History Faculty Works

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Review Of "Les Noces De Comte: Mariage Et Pouvoir En Catalogne (785-1213)" By M. Aurell

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Martin Aurell, *Les noces du comte: Mariage et pouvoir en Catalogne (785–1213)*. (Histoire Ancienne et Médiévale, 32.) Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995. Paper. Pp. 623; maps, tables, and black-and-white illustrations. F 200.

The interface between power and family structure has reinvigorated the study of medieval politics in the past generation, yet lineage rather than marital alliance has dominated literature in the field. Martin Aurell attempts to redress this imbalance. His sweeping study of the marriages of the Catalan counts over four and a half centuries offers one of the most ambitious analyses yet attempted of marital strategies and the changing demands of rulership. Methodologically he owes a great debt not only to the pioneering studies of Karl Schmidt and Georges Duby on the emerging patrilineal structure of the nobility but also to the growing historical and anthropological literature on dowry, marriage, and family alliance. His approach proves particularly appropriate for the Mediterranean, where power remained highly fragmented in the twelfth and early thirteenth century. In northern Europe political consolidation for both royal and territorial dynasties often depended upon the growth of a vigorous family tree, whose excessive branches (whether male cadets or daughters) were carefully pruned to allow the stout trunk to grow ever higher; in the fragmented political environment of the Mediterranean, Aurell presents us with a vine whose many tendrils intertwined to bind disparate lordships. An ample but clearly defined group of Catalan comital families allows for sufficiently complex test groups, while the rich charter evidence for early Catalonia permits the author to separate individual family strands with consistency and precision.

Aurell identifies three distinct phases in the marriage strategies of the Catalan counts. Endogomy (marriage within a group) and isogamy (marriage in which the partners are of equal status) characterize the first stage of marital alliances, from the time of the Carolingian offensive in the Marca Hispanica in the late eighth century to c. 930. Increasingly isolated below the Pyrenees, the earliest counts in the region operated within limited political parameters. Kinship networks reflected this. By the early tenth century the fourteen Catalan counties (in various combinations) were in the hands of the numerous descendants of Bellon, count of Carcassonne (d. 812), a loyal Carolingian standing just below the ranks of the highest aristocracy. The success of his heirs depended upon marriages with descendants of Guilhaume, count of Toulouse, a cousin of Charlemagne, and Kunigunda, a member of the old Visigothic aristocracy. Through several ninth-century marriages the Bellonids and Guilhaumids fused Visigothic traditions and Carolingian loyalty. The early comital families in the eastern Pyrenees demonstrated a marked preference in seeking spouses among close kin: four marriages were contracted among the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Bellon. The proclivity for endogamy corresponded to the frequency with which counts associated brothers in order to rule jointly. Thus, cogovernment and endogamy promoted a clannish solidarity, creating a vast comital *Sippe* in the late Carolingian period.

This pattern changed significantly from 930 to 1080 as Catalonia extended its relations with other Iberian and Mediterranean dynasties and as individual comital houses began to stand out more sharply among the Bellonids. Exogamy (marriage outside a group) and hypergamy (marriage in which the husband is of a lower social status) dominated marital exchanges. While counts and their sons sought wives from beyond their Pyrenean lands in twenty-two of thirty known marriages during this period, daughters were given to foreign husbands in ten of twenty cases. Women were therefore critical in forging links to Castile, Occitania, Sicily, and even Burgundy, but they could also be given to important aristocratic followers at home in order to solidify the loyalty of clients. As regalian rights began to fragment and be seized by castellans, marital ties between ambitious lords and the daughters of the counts reinforced the fealty of ambitious, unruly nobles. While matches with

foreign princes encouraged exogamy, the repeated grant of comital daughters to husbands of a warrior clientele, most notably in the numerous alliances between the counts and viscounts of Barcelona, quickly resulted in consanguineous marriages. Clerical fulminations against incestuous matches had yet to affect the marriage strategies of the Catalan counts.

Finally, exogamy and hypogamy (marriage in which the bride is of a lower status than her husband) characterize the marriage patterns from 1080 to 1210, as the counts of Barcelona, the most prestigious comital house descended from Bellon, skillfully employed marriage as a tool of territorial consolidation and dynastic expansion. The house of Barcelona deftly maneuvered to swallow up other Catalan counties when their rulers faced biological extinction; they cunningly broke earlier marital agreements when the opportunity presented itself or arranged future marriages for children still in the cradle. The counts of Barcelona thereby brought about a genealogical consolidation of the many offshoots of the Bellonid clan. Matrimonial alliances also presented an opening for dynastic ambitions much further afield. With the marriage of Ramon Berenguer III to Dolça, heiress of Provence, the house of Barcelona became a major Mediterranean power, but the most enduring legacy of this phase of marital annexation was the acquisition of a kingdom with the wedding of Ramon Berenguer IV to Petronilla, heiress of Aragon. As the rising prestige of the house of Barcelona consumed the count's children in foreign marriages, his closest aristocratic followers also served his needs by linking new territories to the comital court: the Montcada, Lara, and Bas families brought Béarn, Narbonne, and Sardinia into the Catalan orbit. What the count-kings obtained through marital annexation, however, had to fit into a tightening lineage organization. Peripheral territories such as Rosselló and Provence were given to cadet branches of the family, a strategy that provided a precedent for the assignment of the kingdoms of Majorca and Sicily to the descendants of Jaume the Conqueror at the end of the thirteenth century. Although the count-kings learned to manipulate the demands of a tightening lineage, their marital strategies successfully placed them at the center of a constellation of counties and, eventually, kingdoms.

In addition to a careful analysis of marital alliances, Aurell explores cultural facets of marriage and their effect upon the status of aristocratic women. He stresses, following Duby, that an underlying tension existed between lay and clerical models of marriage. Despite the strenuous efforts of Gregorian reformers to eliminate consanguineous marriages and divorce, comital families for generations continued their marital strategies with little concern for canonical or civil prohibitions. Even when exogamy began to prevail, it arose from the strategic needs of the counts rather than respect for clerical norms. Yet despite the assumptions of Duby and his followers, a convergence of clerical and lay interests could buttress emerging patrilineal structures, for without the stress on the indissolubility of marriage neither the legitimacy of male heirs nor the integration of goods given in dowry could have so profoundly influenced aristocratic territorial formation; it is far from clear that the Gregorians' goals undermined aristocratic lineages.

Aurell points to a general deterioration of the condition of women in comital households by the end of the twelfth century in spite of the emergence of dowry. He interprets this change in the direction of marital gifts in terms of a shift from hypergamy to hypogamy, with territorial or monetary wealth compensating for the lowered status of the bride. Although the wealth women might offer increased, the potential leverage connected with it was negated by the increasing power of the husband over all the properties in his house. This approach makes good sense for foreign brides, whose protectors were far removed, but at the highest levels of the aristocracy marital transfers brought with them new relations of clientage and patronage as well as land and money. The policy of marital annexation succeeded not only by the union of comital power and the properties contributed by brides but also by the creation of a new territorial community recognized by the followers of each party and by the ability of the count-kings to administer their lands with increasing effi-

ciency. Aurell forces one to look with new eyes at the federative constitution created by the marriages of the Catalan counts and later the count-kings. His methods evolve from innovative work on family structure and power in northern Europe, but he demonstrates, occasionally despite his own assumptions, what different forms those strategies could take in the Mediterranean.

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Roger Bacon, *Roger Bacon and the Origins of "Perspectiva" in the Middle Ages: A Critical Edition and English Translation of Bacon's "Perspectiva" with Introduction and Notes,* ed. and trans. David C. Lindberg. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp. cxi, 411; 64 black-and-white figures. $105.

Roger Bacon (ca. 1220–ca. 1292) was the first Western scholar to make *perspectiva* into a mathematical (geometrical) and, as he proudly claimed, "experimental" science. This he did in a number of works (*De speculis comburentibus, De multiplicatione specierum*), the chief of which, *Perspectiva,* is edited and translated into English in the volume under review. The editor and translator is the foremost American historian of medieval and Renaissance optics and a world-known Bacon specialist. His present edition does full justice to his reputation.

While *De speculis comburentibus* has a narrow topic, being a commentary on the last proposition of Euclid's *De speculis* by means of an analysis of burning mirrors and radiation through small apertures, and *De multiplicatione specierum* presents a comprehensive natural philosophy grounded on the fundamental principle of natural action through the propagation of formal likenesses (topics with a heavy perspectival component), the *Perspectiva,* written about 1263, fully develops the science of *perspectiva,* dealing exhaustively with theories of light, color, and vision. (It also deals with some ancillary topics, like the conditions and epistemology of sight, farsightedness and nearsightedness, vision in dim light, the effects of illness on visual perception, double vision, scintillation of stars, etc.)

Light (*lux*) and color are the forms of luminous bodies propagated naturally in all directions as *lumen* and *color* and affecting the sense of sight. Their propagation, though continuous through the three-dimensional medium, can be treated heuristically by means of straight lines in continuous media of uniform transparency. This makes the propagation of light, including reflection at impassable surfaces and refraction at interfaces of different transparencies, amenable to geometrical treatment, warranting the mathematical nature of the science of *perspectiva.*

Though Bacon's theory of vision is thoroughly intromissionist, he bowed to the diversity of the newly translated sources of his discipline and "enriched" it with extramissionist elements, which, though not fully integrated, are presented in the framework of intelligent attempts to explain various optical phenomena. According to Bacon's theory, it is the pyramid (cone) of radiation having its base on the visible body and consisting of rays perpendicular to the cornea and the anterior surface of the crystalline humor that is responsible for sight, enabling a one-to-one correspondence between points of the visible object and their image in the eye. These perpendicular rays are refracted at the interface of the posterior surface of the crystalline and vitreous humors, reaching the retina in the same order they had on the object (there is no reversion and inversion of the image in this scheme) and further transmitted through the hollow optical nerves to the common nerve, where vision is completed. In its bare bones, and without dealing with its various difficulties and their attempted solutions, this is Bacon's theory of vision.

But is it really Bacon's? The peculiar synthesis of its various components is his, but the components themselves are not. They were drawn from a spate of recently translated