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Herausgegeben von Dorothee Dettinger  
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## WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

### Sibling Relationships among Judean Jews in the First–Third Centuries CE

Michael L. Satlow

By the second half of the first century CE Christians were beginning to understand themselves as a kin group. Paul routinely addressed his letters to »brothers« and often »sisters«.<sup>1</sup> In the book of Acts, the Christ-believers too frequently referred to each other as »brothers«.<sup>2</sup> This terminology has generated an enormous amount of scholarship that seeks to understand how these Christians were using kinship terminology to create bonds of solidarity and a new group identity.<sup>3</sup>

Early Christian use of such language was hardly unique. By the late first century CE there had already been a long Jewish tradition, stretching back to the Hebrew Bible, that used sibling terminology (particularly »brother«) to refer to non-biologically related members of »Israel«.<sup>4</sup> 1 Maccabees, for example, a probably fictive letter from the Spartans to Onias states, »It has been found in a document about the Spartans and Jews that they are brothers and that they are of the seed of Abraham«.<sup>5</sup> The sectarian documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls use »brother« to denote other members of their community.<sup>6</sup> 4 Maccabees uses »brother« to connote the relationship between fellow Jews.<sup>7</sup> These three uses are all slightly different, showing how the term was deployed to create new kinship connections among Jews; between Jews and non-Jews (Spartans, in this case); and among members of a small insular sect. In a couple of papyri Bar-Kokhba addresses his followers as brothers, creating a fictive kinship among a band of

<sup>1</sup> Rom 1,13; 1Cor 1,10; 1,26; 2Cor 1,8; 8,1; Gal 1,11; Phil 1,12; 1Thess 1,4; 2Thess 1,3.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Acts 6,3; 9,30.

<sup>3</sup> For especially good surveys of this literature, see REIDAR AASGAARD, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters! Christian Siblingship in Paul*, JSNTSS 265, London 2004; PHILIP A. HARLAND, *Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: »Brothers« (ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙ) in Associations in the Greek East*, in: JBL 124 (2005), 491–513.

<sup>4</sup> HELMER RINGGREN, ΠΝ, 'äch, in: G. JOHANNES BOTTERWECK/HELMER RINGGREN (Hrsg.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Bd.1, 188–193.

<sup>5</sup> 1Macc 12,21; URIEL RAPPAPORT, *The First Book of Maccabees. Introduction, Hebrew Translation, and Commentary*, Jerusalem 2004, 288.

<sup>6</sup> 1QS 6.10, 6.22; 1QSa 1.18; CD (MS A) 6.20, 7.1, 7.2; CD (MS B) 20.18.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., 4Macc 13,9.

fighters.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as Philip Harland has noted, other non-Jewish, voluntary groups at this time also sometimes referred to each other using kinship (and specifically sibling) terminology. Seen in this context, the use of the terminology by early Christians is not very surprising or significant.

At the same time, however, the Gospels make a noted attempt to caste Jesus as opposing the primacy of biological kinship. »Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple« Jesus declares in Luke.<sup>9</sup> In Matthew, Jesus says to Peter, »And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.«<sup>10</sup> When seen against these texts, the kinship terms used by early Christians seem more significant: they seem to linguistically constitute a kin group meant to *replace* rather than *supplement* the biological one, an interpretation that takes added force from Paul's denigration of marriage and biological reproduction.

In this paper, I will use this debate as a jumping off point to consider actual sibling relationships among Jews in the early centuries of this era. This material dimension has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. Even Jesus, after all, was said to have brothers and sisters. What form did these sibling relationships take, and how might we relate to these real relationships some of the more ideological and prescriptive notions common at that time about how siblings should relate to each other? In addition to laying some groundwork for a more complex and sophisticated understanding of Jewish families in antiquity, this study will open up another lens through which we might approach the kinship terminology in the New Testament. »Brother« or »sister« might at times mean »comrade« or »colleague«, but far more frequently it indicated a biological relationship. And like all relationships, family or not, the ones that these terms signaled was as complex as the sibling relationships themselves. Siblings loved and hated each other. They were involved in and alienated from each other's lives. But the fact that they were siblings was relevant, both to their own perceptions of their relationships to each other and to how others perceived them.

Before proceeding, two preliminary comments, one theoretical and one methodological, are in order. First, I do not talk here, or anywhere else, of »the Jewish family«. This is because, in my view, there is no single »Jewish family«. Jews (as well as early Christians too) had families that in most ways resembled those of their neighbors, both geographically and socio-economically. In the second century CE, for example, a rich Jewish family in Sardis would have more resembled a rich Christian or pagan family than it would have resembled a »Jewish« family in Judea. Families structure themselves are determined by a large number of factors, mostly according to very local circumstances. One

<sup>8</sup> P. Yadin 49 (=5/6XHev 49) and 59 (=5/6XHev 59).

<sup>9</sup> Luke 14,26. The parallel at Mat 10,37 does not include the reference to siblings.

<sup>10</sup> Mat 19,29.

might perhaps argue for a cluster of features that distinguish, say, families of Jews, Christians, and others (not to mention »mixed« familial permutations) in a particular city or region, but I believe that it is seriously mistaken to apply a conceptual category like *the Jewish family* to Jews of different regions. The best that I can do here is thus to trace what we know of a few Jewish families, and from them perhaps to make some modest inferences about other families as well.

That said, however, it is important to note that our sources simply do not allow for a rich portrayal of any single sibling relationship that would be of value to this inquiry. (As I will note below, I exclude the relationship between Herod and his sister Salome, and similar kinds of relationships, as atypical and prone to distortion by our sources.) Josephus, whose testimony is usually vital for reconstruction of Jewish life in the first century CE, writes much about ideal sibling relationships but little about actual, typical ones – even his own. Through inscriptions and papyri we can see glimpses of real families from this time period. I use early rabbinic evidence to supplement this evidence, not because I believe that this evidence provides a transparent view of Jewish family life, even in Galilee in the early third century where these compilations were apparently redacted, but because they seem to reflect a set of assumptions about family life that cohere with the more fragmentary, and probably earlier, epigraphical and documentary evidence.

## 1. CONSTRAINTS AND CONTEXTS

In their early groundbreaking work, P. Laslett and J. Hajnal developed social scientific models for understanding European household structures. In their early models, both scholars claimed that there was a single, dominant European household structure (mainly nuclear) that predated the industrial revolution.<sup>11</sup> In the face of mounting evidence that challenged this model, these scholars later retreated slightly. While Hajnal suggested that there were two kinds of dominant household structures in pre-industrial Europe, Laslett argued that there were in fact four primary household structures, each of which was dominant within a particular geographical region within Europe.<sup>12</sup> Even this, however, has proved to be too simplistic. It did not take long for increasing research to make clear that household structures were in fact highly sensitive to very local

<sup>11</sup> JOHN HAJNAL, *European Marriage Pattern in Perspective*, in: DAVID GLASS/DAVID EVERSLEY (Hrsg.), *Population in History*, Chicago 1965, 101–143; PETER LASLETT/RICHARD WALL (Hrsg.), *Household and Family in Past Time*, Cambridge 1972.

<sup>12</sup> JOHN HAJNAL, *Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation Systems*, in: *Population Development Review* 8 (1982), 449–494; PETER LASLETT, *Family Household as Workgroup and Kingroup. Areas of Traditional Europe Compared*, in: RICHARD WALL/JEAN ROBIN/PETER LASLETT (Hrsg.), *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, Cambridge 1983, 513–563.

conditions, and that it was difficult to make broad generalizations about »dominant« household structures within broad regions.<sup>13</sup> This should hardly surprise us. Even in contemporary societies we see a wide range of household and broader kinship structures within given national – and even urban – borders.

While this might seem on its surface to be a step backwards, Hajnal and Laslett's pioneering research and the work it engendered in fact allowed us to clarify the factors that help to determine household formations. In his review of the research, David Kertzer has argued that household diversity can be explained primarily by three factors: political economic forces, demographic forces, and culture.<sup>14</sup> Households are the product of individuals trying to organize their family relationships within the constraints of these three factors. In order to understand how families in Judea and the Galilee organized their households from the first to third centuries CE, then, and the sibling relationships within them, we must first sketch the forces and constraints that these household structures were meant to address.

### 1.1. Political Economy

Most of our evidence – deriving from Josephus, the Babatha and other archives found in the Judean Desert, and early rabbinic literature – reflects a landed class of relatively modest means. Their landholdings were apparently comprised of a number of small, often non-contingent plots. In part, this was a function of the topography of both the cultivatable areas of the Judean Desert and upper Galilee, neither of which easily accommodates large fields. The landholders themselves did not appear to work this land; they employed slaves or other workers or rented it out through (occasionally complex) arrangements with sharecroppers. They registered their land with the Roman authorities and remitted some portion of their crop (probably 10%–20%) to them.

### 1.2. Demographic Forces

While it appears that among wealthier classes women married for the first time in their mid-teens, the evidence for the more middling landed class suggests that within Judea the more typical age for a woman's first marriage was closer to 20, whereas a man's age at first marriage would be around 30.<sup>15</sup> Given ancient mortality rates, there was a reasonably high chance that by the time a man was 30 his father would have died. Marriages appear to have been largely patrilocal, although since the bride and groom might well have been from the same settlement that may not have made much difference. As with most

<sup>13</sup> See DAVID I. KERTZER, *Household History and Sociological Theory*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991), 155–179.

<sup>14</sup> KERTZER, *Household History*, 174.

<sup>15</sup> MICHAEL L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, Princeton 2001, 105–109.

other societies in antiquity, all of which had high mortality rates and a lack of effective birth control, we should probably expect an average of 2–3 surviving offspring, although there would have been other children who did not survive to adulthood. We have no reason to suspect that within this population (except, perhaps, in the immediate years after the revolts of 70 and 132 CE) there would have been a gender imbalance.

### 1.3. Culture

Three cultural norms – or as Josephus would call them, »ancestral traditions« – had some relevance in household formation. The first was polygyny. Jewish men were allowed to marry more than one wife and, as Josephus apologetically notes, sometimes actually did so. That, however, is almost our only extant evidence for Jewish polygyny in Judea in the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries and it is largely confined to very wealthy families. Our modest landowners overwhelmingly would have been monogamous, although Babatha, who should be counted in this group, entered a polygynous marriage after the death of her first husband.<sup>16</sup>

The second cultural norm was levirate marriage. The levirate marriage is a famous paradox. On the one hand, a man is forbidden from having sexual relations with his sister (including half-sisters); the wife of his brother; and two sisters.<sup>17</sup> Yet on the other hand, the Torah requires levirate marriage: in the case when a man dies without having children, his widow is required to marry his brother, although he is allowed to reject the marriage and thus undergo a special ceremony of release.<sup>18</sup>

These rules engender in the rabbinic sources a long and complex series of legal discussions. Some of these discussions, which »think with« extreme hypothetical legal cases in order to elucidate the issues raised by these verses, are clearly farfetched. How often could it have happened, for example, that a man betrothed one of two sisters and forgot which one he betrothed?<sup>19</sup>

It is often difficult, however, to determine precisely how farfetched a particular case might be. »There are four brothers«, one mishnah begins, and »two of them marry two sisters[...]«<sup>20</sup>. If they die childless, what levirate ties and responsibilities exist? The answer to this question is of less concern to me here than the question itself – how outlandish is this case? Is it entirely hypothetical, or might it reflect the fact that whole families, living in close proximity to each other, did develop complex marital relationships? I suspect that scenarios like this were more common than we might suspect.

<sup>16</sup> See SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage*, 189–192.

<sup>17</sup> Lev 18,9.11.16.18.

<sup>18</sup> Deut 25,5–10.

<sup>19</sup> Mishnah Yebamot 2,6.

<sup>20</sup> Mishnah Yebamot 3,1.

The third, and most important, cultural norm was the law of inheritance. Here biblical law – which appears to have been followed by at least some Judeans – was sharply different from Roman law. Whereas Roman law included women in the table of even intestate succession, Judean custom disallowed them. Women who had brothers were not to inherit their parents, even if their parents wanted to include them in the inheritance.<sup>21</sup> The Torah, followed by rabbinic law, allows women to inherit only when they had no brothers.<sup>22</sup>

The Judean desert papyri provide some evidence that while many Jews in the first and second century adhered to this law of succession, daughters who had brothers often were given by other legal means a share of the patrimony. Families primarily used two legal strategies to transfer goods to their daughters, dowries and deeds of gift. Dowries always consisted of moveable goods and were usually relatively modest, whereas deeds of gifts to daughters often consisted of property, sometimes a dwelling or courtyard.<sup>23</sup> We might expect – although there is no definitive evidence either way – that the property that parents transferred to a daughter was worth less than the property that would end up in the hands of her brothers.

It is within this broader context and set of constraints that we must consider the issue of sibling relationships. What do we know about sibling relationships within these Jewish families in both Judea and the Galilee, and what might we reasonably be able to infer?

## 2. REALITY

The law of inheritance, the concentration of a family's wealth in property, and the division of that property into small fields made it likely that even after the death of their father brothers would be involved in each other's lives. Imagine a family of two brothers and a sister. The parents would give some of their wealth, particularly in movable property (e.g., textiles, jewelry, cash) but also perhaps including some land, to their daughter around the time of her wedding. When the father dies, the two brothers inherit the estate, although their father's wife (who may or may not be their mother) has a lien on the estate for the amount of her prestipulated marital settlement. According to the biblical laws of inheritance, the first born son receives a double-portion – in this case, that would mean two-thirds of the estate (after deducting what was owed to their father's wife) goes to

<sup>21</sup> Num 27.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Mishnah Baba Batra 8,2, setting the law of succession: (1) sons and their descendants; (2) daughters and their descendants; (3) brothers and their descendants; (4) paternal uncles. According to Mishnah Ketubot 4,1, if a court fined a man for seducing or raping a woman while the woman's father still lived, and he then died before payment, the payment belongs to her brothers due to inheritance.

<sup>23</sup> SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage*, 97–100. Cf. MORDECHAI AKIVA FRIEDMAN, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine. A Cairo Geniza Study*, Tel-Aviv/New York 1980, 1, 356–391.

the oldest son and one-third to the youngest.<sup>24</sup> In such a case, it would be more probable that the estate could be divided «cleanly», with some fields given outright to the youngest son who might then move to a new household.

Such a «clean» division, however, was not always easy. The composition of the holdings (e.g., unevenly sized or productive fields), the number of brothers (the more brothers the more equitable their inheritance settlement), or the availability and cost of dwellings (should one brother inherit their father's dwelling, the others might not be able to find suitable housing in range of their landholdings) might all complicate such an arrangement. Moreover, I have found no evidence that the law of first-born inheritance was actually practiced.

For better or worse, then, brothers were often stuck with each other. Their joint ownership of a family dwelling might have limited their mobility, often keeping them in close proximity, sometimes even in the same house. One mishnah discusses the case of brothers living together and sharing some, but not all, property and clothing.<sup>25</sup> Another mishnah imagines brothers living in individual apartments within a single courtyard.<sup>26</sup> A papyrus scrap, probably of a census or tax document, suggests that this was not an uncommon occurrence.<sup>27</sup> Familiarity with one's brother is assumed: According to one rabbinic source, a man is expected to know his brother's handwriting, just as he knows the signature of his father and teacher.<sup>28</sup>

Whether or not they lived together, however, many more brothers found themselves in joint business ventures. Here, the documentary record is relatively strong. Several papyri use the conventional phrase «the inheritors of so-and-so» to indicate ownership of a field.<sup>29</sup> A «document of deposit» in Greek from 110 CE appears to deal with a case in which two brothers were in business with each other and one of them died, leaving his share of the business to his son. Rather than liquidate the property and clear the debt, the remaining brother wrote a kind of I.O.U. to his nephew.<sup>30</sup> Papyri explicitly mention brothers owning fields jointly.<sup>31</sup>

Rabbinic sources, too, support the idea that brothers often found themselves jointly owning business property. One source discusses the possibility of

<sup>24</sup> Deut 21,17.

<sup>25</sup> Mishnah Beša 5,3; Tosefta Beša 4,5. Cf. Mishnah Kelim 18,9, on brothers splitting ownership of a single bed. There were, of course, cases in which brothers were able to take their share of the inheritance separately. Cf. Mishnah Nedarim 9,5.

<sup>26</sup> Mishnah Erubin 6,7. It is unclear if this source refers to the brothers eating together at a single table in the courtyard or all being supported by a living father. Even in the latter case, though, the brothers could well decide to stay where they are after their father dies.

<sup>27</sup> JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH/JAMES C. VANDERKAM/MONICA BRADY, *Miscellaneous texts from the Judean Desert*, Oxford/New York 2000, 222–223.

<sup>28</sup> Mishnah Ketubot 2,10.

<sup>29</sup> This phrase appears in Greek and Aramaic. See in XHev/Se 7, 9, 64.

<sup>30</sup> P. Yadin 5.

<sup>31</sup> XHev/Se 50, 62.

brothers dividing a field that they presumably inherited together into individually held plots only to reunite them; most likely they would be more profitable that way.<sup>32</sup> Rabbinic law dealing with the payment of second and poor tithes favors partnerships, explicitly mentioning property jointly owned by brothers.<sup>33</sup> In some agricultural cases, brothers are in fact assumed to be acting in partnership.<sup>34</sup> Special rules that govern brothers serving as witnesses reflect the assumption that they share interests.<sup>35</sup>

The rabbis are also aware of the tensions that such arrangements could create. One mishnah deals with a case in which brothers would like to treat their joint property in different ways:

»Two brothers, one was poor and one was rich, and their father left them a bath-house and an olive press. If [the father] made these [facilities] in order to rent them out [and then collect and use the proceeds], the rent money is split evenly. If [the father] made these [facilities] for their own use, the rich [brother] can say to the poor [brother]: 'Take your slaves and bathe in the bath-house', [or] 'Take your olives and process them in the olive press'«. <sup>36</sup>

The problem is that the poor brother has no assets, like slaves and olives: He wants to rent out the facilities and take his share of the income. The rich brother, though, has more need of the facilities than the money. The mishnah sets a rule – that of original precedent and the intention of their father – to determine the use of the inherited assets. The trope of the rich and poor brothers, and the tensions between them, also appears elsewhere in rabbinic literature.<sup>37</sup>

Brothers could also take responsibility for burying each other, although given the relative paucity of evidence for this practice it seems likely not to have occurred frequently. Most men would be buried – or, as in the case of most of the extant evidence, interred in an ossuary – by their parents, children, or wives. A few ossuary inscriptions, however, that identify a man by his relationship to his brother indicate that in the lack of these relationships, a brother could bury him.<sup>38</sup> In one case we also find a man burying his sister.<sup>39</sup> Presumably, she was left without parents, a husband, or children.

Our evidence is heavily weighted toward brother-brother relationships. We know far less about brother-sister relationships. Rabbinic law gives certain rights to an elder brother over his minor sister when their father has died, but there is

<sup>32</sup> Mishnah Peah 3,5.

<sup>33</sup> Tosefta Maaser Sheni 4,4.

<sup>34</sup> Tosefta Sheviit 6,22.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mishnah Baba Batra 3,4.

<sup>36</sup> Mishnah Baba Batra 10,7.

<sup>37</sup> Sipre on Deuteronomy 48 (L. FINKELSTEIN [Hrsg.], Berlin 1939, 108).

<sup>38</sup> HANNA M. COTTON u.a., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palestinae*, Berlin 2010, Nr. 85, 392, 415, 1358, 1457.

<sup>39</sup> COTTON, *Corpus Inscriptionum*, Nr. 564.

no independent evidence than these rights were ever exercised.<sup>40</sup> Rabbinic law also assumes that brothers could be sexually attracted to their sisters, but it is difficult to know what to make of this assumption.<sup>41</sup> The women who received the bulk of their patrimony as moveable objects were more mobile than their brothers. Women, in fact, often appear to have moved to the house of their husbands and their family estates. Since many women probably married local men, that move may not have been far, but it nonetheless was indicative of the break between a woman and continuing interests in her family's business interests.

The evidence, here, though, indicates wide variability. Brothers and sisters could find themselves in business with each other, or on opposite ends of a legal suit over a property dispute.<sup>42</sup> Josephus' description of Herod's and Salome's relationship, which was so close as to be at times creepy (perhaps intentionally so, written by an author hostile to Herod upon which Josephus drew), is almost surely the result of literary tropes and polemics rather than a reflection of normal behavior. I have argued elsewhere that there is evidence that some Jewish women in Judea and the Galilee maintained some kind of relationship with their parents, even after they married.<sup>43</sup> Some rabbinic sources recommend that a man marry the daughter of his sister, but one scholar has argued that this was, in fact, against the prevalent norm, in which endogamous marriages occurred through one's brother's line. That is, a man's sister and her family was physically and conceptually more distant from him than his brother and his family.<sup>44</sup>

About sister-sister relationships, we know even less. Neither papyri nor epigraphic evidence from this period document any relations between sisters. If brothers from one family married sisters from another family, and the brothers were in partnership or lived locally, we might expect those sisters to maintain some sort of relationship. The sources, however, remain silent about what kind of relationship they might have had.

In this context it is intriguing to consider Jesus' relationship with his siblings. Jesus likely had siblings. According to Mark 6,3, Jesus' neighbors have trouble taking seriously his teaching in the synagogue: »Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses [=Joseph] and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?«<sup>45</sup> Jesus' sisters, as is typical in much literature from antiquity, are erased from the historical record; we never even learn their names. The brothers, though, fare slightly better. The New Testament mentions them only a couple times lumped together under the

<sup>40</sup> Mishnah Yebamot 13,1–5.

<sup>41</sup> Tosefta Qiddushin 5,10.

<sup>42</sup> XHev/Se 12; 63.

<sup>43</sup> MICHAEL L. SATLOW, *Jewish In-Laws, the View from Antiquity*, in: CHRISTOPHE BADEL/CHRISTIAN SETTIPANI (Hrsg.), *Les stratégies familiales dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris 2012, 265–277.

<sup>44</sup> ADIEL SCHREMER, *Kinship Terminology and Endogamous Marriage in the Mishnaic and Talmud Periods*, in: *Zion* 60 (1995), 5–35 (in Hebrew).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mat 13,55.



general designation of the »brothers« (John 7,13; Acts 1,14; 1Cor 9,5). About one of his brothers, James, we appear to know slightly more. According to Acts, James served at least for a time as a leader among the emerging Christians in Jerusalem, on the one hand relaxing the requirements of Mosaic law on the Gentiles while on the other convolutedly deciding that some requirements do indeed apply to them.<sup>46</sup> Paul mentions having met him and Josephus describes his execution at the hands of a run-away high priest, Ananus, probably around 62 CE.<sup>47</sup> Starting in the third century the Letter of James was attributed to Jesus' brother, but it is unlikely to be authentic, and even if it is, the Letter of James tells us little of historical value.

Jesus and James would have had a different kind of relationship from the siblings discussed above because there was no property at stake. Their father was (if the Gospels are to be trusted) a craftsman, which would have made him both less wealthy and more mobile than landowners. The very economics of their family created a household in which siblings were less entangled in each other's lives, and thus Jesus' denigration of biological kinship was perhaps less radical than it initially appears.

At the same time, though, James clearly gained prominence among Jesus' early followers precisely due to his biological relationship to his brother. There should be nothing surprising in the fact that he followed his brother and that, following Jesus' death, he claimed for himself a privileged position as the interpreter and bearer of Jesus' will. Nor is there anything surprising about the fact that many people would have taken James' claim seriously, if only because he was related by blood to Jesus. Biological kinship mattered, and to understand how and why we must turn to the ideological construction of kinship relationships in ancient Jewish households.

### 3. IDEOLOGY AND FICTIVE KINSHIP

Ancient sources insist that biological brothers had a special bond that demanded loyalty, love, and affection from each other. Nowhere in classical sources is this trope more coherently developed than in Plutarch's tract, »On Brotherly Love«. Like the love of children for their parents, the love of brothers, Plutarch claims, is natural: »[M]ost friendships« he writes, »are in reality shadows and imitations of that first friendship which Nature implanted in children toward parents and in brothers toward brothers«<sup>48</sup>. Nature models friendship, as it were, through the affection that we naturally feel toward those related to us by blood.

Even Plutarch, with his highly idealistic portrayal of brotherly love, recognizes that real life sometimes creates obstacles to its realization. In real life,

<sup>46</sup> Acts 12,17; 15,13–21.

<sup>47</sup> Gal 1,19; JOSEPHUS, Ant. 20.200.

<sup>48</sup> PLUTARCH, On Brotherly Love 3 (Moralia 479D; translation LCL).

Plutarch notes, outsiders sometimes attempt to undermine this bond. Brothers, however, must be careful to resist these attempts. Plutarch brings for an example the case of a woman jealous of her brother-in-law's success: »We should be on our guard against the pernicious talk of relatives, of members of our household, and sometimes even of a wife who joins in the rest in challenging our ambition by saying: ›Your brother carries all before him and is admired and courted, but you are not visited by anybody and enjoy no distinction at all.‹ ›Not so‹ a sensible man would reply, ›I have a brother who is highly esteemed, and most of his influence is mine to share«<sup>49</sup>. According to Plutarch, the family is a single team, buffeted on many sides by those wanting to tear it apart for their own benefit.

Plutarch's contemporary Josephus too promotes the idea of brotherly love. Hence, in his retelling of the biblical tale of Joseph, Josephus writes of his brothers that they »bore themselves as though it were some stranger who was to receive the benefits indicated by these dreams, and not a brother, whose fortunes it was but nature that they should share, becoming his partners, as in parentage, so likewise in prosperity«<sup>50</sup>. The passage could have come straight from Plutarch: brothers should understand themselves as sharing in each other's fortunes and misfortunes. Drawing on the same trope, Josephus writes that »Antipater [...] became an object of intolerable abhorrence to the nation; for all knew that it was he who had contrived all the calumnies against his brothers«<sup>51</sup>. Josephus singles out those who kill their brothers as particularly wicked and impious.<sup>52</sup> Herod pleads for one of his brothers on account of the »natural affection« that unites brothers.<sup>53</sup>

The expectation that brothers would favor each other also forms the backbone of Josephus' creative retelling of the story of Korach's rebellion in Numbers 16–18. According to Josephus, but found nowhere in the biblical account, Korach specifically accuses Moses of preferring his brother Aaron as high priest due to his relationship with him. Moses vociferously rejects this accusation.<sup>54</sup>

In Josephus, these and many other expressions of the value of brotherly affection are clearly part of a trope. Did real brothers or siblings, though, really feel and act upon such affection? Josephus himself provides an intriguing example of the sometimes uneasy relationship between the ideal and the real. Almost in passing, Josephus mentions that he had a brother, Matthias.<sup>55</sup> As this brother had the same name as their father, he was most likely the eldest son. Matthias appears only once more in Josephus's narrative. After the fall of Jerusalem, Josephus tells us that he secured amnesty for many of his acquaintances in the

<sup>49</sup> PLUTARCH, On Brotherly Love 16 (Moralia 486D-E, translation LCL).

<sup>50</sup> JOSEPHUS, Ant. 2.17 (translation LCL).

<sup>51</sup> JOSEPHUS, Bel. 1.552 (translation LCL).

<sup>52</sup> JOSEPHUS, Ant. 9.95; 11.298–299.

<sup>53</sup> JOSEPHUS, Bel. 1.507.

<sup>54</sup> JOSEPHUS, Ant. 4.14–15, 27.

<sup>55</sup> JOSEPHUS, Vita 8.

city, including his brother Matthias.<sup>56</sup> Josephus never tells us about Matthias' activities during the war against Rome, or his feelings toward or relationship with his oldest brother. One wonders if the feelings of affection between the two did not quite approach Josephus' own ideal.

While our sources most frequently mention the ideal relationship between brothers, they also occasionally assume a similar relationship between brothers and sisters. One midrash, for example, asks why Shimon and Levi are singled out as Dinah's brothers in Genesis 34,25: Are not all of Jacob's sons her brothers? The answer is that by avenging her rape, Shimon and Levi »put out their selves on account of their sister«<sup>57</sup>. That is, because they showed exceptional devotion to her, Scripture rewarded them by referring to them, and not the others, as Dinah's brothers.

This ideal of brotherly love, as well as its application to fictive kinship, can also be seen in rabbinic sources. One rabbinic story, for example, tells of two brothers in the temple who raced to perform the sacrifice. Just as one brother reached the lamb, the other stabbed him. After the event, the storyteller continues, a rabbi stood in the temple and addressed, »our brothers, the house of Israel«. One of the points of this story was to reinforce the idea that the members of Israel are as bound to and responsible for each other as brothers.<sup>58</sup>

Out of the welter of possible issues and tensions that these sources could emphasize in sibling – particularly brother-brother – relationships, they focused most strongly on love, affection, and solidarity. As argued above, these relationships were rather more complex and centered primarily on concrete issues of property. Why, then, do the ideologues (except for Jesus or his biographers!) so heavily emphasize the affective and obligatory side of these relationships?

I would like to suggest that this ideology was not simply a classical trope that was mindlessly picked up and used by Jews in antiquity, but that it was also useful to those Jews. When brothers who jointly owned property that was unprofitable to divide quarreled, the results were potentially disastrous. Sibling bonds then, as now, are usually weaker than parent-child bonds. It was in society's interest to strengthen those bonds in order to maintain the stability of households. As in many unindustrialized countries today, »sibling relationships are of fundamental importance in determining family functioning and the family's adaptation to the larger society, with sibling cooperation essential to attain marital and economic goals«<sup>59</sup>. A strong ideology that reinforced solidarity between siblings in this environment helped to take the edge off of the inevitable conflicts that otherwise threatened the attainment of these goals.

<sup>56</sup> JOSEPHUS, Vita 419.

<sup>57</sup> Mekhilta d'R. Ishmael, Shira 10 (JACOB Z. LAUTERBACH [Hrsg.], Philadelphia 1949, 221).

<sup>58</sup> Tosefta Shevuot 1,4. Cf. Sipre on Deuteronomy 322 (FINKELSTEIN, 371) for a case of non-Israelite asserting »as if« they were brothers of the Israelites.

<sup>59</sup> VICTOR G. CICIRELLI, Sibling Relationships in Cross-Cultural Perspectives, in: Journal of Marriage and Family 56 (1994), 16.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite Plutarch's and Josephus' moralizing, sibling relationships were (and are) not universal and abstract. Within a given society, the norm depends on several interrelated, concrete and material factors, and even then we should expect wide variations. This paper has attempted to tease out some of these norms for Jews living in Judea and the Galilee in the first two centuries of this era. Tracking the extant evidence, I have dealt here primarily with those Jews who held most of their wealth in land. Families with more liquid assets – as well as Jewish families that did not adhere to the Torah's and rabbinic laws of inheritance – might well have looked quite different, with more distance between siblings, particularly brothers.

This, then, perhaps obliquely can help us to make sense of both Jesus' and Josephus' relationships to their siblings. Jesus appears to have come from a family that supported itself through trade rather than land. It also might have been more mobile than many families. Both of these conditions might lead to weaker relationships between siblings. So too, while Josephus would gain estates from his Roman patrons, his earlier wealth may have come primarily from his connection to the Jerusalem priesthood. He maintained, of course, a relationship with his older brother, but they would have been less entangled in each other's lives than if they were in business together.

In closing, it is worth making one final observation. It is interesting to note that very specific material conditions can act in concert with more universal norms to create distinct family structures. In this case, the combination of landholding in non-easily divisible parcels with a law of succession that excludes women in most cases and divides the property almost equally among brothers and the law of levirate marriage would serve to strengthen ties between brothers, even as it potentially weakened ties between brothers and sisters or between sisters. This, of course, does not mean that brothers, even business partners, necessarily loved each other. But then again, what does love have to do with it?

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