

in Umbria? Are there any commonalities across Italy among aristocratic women? And so on, and so forth.

To conclude, I would readily say that the papers of the volume evidence the editors' original claim that women in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean region were more often than not active participants in the economic and social life of their respective communities and played a crucial role as channels for the intergenerational transmission of property. Similarly, it has been shown that the essays admirably stimulate comparisons and address important questions, while opening the way for further inquiries.

It has to be said, however, that, having taken a first step in the right direction, the task awaiting researchers is still enormous. If we want to make a difference to our overall understanding and start formulating tentative comparisons and interpretations, the only solution that I can think of lies in organised cooperation. A possible solution could be something like an (electronic?) network of interested scholars exchanging information and ideas, plus a workshop with very specific agenda, which ideally will result in the formulation of meaningful questions and the organisation of practicalities. The outcome will be a substantial accumulation of data across geographical, chronological and institutional divisions and in the process we will be able to trace and document variations, commonalities and changes over time. I believe that this will be another important step forward.

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Anna Bellavitis, **Famille, genre, transmission à Venise au XVI^e siècle** (= Collection de l'École française de Rome 408), Rome: École française de Rome 2008, 241 pp., EUR 29,-, ISBN 978-2-7283-0840-8.

This careful study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of what is usually called family law and its relationship to social and gender order in early modern Europe. Although its subject is sixteenth-century Venice, the material analysed, along with the author's intelligent observations, will be extremely useful not only for historians of early modern Venice but also for scholars working in other periods and places of premodern Europe.

The study has two great virtues. First is Anna Bellavitis's meticulous examination of the norms that informed Venetian statute law and of the practices that constituted the 'normal'. Although the basis of Venetian marital property, succession and inheritance law was Roman law, both in statute and as statute was interpreted and applied by municipal authorities, Roman law was modified in ways that expressed slightly different conceptions of how property (and what kind of property) should be controlled during marriage, by whom, and how it should be passed at death. This account is the

fundament, both analytical and narrative, of the book, and approximately the first half of the study is devoted to laying out the rules that governed intestate succession and otherwise unarticulated information about dowry composition and size, provisions for guardianship of children, and the like.

The second half of the book – its second great virtue – systematically analyses a selection of wills from the sixteenth century to reveal how different social groups modified the formal rules. Without the first part of the study, this material would have been considerably less useful, but its value does not derive entirely from the author's ability to show how individuals chose to deviate from or nuance statute law. Its added advantage is the disaggregation of testators by socioeconomic function, in effect, by social place. In this section, Bellavitis all but ignores the patriciate, the group best known to scholars because of their importance as well as the quality and number of records they left. Instead, Bellavitis examined a selection of testaments (850 in all) from the remainder of Venice's propertied classes whose professions (or the husband's profession) could be identified – the "people", a vaguely categorised category that included small retailers, minor artisans, wage earners, people in service, and the like; merchants, understood as merchants involved in regional or international trade; and professionals such as doctors, officials, and lawyers.

It is difficult to summarise Bellavitis's findings, because "God is in the details" of such an analysis. In general, however, she confirms that the Venetian version of Roman law was decidedly patrilineal: property flowed from men to men, especially the principle assets that established social place (immovables; land, especially in this period when landed investments were becoming much more important to Venice's elites; businesses, shops). Marital property law was separatist in that each spouse claimed possession of different properties. The woman's was her dowry, which she received from her own family as bride and which was counted as her own inheritance. She transferred those assets to her husband who had use of the wealth during the marriage, although in principle the property remained hers. In normal practice, the dowry was composed of moveable wealth (an unstable category that in Venice could include assets usually considered immovable and in a commercial economy like Venice's could constitute the important productive assets), but marriage contracts typically required that the dowry be secured by the husband's assets, and immovables typically served in that role. In principle, all but one-third of the dowry was returned to the woman in widowhood (but the amount that could be reserved was limited to 1,000 ducats in the sixteenth century, while the maximum authorised dowry at that time was 6,000 ducats, and even that limit was regularly surpassed by Venice's patricians). Often the return came in the form of immovables, not movables, since the dowry had been secured by such fixed property; and although these provisions provided women (and their families) security, it could take years, even decades, for the dowry to actually be returned. A woman could bequeath her dowry as she wished but if she made no choice (by testament) it returned to her line if her marriage had been childless or was divided equally among her children (girls and boys alike).

Men inherited directly from their fathers but unless provision was made otherwise they did not receive their inheritance until their father's death so that, in effect, in the meantime they lived from their wife's dowry, any inheritance from others, and their earnings. Upon a mother's death, the surviving husband, if father of minor children, automatically became the legal guardian, a responsibility that included care of the children and management of their property (including property left by their mother). Should the father die first, the widow was not automatically made guardian but had to request that status from municipal authorities. As the records Bellavitis mined show, authorities usually granted mothers that right and assigned them the responsibility for the assets, although, as Bellavitis says, "guardianship of the patrimony of minors remained under the control of men in the family" (75).

The second section of the book, where Bellavitis analyses testaments to expose how people modified statute, begins with a useful discussion of the powers of the Roman law testament but also of its limits, and then moves to an analysis of how the three different social groups analysed behaved as testators. The major finding is this: Each group made different choices about restitution of the dowry, about succession, about guardianship of children – in effect, about all the issues investigated in the first part of the book. Minor artisans, smaller retailers, and wage earners tended to share property in ways not anticipated by formal law, by using counterdowries, bequests and provisions of marriage contracts, all in expression, Bellavitis reasons, of a social reality in which husband and wife together managed a small enterprise and considered each others as partners in the household economy. Important merchants made different choices, for there the family firm, managed by the men of the husband's family, was preferred over surviving spouses. Professionals enacted another logic in which the separatist structure of Venetian marital property and inheritance law was deployed to assure that sons received the wherewithal to secure their place in this class – money for education, libraries, offices. Daughters, if they were to become wives instead of nuns, were given dowries used in support of men's professions, and in their widowhoods they generally received only what the law required.

As explained, the great strength of this study is its careful description of the legal system in which people intervened as they wrote testaments; without this thoroughness it would have been very hard to assess the significance, for example, of a decision by municipal authorities to grant a widow's request to serve as guardian of her children or of a mother's will that privileged daughters over sons. There are, however, a few things that would have made an even more powerful study. First, Bellavitis might have more aggressively stepped back to draw this all together for the reader. As she has organised the book, the information is presented section by section, which makes it hard to see the big picture – and although the big picture is made up of many parts that must be analysed individually, we need the big picture. Bellavitis does offer summary statements as she works her way through the chapters, but we have to hunt for them and even those passages only comment, rather unevenly, on the relationship of the particular

issue being discussed to the whole. Even the tables she provides, in almost every chapter, simply summarise the statistical information she has assembled about the particular issue of concern in that chapter. The book's conclusion is a summary of a kind, but it does not draw on the hard data she has gathered; instead, it simply reviews some of the major themes which she has grappled in the book. Second, Bellavitis makes comparisons with other places, whether in Italy or elsewhere, only with respect to particular issues. Although it would be unreasonable to ask that a study requiring research of this kind take on more than Venice and more than a limited period, it would have been useful had she at some point given us her sense of just how and why family law in Venice was different from other mercantile cities in Italy. Might she have opined, for example, about whether Venetian women were better propertied and freer to choose how to use their property than they were elsewhere, whether such privileges depended entirely on social class, or whether any such privileges reflected a distinctive understanding of gender and marriage? Finally, I wish there could have been a more serious effort to root this information in a broader history of Venice. To be sure, Bellavitis refers to the changes in Venice's economy during the sixteenth century (principally a shift of investment to the countryside on the part of the rich as commercial opportunities lessened) and she occasionally comments on immigration patterns, population changes, political tensions, and the like. But she does not rigorously, or even very suggestively, place the legal system or the changes it underwent in this context.

Still, scholars will be very grateful for this study. It is a methodological model of family law everywhere in the premodern West and does provide abundant material for systematic comparisons with other places and periods. Those of us working in northern Europe, where sources of this kind are much sparser, will of course envy her the rich archive, but we will also be able to use Anna Bellavitis's work to help clarify the significance of legal differences between the North and the South.

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Maria Ågren, **Domestic Secrets. Women and Property in Sweden, 1600–1857** (= Studies in Legal History), Chapel Hill/NC: University of North Carolina Press 2009, 285 S., EUR 46,99, ISBN 978-0-8078-3320-9.

Das Buch von Maria Ågren tritt den LeserInnen als dichtes, fein gesponnenes Gewebe entgegen, das sich mit der Frage nach den Eigentumsrechten verheirateter Frauen in der schwedischen ländlichen Bevölkerung auseinandersetzt. Die Kettfäden, die von 1600 bis 1857 reichen, ohne an den Enden exakt abgeschnitten zu sein, sind zum einen ausgewählte Bezirke in Zentral-, Nord- und Westschweden auf der Basis von Gerichtsakten, wobei Ågren darauf achtete, keine Randgebiete auszuwählen, die von dänisch-norwegischem Recht beeinflusst gewesen sein könnten. Zum anderen ziehen