

English summaries

Toward the Birth of Purgatory: Amnesty and Penance in Western Christianity from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages

P. BROWN

The article considers the shift from an emphasis on the ultimate amnesty of God (modelled upon the prerogative of mercy ascribed to a late Roman emperor) as, in itself, sufficient reason for the acceptance into heaven of the average sinner, to a greater emphasis on the need for specific penitential satisfaction, by the sinner, in this world and in the next. The change is related to the change in the imaginative power of certain models of mercy and reconciliation, based on specific forms of state-system, some of which forms weakened in the West — or had always been absent, in the case of Ireland. Elsewhere, in Byzantium and the Near East, they continued largely unchanged, and even, in the case of Islam, were heightened in intensity.

The weakening of the sense of the amnesty of God was accompanied by a more intense sense of the individual. The individual believer was now seen as the bearer of specific sins, which must be atoned for by penance in this world and the next. The increased interest in “purgation” in the other world would lead, eventually, to a notion of Purgatory.

Incertitude and Patchwork: the Textile Industry in Prato in the 18th and 19th Centuries

C. MAITTE

Prato, in Tuscany, is presently and exemplary Italian industrial district. Known especially for the textile trade, its industrial history dates back to the Middle Ages. Yet, during the 18th and 19th centuries, the town is far away from the industrial development of the biggest centers in Europe. Prato survives by weaving ordinary cloth, by mixing different fibers and producing mediocre levantine bonnets. The banality of this modest industry is the real aim of this essay. Comparing the Prato's case to different interpretative models of industrialisation, I come to the conclusion that neither the industrial revolution model, nor the proto-industrialisation one, or the alternative to the mass production are able to explain Prato's industrial history. To break through this impasse, I am forced to construct and intellectual patchwork which leads far from generalisations and allows to understand the precarity and uncertainty of Prato's alternative choice.

Godparenthood, “Guest-friendship”, and the Spread of Christianity G. HERMAN

Scholars have recently come to recognize that in pre-industrial societies godparenthood was an extremely adaptable and versatile bond of considerable importance.

They cannot, however, agree upon how this institution came to be, the predominant view being that it was a straightforward creation of the early Christians. This article is an attempt to show that the societies of pre-Christian antiquity already had an institution, called xenia by the Greeks and hospitium by the Romans, which displayed a long list of features similar to those associated with godparenthood. The resemblance is so striking as to warrant the conclusion that the early Christians, rather than creating ex nihilo so complex a social bond as godparenthood, invested the pre-existing pagan institution with Christian imagery and symbolism and appropriated it to the service of the new religion. If this suggestion is correct, we may here have hit upon one secondary reason, hitherto overlooked, for Christianity's spectacular spread.

“Dear Cousin”: The Uses of Close Kinship Ties in Marriage in Eighteenth-Century France

A. BURGUIÈRE

A clear distinction was made by the Catholic Church until the 19th century between marriages involving an uncle and his niece (or an aunt and her nephew) or marriages of first cousins which required a dispensation that the Pope only had the power to give, and marriages of more distant kindred: in this case the dispensation might be obtained, if the claimers were “poor”, directly from the Episcopal Court.

But the small number of “fulminations” of marriage dispensations for a kin tie of the first and second degree in the files of the Episcopal Court of the diocese of Paris (for the 18th century) compared with the large number of “fulminations” for marriages of first cousins shows that the “popular” practice did not recognize the same frontier as the canonic Law did, between the less acceptable and the more acceptable degrees of incest.

The representation of marriages between kindred in the works of fiction and in theatre pieces preferably, proposes an other way, and perhaps a better one, to observe the popular norms concerning incest and endogamic marriages. By analysing the narrative scheme of a sample of theatre plays performed in Paris during the 17th and 18th centuries, one can observe a strong contrast between the purpose of a match between cousins which is so constantly presented positively that it could be considered as the pattern of preferred marriage and the very negative image of uncles intending to marry their niece, always presented as perverse and ridiculous.