's book is in the category of the 'big book' and the subject of history of childhood is still thriving on attacks on it. Another sign of longevity of a field is that 'workshops' form around 'new problems'. Cohen assumes that because of the term 'workshop', historians are really living in the preindustrial age. Certainly, family history, women's history, and history of childhood have had their share of workshops with printed volumes coming out of these encounters.

As subjects progress toward more stability, Cohen observes, the workshops turn into journals that are published on a quarterly basis. Thus we have the *Journal of Family History, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Journal of Women's History, Gender Studies, History of Childhood Quarterly,* to name but a few. Finally, departments feel that they must hire a faculty member to teach the new subject. Fields that have really succeeded to the heights of academic recognition have separate departments and graduate programs. Of the three areas investigated in this paper, only women's studies has made that leap into permanence. But all three fields reached the other levels of permanence in the academic world and show no signs of disappearing in the twentieth-first century.

46. Cohen 1980.

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