

Hans Rosenberg Article Prize 2011-12

Duane Corpis, "Marian Pilgrimage and the Performance of Male Privilege in Eighteenth-Century Augsburg," *Central European History* 45 (2012)

The Hans Rosenberg Article Prize Committee is pleased to announce that the winner of the prize for 2011-2012 is Duane Corpis, for his article "Marian Pilgrimage and the Performance of Male Privilege in Eighteenth-Century Augsburg," which appeared in *Central European History* in 2012. In his elegantly written, theoretically sophisticated, and archivally innovative essay, Corpis provides an exacting and illuminating interpretation of struggles among local clergy, civic notables, and Catholic Church leaders, to reform and control pilgrimages to the Marian shrine of Violau in the imperial city of Augsburg.

Records of popular annual pilgrimages to the shrine date back to 1555, and Corpis shows that devout pilgrims in particular made the trip in order to beseech a wooden statue of the Schmerzhaften Muttergottes (or Virgin of Violau) for miraculous assistance in curing physical ailments such as blindness, fevers, epilepsy, and gout, as well as for protection from magic curses and the restoration of livestock to health. In an era of post-Tridentine Catholic reform, however, Church authorities worried about popular superstition and unofficial forms of devotion tried twice to ban the Violau pilgrimage and stamp out its supposed "excesses." Both times — in 1755-56 and again in 1780 — local civic elites organized successful campaigns to keep the ritual in place, albeit with significant changes. In a close reading of the changing ritual itself, the backgrounds of the men involved in the reform struggle, and the larger social, political, and cultural contexts of eighteenth-century Augsburg, Corpis complicates familiar accounts about the persistence of local tradition in the face of religious reform enforced from the top down.

Corpis departs from the work of the anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner, as well as their more recent interpreters, who have emphasized the role of pilgrimages in creating community and unity among otherwise socially stratified groups. As Corpis deftly shows, the pressure for reform "from above" allowed local elites to remake the Violau pilgrimage in ways that reinforced their own social privilege. In Corpis's nuanced

take on the dynamic and paradoxical world of conflicted power hierarchies, civic actors offered Church authorities a version of the pilgrimage reformed “from below.” By excluding the participation of women and men of limited means and influence, civic activists “of the middling sort” remade the pilgrimage in ways that satisfied the authorities and burnished their own exclusive social roles and interests; even so, the re-invented tradition was sanctified by the appeal to putatively “timeless” religious ritual.

In a suggestive conclusion, Corpis distinguishes between communal and personalized forms of devotion, proposing that the more individualized acts of piety we associate with the rise of the “self” in the eighteenth century may also have worked to the advantage of the Catholic Church. As Corpis argues, communal modes of piety such as the pilgrimage to Violau were problematic for ecclesiastical officials not only because they involved collective organization and action, but also precisely because they entangled acts of piety and sacred space with local spectacles of social and political power. Personalized acts of devotion, however, such as private pilgrimages or the increasingly popular Marian Schluckbilder (small images of the Virgin meant to be ingested to help heal the body) were more stable and could be more readily subjected to ecclesiastical control than the unruly and unstable community as a whole. The personalization of piety was one way that the Church could circumvent local authority and collective action, even as its actions contributed to the emergence of a modern “personal” self.

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