



A History of Private Life, Volume V

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With this volume, translated from the French by Arthur Goldhammer, Harvard University Press brings to conclusion a magnificent publishing project. Originally issued in France between 1985 and 1987 under the general editorship of Philippe Aries and the medievalist Georges Duby, the five-volume series is a must for anyone who is possessed by historical curiosity and a sense of wonder at the idiosyncratic particularity of human experience.

That said, it must be acknowledged that volume 5 is a disappointing finale. Perhaps in response to criticism of the ever-narrowing focus on French culture that characterized previous volumes in the series, volume 5 in English differs significantly from the French original, with sections on the family in Italy, Germany, and the United States. (The section on Sweden appeared in the French original as well.) All three of these added sections are shaped by the radical feminist biases that dominated volume 4; in addition to being tendentious, all three are written in an unengaging social-science style. The most interesting chapter in volume 5 is devoted to “Cultural Diversity in France”; particularly worthy of note are sections on French Judaism and the role of immigrants in French society.

Like the earlier volumes in the series, volume 5 is lavishly illustrated, with a central section of color plates (an odd bunch here) and black-and-white illustrations scattered liberally throughout the book. The text is supplemented by notes, a bibliography, and an index; again, most of the titles in the bibliography are French, but some English-language sources are cited as well.

Sources for Further Study

Los Angeles Times. November 6, 1991, p. E7.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch. December 22, 1991, p. CS.

Vogue. CLXXXII, January, 1992, p. 76.

The Washington Post Book World. XXI, November 17, 1991, p. 8.

Washington Times. November 10, 1991, p. B8.

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