



A History of Private Life, Volume III

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Like the first two volumes of the series, *FROM PAGAN ROME TO BYZANTIUM* and *REVELATIONS OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD*, *PASSIONS OF THE RENAISSANCE* is a beautifully produced, sumptuously illustrated collection of essays unified by a common theme. This is not a survey of the period. Making no pretense to comprehensive coverage, the volume offers instead what editor and contributor Roger Chartier describes as “a number of hypotheses, interpretations, models.” Among the many topics considered in these frankly exploratory essays are “The Practical Impact of Writing” (this essay, by Chartier, is one of the best in the book), “The Child: From Anonymity to Individuality,” “The Literature of Intimacy,” and “The Honor and Secrecy of Families.”

PASSIONS OF THE RENAISSANCE, as might be expected, has both the virtues and the flaws of its predecessors. No history-lover who has seen the first two volumes will need persuading to plunge into the third. Though some readers may be misled by the title’s emphasis on “passions,” there is a wealth of historical lore here. As for recurring flaws, they include a predictable ideological bias and an insufficient appreciation for the uses of narrative. The concentration on French history, evident in the essays on the medieval world, is yet more pronounced in this volume; perhaps, as Chartier suggests, this ambitious project will prompt similar studies focusing on other countries. Certainly the final two volumes of *A HISTORY OF PRIVATE LIFE* will be eagerly awaited.

Sources for Further Study

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