

## Systematic Extension in Latin Relationship Terminology.

Donald C. Jackman (State College, Pennsylvania)

The Who's Who of the Middle Ages more often than not boils down to who is related to whom. The enormity of this problem is readily perceived when one applies a concept of relative historicity to the sources providing our information on the aristocracy. How could the given medieval author be sure of the comparative importance of particular persons and their actions, or of the value of relationship data concerning them? He was obliged to relativize his historical statements, above all by limiting them closely to mesh with his own self-conception. By this means he was able to dodge the issue of ever-changing interrelationships and their effect on the worth of what he was recording. The narrative can be viewed to some extent as an effort to record only such events that could undergo no change in their significance - hence, for example, the penchant for anecdote. Even more so the narrative represents, or allows to flourish, the psychology of the author both actively and passively.

Description of relationship could not always be avoided if narrative was to be connected. Similarly, in official documents relationship terminology was often indispensable: yet there too the need to relativize existed. Absolute precision in relationship terminology was undesirable. For example, the monastery receiving a gift of land might wish to record the relationship between certain co-benefactors in order to document fully its title to the gift; but it might not wish to make that relationship precise, lest such precision help heirs contest the gift.<sup>1</sup> Such neglect or lack of precision in relationship terminology was moreover informed by a fundamental aspect of aristocratic society. To say that 'the aristocrats were all related with each other' may be trite and redundant, but the complexities of interrelationship certainly diminished the force of any one description of relationship. An adoptive brother might be both agnatic first cousin and cognatic second cousin, and in many cases the more distant relationship was especially important.<sup>2</sup>

From the time when the aristocratic basis of society became ingrained under the Franks, most of these factors would have been part of the everyday awareness of those who worked in the written language. Clear examples of imprecision can already be observed in the later eighth century. In the *traditiones* of Lorsch we find reference to 'Heimrich son of Williswint', yet we know that Heimric was the son of Williswint's son Cancor.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere a Wido can be discovered with a *germanus* Warin, who was undoubtedly Wido's brother-in-law.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter imprecision is not infrequently met. In most cases it is necessary to infer relationships, however, in order to observe the imprecision of the terminology.

Lettered persons would not have used relationship terms indiscriminately. In the examples provided, Heimrich can become the *filius* of his grandmother if his parents are already dead, and Warin is Wido's *germanus* through a simple extension to relationship by marriage. Once such usages turned into conventions, there was an opportunity to develop terminological extension as a system. Medieval Latin discards various Classical extensions in relationship terminology and replaces them with its own, in light of which there can be little doubt that grammarians gave considerable thought to the question.

To discern the system it is necessary to reconstruct relationships. The possibility of extension must therefore take its place among the sources and resources that lead towards genealogical accuracy. To this end the fundamental properties of relationship terminology should be identified. We can divide terms into two basic categories -those that lexically denote exact relationships, and those that do not. Terms of exact relationship can extend their meanings, but with inexact terms, such as *cognatus* and *consanguineus* it is difficult to foresee extension. This simple categorization allows us to concentrate on the exact terms, which can be divided as follows. Terms of immediate relationship come in three types - descendant (*filius*, -a), horizontal (*frater*, *soror*, *germanus*, -a), ascendant (*mater*, *pater*). Terms of oblique relationship include *patruus*, *avunculus*, *amita*, *matertera*. Then there are lineal ascendant and descendant terms, thus *avus* with its derivatives, of which *proavus* and *atavus* are sometimes found extending to the general meaning of remote ascendant. This basic categorization is of interest, although by no means does it subsume all relationship terms.

The exact terms of immediate relationship permit some finite observations regarding their potential for extension. While *frater* and *filius* can readily be applied to in-law relationships and, less readily, to 'telescopic' situations (*frater* for cousin, *filius* for grandson), *mater* and *pater* seem difficult to manipulate in this fashion. Much depends on context. When the chronicler Marianus Scottus describes King Hermann of Salm as *fratris filius* of Count Heinrich of Laach, he is referring to an in-law relationship that is economically dealt with through a compound term; it remains to the modern historian to determine which part of the relationship was by marriage, and why Marianus Scottus thought the relationship was significant.<sup>5</sup> In many cases the extended terms may arise through the author's imagination, linguistic as well as historical. System lay less in a set of logically sequenced rules than in observations about the potential of individual terms and situations.

In one particular case, however, the terminological potential yields a system. The term *nepos*, *neptis* falls into three different categories: inexact (cousin of undetermined degree), lineal descendant (grandchild), oblique (nephew, niece). Within this variety of usages there is a single guiding principle. A nephew or first cousin (*nepos*) is the grandchild (*nepos*) of a common ancestor: the medieval extension to cousin appears to originate in this observation. *Nepos* therefore may regularly extend to any relationship where one party is grandchild of the common ancestor: it can extend to first cousin, once or even twice removed, but apparently not to second cousin. Even then, occasion was found for extending *nepos* further. Monarchs might refer to fairly distant relatives as *nepos*. This 'royal extension' became prevalent under Emperor Heinrich II (1002-24), but the principle conceivably was recognized at a much earlier date.<sup>6</sup> The case is difficult to prove; yet by showing favour to distant relatives through the use of this term of familiarity, the monarchs lend credence to the notion that *nepos* normally extended only to close consanguinity.

The situation of *nepos* is especially interesting from a legal standpoint. Despite the ongoing efforts of the church to stamp out consanguineous marriage, customary law permitted marriage between second cousins while explicitly forbidding marriage between first cousins. In other words, *nepotes* could not marry: thus the equation between regular terminological extension of *nepos* and the degrees of forbidden marital relationship seems to have been exact.<sup>7</sup> At one point the Saxon Annalist actually speaks of *nepotes*

*consanguinei* in reference to forbidden marital relationship, cousins (*consanguinei*) too closely related to be permitted to marry.<sup>8</sup> The medieval extension of *nepos* need not therefore merely be a word game: it might well have arisen in direct conjunction with the customary law concerning marital consanguinity.

Terms of oblique relationship reveal circumstances that are hardly less interesting and perhaps equally indicative of an implicit association between terminological extension and aristocratic social norms. Here there was limited scope for extension, but only because the terms did not frequently arise. Otherwise such terms provide a rich field for the imagination. The word *avunculus* is known for a number of situations where it cannot possibly mean ‘mother’s brother’. The most famous is probably Dudo of St. Quentin’s reference to Count Bernard of Senlis as the *avunculus* of William Longsword, which is thought to conflict with that chronicler’s information to the effect that Longsword’s mother was a daughter of the Neustrian margrave Berengar, placing both reports in a dubious light.<sup>9</sup> Extension opens up a variety of possibilities that might eventually lead to accurate genealogical reconstruction. Thus *avunculus* would be fully relevant to an in-law relationship, if there was also a close consanguineal implication of the term.

Only a few representative instances of terminological extension have been offered here, and the true dimensions of the system cannot yet be envisaged. The medieval tendency was to avoid descriptions of relationship. What little material comes down cannot always be put to immediate use. It can nevertheless be suggested that a terminological system in all its multifarious aspects was integral to an informed view of the aristocracy; it developed as a series of observations concerning the uniqueness of relationship situations and the efficacy of their description. Like the relationships, the very notion of systematic extension was controlled by practical needs of the text and the psychology of the author. Terminological extension was the expression of profound cultural awareness and as such it served its own end.<sup>10</sup> It presents some vital issue for modern historians to ponder as the texts become more accessible.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 821 Waldrada donated estates to Fulda with the permission of Count Udo, and in 824 a new deed was prepared showing that these two were donating the same estates jointly; Codex diplomaticus Fuldensis, ed. E.F.J. Dronke (Kassel, 1850), nos. 395, 429. Nowhere is the relationship between Waldrada and Udo given; but it is widely believed that they were mother and son.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Duke Konrad of Swabia (983-97) was agnatic first cousin twice removed of Duke Hermann I (926-49); Duke Otto III (1048-57) was agnatic first cousin once removed of Duke Herman IV (1030-8). In all cases the ducal claim arrived cognatically.

<sup>3</sup> Codex Laureshamensis, ed. K. Glöckner (3 vols., Darmstadt, 1929-36), no. 228: ‘*Heimricus comes, filius domne nostre Willisuuinde*’. The classic study of this family is Glöckner, ‘Lorsch und

Lotharingen, Robertiner und Capetinger', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* N.F. 50 (1937), 301-54.

<sup>4</sup> G.C. Crollius, 'Probationes Hornbacenses aliaeque ad origines Salicas', *Academia Electoralis Theodoro-Palatina, Historia et commentationes* 6 (1789) 240-2 (no.1). Wido's genuine brother is named in MGH Dipl. Karol.148. Warin, conversely, was count of Ladengau, and his line essentially is known.

<sup>5</sup> Marianus Scottus, *Chronicon ad 1081*, MGH SS V, 562.

<sup>6</sup> A noteworthy occurrence is in the contemporary chronicle, Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi *Chronicon*, ed. R. Holtzmann (MGH SSrerGerm n.s. 9, Berlin 1935), 164-5, in reference to the second cousins Emperor Otto III and Pope Gregory V.

<sup>7</sup> *Lex Salica*, ed. K.A. Eckhardt (MGH LL Nat. Germ. 4/2, Hanover 1969) 209: '*Si quis sororem aut fratris filiam aut certe alterius gradus consobrinam aut fratris uxorem aut auunculi sceleratis nuptiis sibi iunxerit, huic penae subiaceat, ut a tali consortio separetur; atque etiam si filios habuerint, non habeantur legitimi heredes, sed infamia sint notati*' (23 § 16) [italics added]. The word *consobrinam* usually refers to first cousin simply, but here it undergoes some qualification to be understood in conjunction with *fratris filiam*; see discussion in D.C. Jackman, 'Das Eherecht und der früdeutsche Adel', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung* 112 (1995) 191-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Annalista Saxo ad 1049*, MGH SS VI, 688.

<sup>9</sup> Dudo, *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, ed. J. Lair (*Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de Normandie*, 3me s. 3/2, Caen, 1865), 157, 189.

<sup>10</sup> Compare the statement of K. Leyser, 'The German aristocracy from the ninth to the early twelfth century', *Past and Present* 41 (1968) 27, regarding chronicles 'written for an aristocratic audience, whether it was tonsured or belted'.