

‘A bed, a mattress and a pillow full of feathers: practical provisions upon marriage in 12th-century southern Italy’

Abstract:

This paper examines the tradition of dowry provision and other marriage gifts principally from evidence in 12th century southern Italian charters. Southern Italy was politically a Norman realm in this period yet marriage customs seem to continue to follow local norms, which themselves differed across the peninsula. The societies of medieval Apulia seem to have been particularly conscious of providing moveable goods as well as cash and property on the occasion of marriage [at least this is what they recorded]. What kinds of things were provided by fathers and brothers to their daughters and sisters? What happened when a father was not around to provide? How important was the provision of material goods prior marriage in the shaping of new family relationships? This paper will also explore the role dowry objects could have played in the maintenance of links between a woman and her kin family. Wills are another importance source for understanding how practical provisions for a family marriage was a major consideration in forming a bequest. The paper will end with some thoughts about continuities and changes over the 12th century. Did the customs of marriage provision change under Norman rule and are they comparable to other areas of Norman Europe?

Tehmina Goskar