

Dorota Guzowska
Uniwersytet w Białymstoku
guzowska@uwb.edu.pl

Philippe Ariès' theory on parental indifference and its reception in Polish historiography

Two decades after family and childhood were 'discovered' in the 1960s by historians, Lawrence Stone, a British historian, an author of a classic *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, published a book *The Past and the Present*, in which he traced some major developments in the then historiography and explored some of the ideas of several American, English and French historians writing about family life, religion, law, education, old age and death between the 16th and 18th centuries. In the book, he devoted a considerable amount of attention to the work of a Frenchman, a Philippe Ariès, the author of *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, published in France in 1960 and two years later translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood*. However, before Stone commenced discussing Ariès' ideas, he took the liberty of making several remarks about the author himself and his personal background which, as Stone believed, was of fundamental importance in shaping Ariès' view of the past. He began unceremoniously by stating that "Mr Ariès is not a professional historian, but a man who earns his living as the head of an information center in a research institute on tropical fruit. Although he studied history in the usual way at the Sorbonne, he failed his *agrégation* in 1943, and abandoned a career as a professional historian" (STONE 1981 : 245). Then, in a similar tone, Stone explained that Ariès' Catholicism and his nationalistic and royalist views were responsible for making him a "prophet without much honour in his own country" and "the odd man out in French historiography" (STONE 1981 : 245). Several sentences later, Stone admitted, somewhat reluctantly, that in spite of all the shortcomings of its author, *Centuries of Childhood* had an enormous impact on British and American historiography. He wrote that "it has been one of

the most influential works of history of the 1960s, stimulating an outburst of research into family history which is now in full flood in America and England” (STONE 1981 : 245). Elsewhere in his text, Stone called *Centuries of Childhood* “a pioneer work, erudite, imaginative, and inventive” and thus deserving its “dazzling success” although it contained several major errors and omissions (STONE 1981 : 222).

Ariès claimed that from the Middle Ages to the 16th century the concept of childhood did not exist. By the “concept” of childhood he meant an awareness of what distinguishes children from adults. He maintained that in European families the world of children was not separated from the world of adults and only in the 17th century were children “discovered” as a distinct social category, possessing unique needs and requiring appropriate, i.e. different forms of treatment (ARIÈS 1962 : 38, 50, 71). The two factors which, allegedly, led to the “discovery of childhood” were the emergence of the concept of the conjugal family, unknown, as Ariès claimed, in the Middle Ages (1962 : 353), and the rise of day-schools, which separated children from adults (1962 : 164). Following George Duby’s argumentation, Ariès saw the reason for the rise of nuclear family in the growing authority of the state in the early modern period, which weakened the need for keeping blood ties tight (1962 : 355). Such a new family centered itself on a child and ties between parents and their young children became stronger and more affectionate (ARIÈS 1962 : 369, 380).

A very critical attitude Lawrence Stone took towards Philippe Ariès’ methodology and interpretation of sources did not preclude him from sharing some of the French author’s views on childhood and parent-child relations. In the *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Ariès claimed that people did not attach emotionally to their children in order to save themselves some of the pain caused by the little ones’ all too frequent premature deaths (ARIÈS 1962 : 38-39). Very high child mortality was to make parents emotionally immune to their babies’ deaths. As Ariès stated “The general feeling was, and for a long time remained, that one had several children in order to keep just a few”, which resulted in a certain indifference of parents towards their offspring (ARIÈS 1962 : 38). Lawrence Stone, in his monumental work *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, referred to the same demographic factor accounting for people’s unwillingness to build deep emotional bonds with their children. He was even more straightforward than Ariès when he wrote that “to preserve their mental stability, parents were obliged to limit the degree of their psychological involvement with their

infant children”; and that “high mortality rates made deep relationships very imprudent” (STONE 1977 : 70, 117). Then he added that as child mortality decreased, it became “worth while to lavish profound affection upon them...” (STONE 1977 : 680). Several years later, in *The Past and the Present*, he repeated his bleak diagnosis of the past society:

Everything suggests that in the past most parents have treated their children as inevitable by-products of sexual pleasure, sometimes bitterly unwelcome, sometimes barely tolerated, sometimes useful to be exploited economically, and sometimes cherished and loved. Most frequently, however, the response seems to have been one of relative indifference. The cruel truth [...] may be that most parents in history have not been much involved with their children, and have not cared much about them.

(STONE 1981 : 227)

The thesis of parental indifference towards young children's lives and deaths proved to be the most controversial facet of Ariès' book and one of the most contentious views held by Lawrence Stone. Although it attracted some followers among British and French scholars (DELUMEAU 1987; BADINTER 1981; SHORTER 1976), it has then been challenged by subsequent generations of family historians both in France and in the United Kingdom (HOULBROOKE 1984; MACFARLANE 1986; MOUNT 1982; ORME 2001; POLLOCK 1983; RICHÉ /ALEXANDRE-BIDON 1994; WRIGHTSON 1982).

The aim of this article is to present how Ariès' book and particularly his theory of parental indifference has been received in Poland. The works of Polish historians discussed here have been placed in chronological order, which will enable the reader to trace the evolution in the approach of Polish historians to Philippe Ariès and his work.

In the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s a number of Polish researchers, inspired by their French colleagues from the *Annales* school, embarked on a study of family in old Poland. Their attention tended to focus mainly on genealogical, demographic, economic and legal aspects of the subject. Nevertheless, some works contained also brief paragraphs touching upon the problem of emotional, and not only legal or economic, relations between family members. Only in the 1990s and in the 21st century did Polish historians begin a more systematic in-depth study of emotional relations between family members, the situation and role of women, and the position of children.

A pioneering study which fell within a research field of family history was Maria Koczerska's *Rodzina Szlachecka w Polsce Późnego Średniowiecza*, published in 1975. Koczerska focused her attention on demographic, economic, legal and social aspects of family life of Polish gentry. She devoted six short paragraphs to emotional relations between parents and their children (KOCZERSKA 1975 : 123-124). She did not mention the work of Philippe Ariès; Lawrence Stone's book was still to be written. Her interpretation of Polish sources was very optimistic. She wrote about "abundant evidence of parental love" and "strong feelings" parents had for their children (KOCZERSKA 1975 : 124). In the chapter about death in family, she mentioned legal, economic and social consequences of the death of parents, but did not discuss either the impact of children's death on family life or the emotional approach of mothers and fathers to their offspring's deaths (KOCZERSKA 1975 : 157-183).

Maria Bogucka, writing in 1983 about 16th- and 17th-century families in Polish towns, similarly focused on family size, structure and economic functions, but she also mentioned briefly some aspects of the emotional side of family life. Without referring directly to either Ariès or Stone, she came to conclusions that to a considerable extent mirrored their theses of parental indifference. She wrote that emotional ties between Polish parents and children were very weak, which stemmed from high infant mortality and the fact that children left their parents very early in life, as they were sent to other households for service or apprenticeship. Bogucka claimed that infants in particular were treated with almost complete indifference because in most families they would come and go so frequently that some absent-minded men often did not even remember the exact number of children they fathered throughout their lives (BOGUCKA 1983 : 503). Interestingly, Bogucka revised some of her conclusions in her book *Staropolskie obyczaje w XVI–XVII wieku* (BOGUCKA 1994). Her views presented in this work will be discussed in greater detail below.

In the first paragraph of her article about children in medieval Polish culture, Beata Wojciechowska expressed her decided disagreement with Ariès' statement that medieval children were perceived as miniaturized adults and that their age-specific needs were not recognized (WOJCIECHOWSKA 1991 : 5). Further, writing about various aspects of medieval child-rearing, Wojciechowska ventured a suggestion that frequent occurrence of the motif of maternal breast-feeding in medieval chronicles, hagiographies and religious songs may be indicative not only of medieval people's understanding of the importance of this practice, but it may also prove that they were aware

of the significance of a spiritual relationship that breast-feeding helped to establish between a mother and her child (WOJCIECHOWSKA 1991 : 7). Turning to iconographical sources, similar to those employed by Philippe Ariès in his research, Wojciechowska drew quite different conclusions. She analyzed a number of medieval images of Jesus as an infant. Not only did she show that in the 13th to 15th centuries Jesus was presented as a cheerful baby rather than a small adult, but she also noticed that medieval representations of Jesus emphasized a strong emotional bond between the child and his mother, which may have reflected the general attitude of medieval parents towards their infant children (WOJCIECHOWSKA 1991 : 7-8).

In 1992, Kalina Bartnicka, writing about children in the light of Polish 18th-century memoirs, began her article with a reference to Philippe Ariès and his theory of gradual change in parents-child relations. Further in the article, however, she did not appear to have noticed many signs of improvement in the attitude of Polish parents towards their children's emotional and physical needs, which, according to Ariès and Stone, did take place in France and in England in the 17th and 18th centuries. Bartnicka wrote about Polish parents' indifference, especially towards younger children and found an explanation for such a state in high child mortality combined with wars and political instability in Poland at that time, which, as she maintained, resulted in the fact that parents became emotionally numb (BARTNICKA 1992 : 42-43). In her text, she emphasized also the lack of intimacy in family relations, great emotional detachment, formality and coldness of contacts (BARTNICKA 1992 : 56).

In an article about the attitudes to children in old Poland, published in 1995, Janusz Tazbir concentrated on the application of corporal punishment to the upbringing of children at home and in formalized education, but he tackled briefly some other aspects of childhood as well. He referred to Philippe Ariès twice in his article. One was an indirect, but approving reference to the French author's well-known conclusion that since children's faces, bodies and clothes in portraits painted before the 16th century looked like miniaturized faces, bodies and clothes of adults, it proves that children and childhood were not treated as autonomous, separate from the world of adults (TAZBIR 1995 : 157). Writing about the emotional attachment of early modern Polish parents to their little children, he pointed out that a historian analyzing sources faces a difficult task of drawing balanced conclusions from materials which, on the one hand, reveal parents' indifference, lack of concern, and sometimes even cruelty towards their children, and, on the other,

testify to other parents' occasional overindulgence in their babies, excessive affection and very strong connection between parents and their children from the very moment of birth (TAZBIR 1995 : 163-164). Although Tazbir avoided giving an unequivocal answer to the question whether family relations in old Poland were dominated by sternness or by affection, he emphatically stated that the time between the 16th and 18th century definitely was not the time of parental indifference (TAZBIR 1995 : 164).

A general essay on the concept and experience of childhood in the European Middle Ages was written in 1998 by Tarzycjusz Buliński. Throughout the text, he frequently referred to *L'enfant et la vie familiale*, calling it a "revolutionary book" (BULIŃSKI 1998 : 88). Despite being aware of reservations many historians have had about Ariès' work, Buliński maintained that its major conclusions, especially those concerning the lack of distinction between the world of adults and the world of children, ought to be sustained (BULIŃSKI 1998 : 89). Similarly to Ariès, Buliński claimed that childhood and adulthood were not defined by biological factors, but by social relations. He explained that in the Middle Ages, childhood was understood as a state of being dependent and lasted to the moment an individual was ready to take his/her social role, which was only loosely linked to the fact of belonging to a certain age group (BULIŃSKI 1998 : 96). Buliński devoted a separate chapter in his article to the problem of parental indifference. He agreed with Philippe Ariès that medieval parents were very reluctant to build sentimental relationships with their children and were unlikely to show them much affection. To explain such attitudes, Buliński cited a classic argument of high child mortality, but he referred also to social norms which warned adults against spoiling children by treating them affectionately (BULIŃSKI 1998 : 97-99).

A very different approach to Philippe Ariès and his thesis of parental indifference was adopted by Zenon Hubert Nowak. Unlike all other authors cited here, who focused their interests on the early modern period and on the situation in Polish lands, Nowak wrote about children in the Middle Ages in the lands of the Teutonic Order in Prussia. Another element that distinguishes Nowak's text from all other discussed here is that its author, when discussing the thesis of medieval parental indifference, made a reference not only to Ariès but also to Lawrence Stone (NOWAK 1998 : 104). In his article, Nowak aimed at proving that although in the 15th century children were indeed active participants in the world of adult work and entertainment, they were nevertheless treated differently from adults. He also emphasized

in his text that the thesis of parental indifference can hardly be defended in the light of available sources.

The first decade of the 21st century saw an increase in scholarly interest in childhood and parent-child relations in the past. At the end of his essay on 'post-Ariès' Anglo-American historiography of medieval childhood, Witold Brzeziński concluded that further disproving Philippe Ariès' theses by Polish researchers was futile because it had already been done in the West. Instead, as Brzeziński postulates, Polish historians ought to focus their attention on more detailed studies of available sources to demonstrate not only how medieval childhood in Poland did not conform to Ariès' model, but more importantly, what it was simply like (BRZEZIŃSKI 2002).

Shortly before the appearance of Brzeziński's text, Dorota Żołądz-Strzelczyk published her book *Dziecko w dawnej Polsce* (ŻOŁĄDZ-STRZELCZYK 2002a), which was, to a very large extent, a pre-emptive answer to Brzeziński's postulate. In the book, she gave a detailed description of various practices surrounding pregnancy and delivery of a child, its christening, nursing, clothing, feeding and educating. She devoted separate chapters to illnesses, death and child abandonment. Żołądz-Strzelczyk maintained that in old Poland childhood ended between the seventh and tenth year of life. Unlike Philippe Ariès, however, she did not claim that the worlds of adults and children were indistinguishable. Using similar categories of sources as the ones employed by Philippe Ariès, she arrived at completely different conclusions. For example, referring to iconographic representations of Polish children wearing 'adult' clothes, she wrote that it is not correct to argue on their basis that children were treated as little adults. She explained that formal clothes, emulating adult fashion, were worn by children only on special occasions or when they posed for portraits (ŻOŁĄDZ-STRZELCZYK 2002a : 152, 160, 166). At the same time, however, she was not utterly critical of the thesis of parental indifference to newborn babies. Writing about how parents in old Poland dealt with the death of their children, she asserted that reactions varied from an individual to an individual and were, additionally, conditioned by culturally accepted patterns of behaviour. Some parents, as she claimed, grieved deeply over their loss whereas others accepted children's deaths as "ordinary". Death was so frequent, Żołądz-Strzelczyk continued, that many people eventually lost their ability to feel pain. Here Żołądz-Strzelczyk appeared hesitant about concluding that Ariès' thesis ought to be totally rejected although she postulated that it should be, indeed, largely modified (ŻOŁĄDZ-STRZELCZYK 2002a : 262).

In her other text, Dorota Żołądz-Strzelczyk discussed how the understanding of the concept of childhood changed over time in Poland and other European countries (ŻOŁĄDŹ-STRZELCZYK 2002b). Writing about a legal procedure of *sublatio* that is an act of acknowledging a new-born child by a father by lifting it, she noticed that the time between the child's birth and *sublatio* was not precisely determined. Without referring directly to Ariès or Stone, she repeated after them, in her attempt to explain this imprecision, that it may have resulted from parents' indifferent attitude to their new-born babies. She wrote, "Parents did not attach themselves to their children because the babies could pass away any time..." (ŻOŁĄDŹ-STRZELCZYK 2002b : 18).

The death of a child in the culture of old Poland is the subject matter of the article by Hanka Żerek-Kleszcz. She began her text with a quotation from Philippe Ariès, who claimed that parental indifference to children's death was "a direct and inevitable consequence of the demography of the period" (in ŻEREK-KLESZCZ 2002 : 285). In her article, Żerek-Kleszcz posed a question whether the thesis of alleged parental indifference could be sustained in the light of evidence she found in 17th and 18th-century Polish sources. The analysis of poems, epitaphs, coffin portraits, diaries and *silva rerum* allowed Żerek-Kleszcz to conclude that while it would be a gross overgeneralization to state that in old Poland there was one model of reaction to children's deaths, available sources provide sufficient evidence against the thesis of parental indifference (ŻEREK-KLESZCZ 2002 : 299).

Małgorzata Delimata's book *Dziecko w Polsce średniowiecznej*, which came out in 2004, complemented Dorota Żołądz-Strzelczyk's work on children in old Poland. Unlike Żołądz-Strzelczyk, however, Delimata was more firm in her disagreement with Philippe Ariès' ideas. One of the major aims of her research was to disprove Ariès' theses of the lack of awareness of children's specificity and of the lack of emotional ties between family members. Since she built much of her own argumentation around Ariès' theses, she discussed Ariès' book in greater detail instead of just laconically mentioning the fact of its existence, as it had been and would be done later by other Polish authors. Delimata is also distinguishable because she is one of only two among all scholars quoted here, who made a reference not only to Ariès, but also to *The Family, Sex and Marriage* by Lawrence Stone (DELIMATA 2004 : 11-12; NOWAK 1998 : 104). In her book she explored demographical and legal aspects of childhood in medieval Poland, but she wrote also about childcare practices and ceremonies and rituals associated

with this phase of human life. She devoted a separate chapter to the issue of parent-child relations. She asserted that although available sources allow only for very tentative conclusions, many of them testify to the existence of strong emotional ties between parents and their offspring, regardless of children's age (DELIMATA 2004 : 130).

The subject of parent-child relations has always attracted the attention of historians studying customs and traditions in old Poland. The book by Jan Stanisław Bystroń, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek XVI–XVIII*, published for the first time in 1932, was for many decades the only work of this kind in Polish historiography. Its author died in 1964. In 1962, i.e. two years after the appearance of Philippe Ariès' book, the second edition of Bystroń's monumental work was prepared for publication. It is not known whether Bystroń was at that time aware of the existence of Ariès' work, but his remarks on the indifferent attitude of parents to children's death, which he had made as early as in 1932, when the first edition of his book came out, are strikingly similar to Ariès' findings (BYSTROŃ 1976, 2 : 148).

Another classic work on the customs and traditions in old Poland is the one by Zbigniew Kuchowicz (1975). His bibliography did not include Philippe Ariès' book on childhood, but similarly to Bystroń, Kuchowicz did not have any doubts that parents in the past treated their children with emotional reserve, coldness and formality, and did not concern themselves much with their offspring's premature deaths. Interestingly, Kuchowicz acknowledged the existence of some evidence testifying to deep and inconsolable sorrow after children's death, but he dismissed it as untypical, an exception to the rule of general parental indifference (KUCHOWICZ 1975 : 161).

Very different conclusions were drawn from early modern sources by Maria Bogucka, who in 1994 wrote about Polish customs and traditions in the 16th and 17th centuries. She began her disquisition on parent-child relations with a brief remark that the issue had been studied with some interest by western historians, French and British in particular. She did not refer to any of them by name, but her further mention of theories that high infant and child mortality resulted in parents becoming cold and emotionally detached from their children, indicated clearly that she must have had Ariès and probably also Stone in mind (BOGUCKA 1994 : 73). Unlike in her earlier work on early modern family life in Polish towns, written in the early 1980s, in 1994 Bogucka asserted that Polish sources provide abundant evidence disproving the theory of parental indifference. She pointed to the common practice of maternal breast-feeding in Poland, which, as she claimed, must

have contributed to the building of warm, sentimental relationships between mothers and their infants (BOGUCKA 1994 : 73). Bogucka devoted also a few paragraphs to parents' reactions to their offspring's death. Acknowledging that children's death was so common that parents learnt to accept it, Bogucka, nevertheless, was very far from claiming that humble acceptance equaled indifference. On the contrary, she cited evidence testifying to great anguish experienced by bereaved parents (BOGUCKA 1994 : 74).

Ariès is briefly referred to by Lidia Korczak, who contributed a chapter about customs and traditions in medieval Poland to the volume edited by Andrzej Chwalba in 2005. Although in the footnote she admitted that Ariès' thesis of the lack of the concept of childhood in the Middle Ages was not popularly accepted in academic circles, in the main body of her text she appeared somewhat torn between admitting that there existed deep emotional relationships between parents and children and stating that medieval children were not treated as individuals whose needs were recognized (KORCZAK 2005 : 43).

It is interesting to see how the awareness of the importance of studying parent-child relations and the position of children in the emotional world of adults has spread into a field which, by definition, was initially interested only in numbers, statistics, structures, fertility, mortality and migration of human populations in the past, namely historical demography. The first general introduction to the demography of old Poland was written by Irena Gieysztorowa in 1976. The author presented sources and methods of demographic study of past Polish population, but she did not reach beyond statistics, facts and figures. In her book there was no place for Philippe Ariès and his theories (GIEYSZTOROWA 1976).

More than thirty years later, in 2009, Cezary Kukło published a long-awaited compendium of demography of old Poland, which complemented Gieysztorowa's study and contained descriptions of the latest methodological achievements of world historical demography. Kukło's book was, in a sense, a reflection of changes that had taken place in the approach to demographic studies between the publication of Gieysztorowa's work and the first decade of the 21st century. In the chapter about Polish family, Kukło wrote not only about marital fertility or the size of households, but also about the quality of relations between spouses and the intensity of feelings parents had towards their children (KUKŁO 2009 : 369-374). Referring to Philippe Ariès, Kukło emphasized that his book ought no longer to be treated as reliable and that the thesis of parental indifference in the face of

high child mortality could relatively easily be refuted on the basis of Polish 16th- and 17th-century sources. To illustrate his point, Kuklo referred to the findings of other historians and quoted also a passage from the *Memoir* of J. W. Poczobut Odlanicki bewailing, in 1670, the loss of his infant son (KUKLO 2009 : 372). The very fact that the reader of Kuklo's work encounters a discussion of emotional ties between parents and children is indicative of a new, innovative approach to presenting the results of strictly demographic research and may, at least to some degree, be attributed to the influence of such scholars as Philippe Ariès.

There are very few publications devoted specifically to children and childhood in the past that do not contain a classic statement that the beginning of scholarly interest in the history of childhood dates back to the publication of a groundbreaking book of Philippe Ariès in 1960. In Polish historiography, the statement became regular after 1995, when *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Pol. transl.: *Historia dzieciństwa: dziecko i rodzina w dawnych czasach*) came out in Polish translation, although Polish historians in the two previous decades had also been familiar with his theses. The appearance of Ariès' book, marked a slight change in the approach taken by Polish historians in their writing about past childhood. Now, being aware that Ariès' work became more available to Polish readers, they, unlike their colleagues in the 1970s and 1980s, were somewhat compelled to refer not only to Ariès, but also to his critics.

The fact that the earliest works mentioned in this review did not contain any reference to Philippe Ariès is hardly surprising. One reason may lie in the grave political situation in Poland after 1945, which for many decades hindered the exposure of Polish national historiography to the academic and intellectual influences of the West. Even more plausible, however, is that even if Polish historians in the 1960s and 1970s had had undisturbed access to western European publications, they would have ignored the appearance of Philippe Ariès' book, just as much as it was done by their French, British, American and other colleagues at that time. *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* was the first book on the history of childhood since 1916 (George Henry Payne, *The Child in Human Progress*), but its publication escaped the attention of historians. Within the first five years after its appearance, the book was reviewed in only four scholarly journals and it had to wait almost a decade to start showing up regularly as a point of reference in a range of books and articles (VANN 1982 : 281, 284).

Polish historians citing Philippe Ariès refer to his idea of the lack of the concept of childhood in the period prior to the 17th and 18th centuries. There are also some references to his views about the role of organized education. However, in the majority of books and articles analyzed here, Philippe Ariès is quoted as an author of the thesis that high infant mortality stifled parents' affection towards their own children. Some historians, especially those whose works were written shortly after the publication of *L'Enfant et la vie familiale*, did not quote Ariès by name, but a general rule appears to be that even if Ariès was cited, it was usually in the form of a general reference to his work as a whole, or a *pro forma* acknowledgment of his book's "formative role in the development" of one of the major preoccupations of world historiography in the 1980s and the 1990s, namely the history of the family. Very few authors (BRZEZIŃSKI 2002; DELIMATA 2004; ŻEREK-KLESZCZ 2002) actually entered into an in-depth discussion with particular theses of Ariès' whereas most limited themselves to stating that Ariès notion of premodern parental indifference did not win universal acceptance from scholars in western Europe and has been successfully refuted by them.

Speaking of refutation, a conclusion that may be drawn from the review of Polish historiography of family and, specifically, of childhood history, is that Polish historians tend to follow the trends set by western academic circles, although a slight time shift is clearly visible. The majority of works published since the mid-1990s have revealed their authors' attempts to give a more balanced assessment of past parents' attitude towards their children. While earlier texts tended to provide more evidence testifying to the loveless attitude of parents towards their babies and to parental indifference in the face of children's death, authors of the latest publications managed to liberate themselves from the approach adopted by Ariès.

Another issue worth noting concerns the chronology of events, or to be more precise, the lack of convergence in this respect between Ariès (and Stone) on the one hand and Polish historiography on the other. Both Ariès and Stone premised their hypotheses about parental indifference on a belief that at some point in history there was a shift in people's attitudes and henceforth parents became more willing to establish sentimental relations with their children. Ariès assumed that moment to fall somewhere between the 16th and 18th centuries whereas Stone thought that the change took place at the end of the 18th century, but some signals of transformation were visible in the 17th and early 18th centuries as well. Therefore, Ariès' and Stone's models of affectionless relations between parents and children described the

situation in the Middle Ages and the very beginning of the early modern period. The problem with many Polish historians whose works have been presented above is that, with the exception of Zenon Nowak, Małgorzata Delimata, Maria Koczerska i Beata Wojciechowska, they were writing about Poland between the 16th and 18th centuries, not in the Middle Ages. Those who argued that early modern Polish parents were unlikely to create sentimental relations with their children turned to Ariès *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* for reference, as if forgetting that the French author's thesis of parental indifference concerned the period prior to the 16th century. On the other hand, historians who argued in their texts that parents in 16th-, 17th- or 18th-century Poland were very much unlike those described by Ariès' because they cared deeply about their children and were profoundly affectionate towards them, were in fact not less unfair towards the French author. By providing arguments against Ariès' thesis, they were actually fighting against the wrong villain because Ariès never claimed that early modern parents were indifferent towards their children. On the contrary, his whole book is an attempt to show that they were, unlike their predecessors in the Middle Ages, much more affectionate, caring and interested in their children's well-being because they "discovered" childhood as a separate stage in life. Polish historians were, therefore, accusing Ariès of sins he did not commit, while none of them came as far as to point out that it was simply erroneous on Ariès' part to assume that people, whether today or in the past, would consciously tailor their emotions and resolve not to love their offspring only because children were likely to die in infancy.

There are two books regularly quoted in European historiography of family and childhood as landmarks in this field of research and which are, at the same time, representative of an approach which has long become obsolete: Philippe Ariès' *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*. Although the scope of their studies differed, Ariès and Stone made a similar contribution to persuading a general reader that in past families close emotional ties were absent. The former was more or less directly referred to by Polish scholars whose works have been discussed here. Lawrence Stone's book, however, in spite of being one of the canonical works of early modern historiography, had been hardly included by Polish specialists in childhood history in their references before the 1990s and even then he tended to be mentioned in footnotes only rather than discussed in greater detail. One possible explanation may lie in the fact that Polish academia between the 1960s and 1980s

was much more familiar with the achievements of French than British historiography. It may have resulted from long-established friendly relations between Polish academic circles and the school of *Annales*, which resulted in French intellectual trends spreading to Poland much more intensively than any other (KAMECKA 2004). Besides, in spite of being criticized by many professional medievalists for manipulating and misinterpreting sources, and by other historians for his “presentist” methods, Philippe Ariès ought to be credited for being the one who entered the virgin field, hence references to him, as a pioneer, appear justified.

Lawrence Stone, whose remarks on Ariès’ work opened this article, made one comment on Ariès’ book’s success, which today sounds surprisingly insular. Referring to the role of *L’Enfant et la vie familiale* in stimulating the outburst of interest in family history among British historians, Stone noted that “for an amateur and a foreigner, this is a remarkable, indeed a unique achievement” (STONE 1981 : 245). The analysis of a number of works in family and childhood historiography in Poland allows of an observation about his influence on Polish historiography, whose development has always been strongly linked to the influence of French historians. Polish scholars have for years been familiar with Ariès’ theories. My conclusion, however, is that for a Frenchman, if I may paraphrase Stone’s words, Ariès influence on Polish historiography could have been more pronounced. The reception of his ideas could have been more fruitful and one may only wish his publication had caused as “stimulating an outburst of research into family history” in Poland as it had in Britain and America several decades ago.

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