

## Summaries of articles

### *The Death of Muirchertach mac Erca*

C.-J. GUYONVARCH

*The archaic account of the death of Muirchertach mac Erca is one of the most eloquent testimonies in Irish mythology and pseudo-history to the ambiguous and obscure relationship between declining paganism and triumphant Christianity. Composed in keeping with the oldest techniques of Celtic oral narrative — explanatory sections in prose alternating with long passages in verse that constitute the heart of the story — this text, following a very long process of transmission by manuscript, presents three symbolic characters : the saint, who embodies all the intransigence of Celtic Christianity ; the king of Tara, senile and worn out by the exercise of power, who suffers a triple sacrificial death : he is killed by his enemies, burned alive in a fire in his palace and drowned in a vat of wine or beer; the woman of the afterworld, transformed into a creature of temptation and sin. The plot is evangelical in its simplicity: the woman uses magic to tempt the king, who succumbs and meets a tragic death; the saint, not without difficulty, is ultimately victorious and, as a sign of his total triumph, sends everyone to Paradise.*

### *The Family as Seen by the Counts of Champagne*

M. BUR

*The tomb of Thibaud III, Count of Champagne, erected at Saint-Étienne-de-Troyes by his widow Blanche de Navarre between 1208 and 1215, offers an image of the family unique in the iconography of its time. In a related development, the cantor of the cathedral of Châlons-sur-Marne, Guy de Bazoches, prepared a genealogy for Thibault III's father, Count Henry the Liberal, in 1171-1172. This document uses an undifferentiated filiation to present the Count as the descendant of all the western kings from Clovis and Charlemagne onward. The explanation for this genealogy can be found in a comparison with the one drawn up by Guy for himself and his family with the aim of establishing a connection with the first king of Christian France and of including in successive generations a figure as mythical as Lohengrin. Lastly, as several passages of his correspondence show, the cantor constructed a family for himself that, by eliminating father and mother, emphasized uncle-nephew ties. This article studies these various vertical and horizontal visions of kinship in the aristocratic world of Champagne—visions in which the notion of lineage is hard to discern.*

***Self-Regulatory Mechanisms in Traditional Populations***

A. BIDEAU

*A wide variety of factors—pertaining to all stages of human, social and biological life—can play a role in the different patterns of demographic regulation; they are responsible for an overlap between a set of cultural traits and a range of purely physiological mechanisms. This article examines the response of populations to unforeseen or gradual changes in their social life. The aim here is to study and individualize demographic response. The regulatory role of marriage, the social and biological factors at work in the regulation of the fertility cycle, the consequences of epidemic crises and their regulatory effects are analyzed in turn.*

*In conclusion to this study, it is important to emphasize once more the wide variety of possible attitudes and the extent of inter-relationships between demographic and biological factors and economic and social factors. This variety makes it impossible to fit the complexity of reality into the theories and models advanced—whether cultural or bio-cultural. As man's action on his environment draws on a broad range of "cultural factors"—sometimes constituting a value system—that action clearly points both to the role of individual and collective behavior and to the influence of demographic, economic and ecological pressures.*

***Early Aspects of Equilibrium***

J.-Cl. PERROT

*A number of French authors from Boisguilbert onward have attributed a central role to the notion of equilibrium in analyzing the theoretical interdependence of economic factors. This brief study draws attention to the specific role played in the development of this pivotal concept by certain "engineers" trained in mathematical and physical disciplines. In the eighteenth century, other economists (Forbonnais, Turgot) reached similar conclusions through different approaches, to be explored later. That the economic work of the "engineers" should have been repeatedly misunderstood in France raises a problem pertaining to the sociology of knowledge—a problem that should be analyzed along the lines of David Blot's recent work.*

***The Locus of Genius: Remarks on the Geography of Art***

J.-R. MANTION

*This article begins by analyzing eighteenth-century theories about climate (such as those developed most notably by du Bos), according to which England was incapable of being the locus of any form of artistic achievement. Several European authors—Latapie (who in 1771 translated Whately's Observations of Modern Gardening), Kant and Reynolds—are examined with a view to explaining the fracture and theoretical difficulties provoked by the sudden appearance and spread of landscape gardening in Europe.*

*Regarded by some as the expression of English politico-economic genius and as a commodity unexportable outside its native land (Walpole), landscape gardening—it is argued here—allows us to reexamine the question of the “Englishness of English art”, still debated by leading art historians such as Sir Nikolaus Pevsner.*

***The “Cruel Mother”: Motherhood, Widowhood and Dowry in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Florence***

CT. KLAPISCH-ZUBER

*In Florence, a woman’s identity was defined according to the man who acted as her caretaker or trustee. Consequently, widows posed a considerable problem for Florentine society. In what lineage—their husband’s or their maiden one—were they to be allowed to “reside”, that is, physically and with their dowry? This article looks at how widows who remarried came to be accused of abandoning their children and were inevitably put in the position of betraying the interests of one of their two reference lineages.*

***The “Sonderweg” of German History : Myth or Reality?***

D. GROH

*The publication of a small book by two young English historians sparked a fierce debate among German historians and political journalists on the topic of the “Sonderweg” (particular course) of German history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the authors confined their attacks to the “myth of the failed bourgeois revolution” of 1848, they saw themselves suddenly confronted with severe criticism from progressive German social historians stressing the fact that without the explanatory model of the (negatively evaluated) “Sonderweg”, it is impossible to explain the coming of Nazism. This article focuses on the empirical and theoretical dimensions of the problem. It is argued that the harshness of the debate can be understood only in the context of (1) the specific development of left-wing German historiography after World War II under the impact of sociological middle-range theories reimported from the United States and (2) the national and political setting in which this form of historiography developed, virtually uninfluenced by Marxist approaches.*