PATRINUS

European network for a social and cultural history of baptism and godparenthood
Rete europea di storia sociale e culturale del battesimo e del padrinato
Réseau européen d'histoire sociale et culturelle du baptême et du parrainage

Organizers
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The interest for the history of baptism and godparenthood is growing since 20 years. This is no surprise, considering that such studies are placed at the intersection point of many disciplines: history of religions and of the Churches, historical sociology of religions, historical anthropology of kinship, family history, historical demography, sociology and history of ritual practices, history of sociability, social history, even political history.

For a long time, baptism and godparenthood have been examined exclusively from the point of view of the history of doctrine and liturgy. After the pioneering works of the abbot Corblet (XIXth century), they entered the research field of social sciences thanks to the specialists of "rites of passage" and to anthropologists of kinship studying contemporary South America and Balkan Europe. These researchers were soon joined by historical anthropologists interested into Western European family and by historians of mentalities. Another impulse came, after the researches led by John Bossy during the 1970s, from the social history of sacraments, an approach whose fecundity is far from being exhausted.

A few years ago, a third important research movement started to work on these problems, coming from social history and history of the family, more and more interested in analyzing social ties outside of the family and social networks of individuals. Baptism, being the ceremony of entrance in the human or religious community, is a moment that crystallizes family, social and religious identities. Requiring the selection of a more or less large number of godfathers and godmothers, or of witnesses, baptism also creates new social ties, between the baptized child and his spiritual parents, between his parents and the godparents. This relationship, less fundamental than alliance but for a long time having the force of a true tie of kinship generating impediments to marriage, can not be reduced to a simple social contact and does not necessarily replicate already existing ties, such as blood ties. Thanks to its intensity and its flexibility, spiritual kinship contribute in a coherent and persistent way to define models of sociability and to influence relational strategies of individuals or of families. Both in societies of the past and in those of the present day, where the model represented by godparenthood has stayed influential enough to inspire formal civil ceremonies ("civil godparenthood" in France, Spain, Belgium) or informal family customs, the ties created at baptism are used by people involved to reach many different objectives (political and social support, economic aid, regulation of social conflicts, social integration, transmission of identity, religious or politic achievement, etc.).

Composed of researchers working on areas diversified from the national and religious point of view and on periods going from the end of the Middle Ages to the present day, PATRINUS network intends to explore collectively all the research paths opened by the aforementioned approaches and to shed new light on the social, cultural, family, religious history of those societies sharing Christian roots.

Objectives of the network

1) Connect researchers working on history of baptism and of godparenthood
2) Review and divulge existing works on such topics
3) Compare the analysis and identify common paths of research
4) Emphasize a comparative approach to historical processes (between nations; confessions; communities)
5) Organize regular scientific meetings among members of the network
6) Publish in collective works (reviews, books) the results of such meetings

Program of the meetings

Last meetings

* 22 March 2006 : « Spiritual kinship in urban context XVIth-XXth century », ESSHC, Amsterdam
* 9 May 2006 : «Famiglia e "famiglie" : il ruolo economico delle relazioni di familiarità "innaturali" », Bocconi University, Milan (Italy).

Scheduled meetings

* November 2007, international meeting on social and cultural history of baptism and godparenthood, University of Saint-Etienne (France)

* Spring 2008, two sessions at the ESSHC, Lisbon.

Involvement/Adesione/Adhésion

Name/Cognome/Nom :
First Name/Nome/Prénom :

Institution/Istituzione/Institution :

Address/Indirizzo postale/Adresse postale :

E-Mail :

Research fields/Argomenti di lavoro/Thématiques de recherche :