Christiane Klapisch-Zuber:
“Tree of Consanguinity”

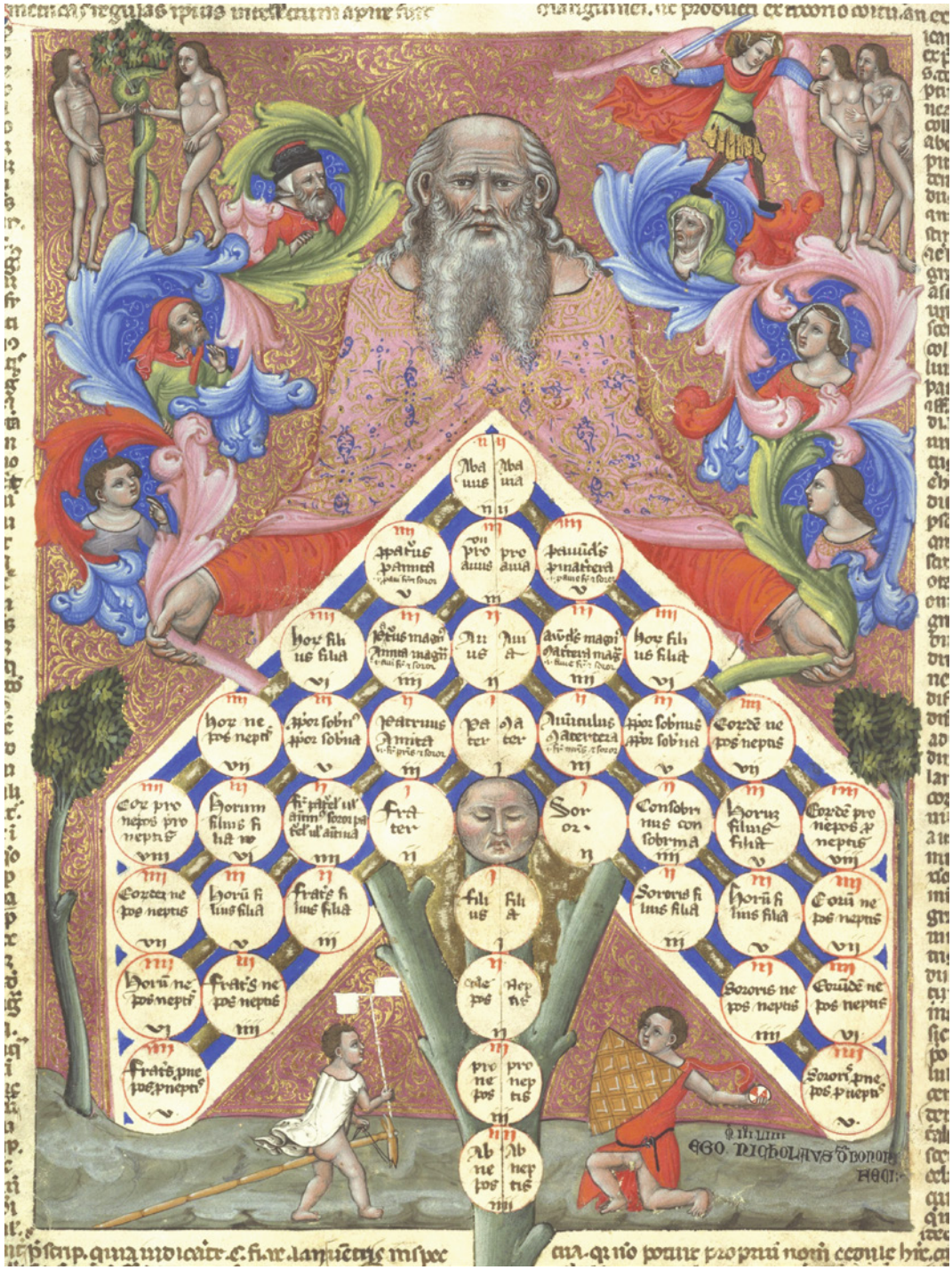
in: Eric Hounshell, Ruth Amstutz (eds.):

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SHADOW OF THE TREE

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TREE OF CONSANGUINITY Avoidance of Incest



Detail from Niccolò da Bologna, "Arbor consanguinitatis", in: Giovanni di Andrea, *Novella in libros Decretalium*, Bologna (1354), Salzburg: Bibliotek der Erzabtei Sankt Peter, ms. a XII, 10, f° 118r.

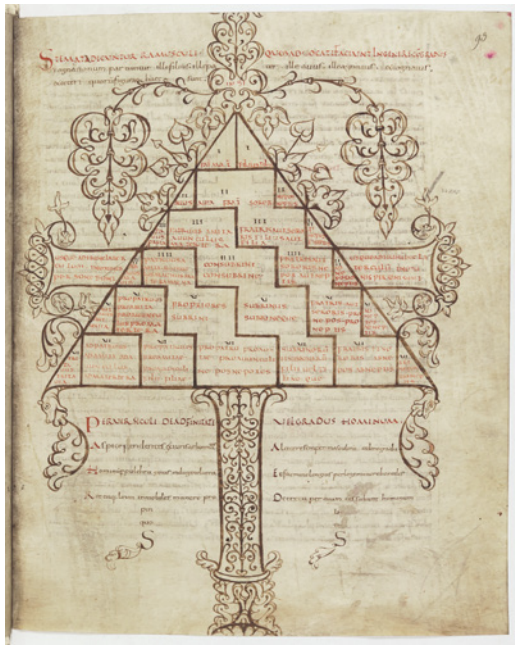
The image by Niccolò da Bologna brings together a rich visual and symbolic heritage. Niccolò da Bologna was a renowned miniaturist who illuminated, in the second half of

the 14th century, treatises on law and liturgy, devotional books, books for corporatist groups, and classical literary works.
The author of the book where this image appeared, Giovanni di Andrea (ca. 1271-1348), was a famous Bolognese jurist and teacher described by his contemporaries as the "Fountain and Trumpet of Law" (*Fons et tuba juris*). Linked to the power of his city, he issued a number of expert opinions on behalf of the Bolognese commune and acted as mediator in conflicts between it and the university. He is author of the *Commentaries on the Decretals* (the miniature is taken from one of these, published after his death) and, among other works, a *Summa de consanguinitate ou Lectura arboris consanguinitatis*.

At the center of this superb, iconographically layered fourteenth-century miniature by Niccolò da Bologna (ca. 1325–1403) is a consanguinity table, a table of kinship positions, and the terms designating them, to which are added Roman numerals indicating the degree of kinship with "Ego," here represented by a round face. The table allows the cleric who consults it to prevent incestuous situations below the limit of consanguineous kinship, which was then fixed at four degrees.
The role of guarantor of incest prohibition is occupied in the image from Niccolò da Bologna by a bearded patriarch holding the branches of the tree that springs up from the bottom of the painting. The branches end in scrolls and volutes where characters representing the "stages of life" are placed. Thus, at the bottom of the miniature we can see children playing age-appropriate games, while from bottom to top the scrolls successively carry the busts of the representatives of youth, adulthood, and old age, with men on the left (the most prestigious heraldic position) and women on the right. These figures also refer to the moral hierarchy of virgins, husbands, and widowers favored by the Church. Finally, in the upper corners of his miniature, the artist harks back to the origin and justification of the laws regulating marriage: on the left the Temptation and Original Sin, on the right the Expulsion from Paradise.

TREE OF CONSANGUINITY Figures of Presentation

The miniature by Niccolò da Bologna combines numerous visual and symbolic antecedents. In the ninth century, some of the characteristics of a real tree suggested by the word "*arbor*," which had been used to designate such diagrams since antiquity, were soon incorporated into this picture. In the Byzantine tradition, rather than a tree the emphasis was on a "figure of presentation," a man clasping the ends of the table with his arms, in the then-current seventh degree.[1] The figure shown here is in turn endowed with attributes showing him as Christ, a crowned sovereign, or a wise man – all guarantors of the laws instituting matrimonial prohibitions.



"Arbor consanguinitatis", in: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* (9th c.), Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Latin 10292, f° 93.

This ninth-century edition of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* incorporated characteristics of a real tree which had been suggested by the word *"arbor"* that had been used to refer to such diagrams since antiquity.



"Arbor iuris", in: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* (11th c.), Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Latin 2169, f° 195.

Instead of a tree, this eleventh-century Byzantine edition of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae,* inspired by Byzantine images, deployed a "figure of presentation" who holds the table. Other Western images of this type display qualities of Christ, a crowned sovereign, or a wise man.

The overabundance of themes that Niccolò da Bologna uses in his miniature is exceptional; his image recapitulates the course of visual representation that grew richer over time, from a simple graphic stemma to a composition with multiple references, primarily framed as trees. One can imagine a priest using it as mnemonic aid for his preaching, thus giving yet another dimension of *ars memoriae* to the centuries-old form of *arbores consanguinitatis.*

Notes

1 Evelyne Patlagean: "Une représentation byzantine de la parenté et ses origines occidentales", in: *L'Homme* 6 (1966), pp. 59–91.

Further Readings

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber: *L'arbre des familles*, Paris: Edition de la Martinière (2003).

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber: "The Genesis of the Family Tree", in: *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 4 (1991), pp. 105–129.

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber: *Stammbäume: eine illustrierte Geschichte der Ahnenkunde*, Munich: Knesebeck (2004).