CHAPTER 8

Family Memory in the Early Modern Age

The Case of Tuscany

Family history has been the object of increasing attention of historians and literary historians over these last thirty years. A new course of study began about thirty years ago when Italian family books were highlighted and considered an autonomous genre, and then scholars from differing fields both in team and individually have attempted to analyze their structure and function, the motives of their authors, and characteristics of their social contexts.¹

Family memory writings (the family as receiver, the sense of the family as principal inspiration) are a type of source which can give us indications about the most varying aspects of social, cultural, and mental history of an age, allowing us to know details of material life, of family groups’ survival strategies, both individual and social. They are in close relation to the process of formation and evolution of the family identity, in relation to its tradition and context, they express the consciousness of the writer’s and his group’s social position, constitute an indicator and are sometimes at the beginning of, those same forms of representation of social life: it is no accident that they are produced mainly in the city, and especially those cities with an autonomous tradition of political representation.

Recently there have been additions to the field that studies these texts, regarding equally significant types for the understanding of social realities of sectors otherwise little represented in traditional sources: the expressions of popular autobiography studied by Amelang, or the so-called Ego-Dokumente according to Schulze and Dekker, documents of varying type that can supply information about personal events or the history of their authors or protagonists.²


Just as greater and closer attention has been given even by Italian historians to autobiographical and in general to memory writings.\textsuperscript{3} These ones, however, even considering, differently from the past, also unpublished sources and those not intended for publication (overlooked at least initially by theoreticians of autobiography such as Lejeune)\textsuperscript{4} are still dealing with different types of sources, where the individual memoir and the intimate diary prevail over the family view, in the wake of the autobiographical model that some say found its paradigm in the 18th century in Rousseau’s *Confessions*.

In any case this “new course” has certainly produced results both in terms of conferences and in original publications, up until very recent times.\textsuperscript{5} Nevertheless one aspect, even in the coordinated projects, has been left behind: that of a systematic census of the unpublished sources (and consequently also their equally systematic and complete evaluation). Begun with enthusiasm by a group of young volunteer scholars in mid-1980s, it has produced partial results for some Italian regions where there was less material or there were more scholars, but it has remained in a nearly embryonal state from the point of view of quantity in the area of absolutely greatest concentration of family memory writings: Tuscany.\textsuperscript{6} Here, to give an idea, even just the census of memory texts printed wholly or partially from the 14th–15th century revealed 330 texts, while in other places this type accounts for only some dozens for all epochs.\textsuperscript{7}

In this region the early modern period has been especially overlooked by scholars, who have tended to concentrate primarily on the earlier manifestations of the family book (end 13th–15th centuries).\textsuperscript{8} In fact a closer study of the centuries 16th–18th shows a great continuity with the earlier period as regards the tradition and the function of these writings, whose production (judging from the surviving sources) stayed at constant levels notwithstanding a series of long term processes (the diffusion of parish registers after the Council of Trent; the formalization of recognition of noble status) that tended to re-dimension their practical applications.

The project carried out by the research unit of Trent, which I have coordinated, was intended to gain a more exact recognition of these sources and

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\item[5] See now also the dossier *De la autobiografia a los ego-documentos*.
\item[6] See on this Ciappelli, “I libri di famiglia a Firenze.”
\item[8] See texts on Florence cited at note 1.
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