

Abstracts

Anna Bellavitis, Dowry in Venice from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period

According to the Venetian Statutes, the father's inheritance was divided between sons, who received immovable goods, and daughters, who received movable goods. Most of the time, the dowry that was bestowed upon daughters at the time of their marriage was the only portion of their father's inheritance that they received. Sumptuary legislation tried to limit the dowries, especially between patrician families, but was much less strict when the marriage was between a "populares" bride and a patrician groom. In fact, we can consider that the aim of the legislation concerning dowries was to maintain a balance between the patrician families that governed the Republic of Venice, and that it played an important role in protecting the stability of the State. During the marriage, the dowry was still the property of the bride, but the husband had total control over it. However, he had to guarantee its restitution to his widow or to her family, with his immovable goods as a security. The laws protected, in theory and in practice, the right of the widows, of all social groups, to reclaim their dowry.

Birgit E. Klein, Jewish Matrimonial Property and Inheritance Laws in the Pre-Modern Era. The Changing Role of the *ketubah* and its Consequences

In Jewish law, the biblical and ancient rabbinic norms remained binding and were unchangeable – including in the area of matrimonial property and inheritance law. Adjustments to new economic and social requirements therefore only occurred by means of contract law. The *ketubah* (obligatory marriage debt security), which the groom had to pledge to his wife in the case of every Jewish marriage, but was only paid to her when the marriage was dissolved due to death or divorce, played a central role here from ancient times on. It served as a guarantee of the subsistence level of women in the first few months after the dissolution of the marriage, because they were not legal heirs either as widows or as daughters. In the Middle Ages, the role of the *ketubah* changed fundamentally. The altered economic conditions made it necessary to retain

the family fortune undivided in one place for as long as possible in order for it to be used effectively. In the way, the differentiated contract law was then able to at least partly offset the inequalities of Jewish women in matrimonial property and inheritance law.

Angiolina Arru, *The Unpaid Dowry. Ambivalence and Advantages of the Dowry System at the End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Century*

In the Italian dowry system, the dowry tied male assets, as these had to be staked as a guarantee for it. As the dowry had to be returned, it produced a credit relationship. Women seem to have been well aware of the state of dependency in which the debtors of their dowry found themselves. It is therefore no coincidence that for women property was synonymous with credit. However, after the abolishment of the obligatory dowry in the year 1865, credit relationships between men and women within a family did not disappear. It is thus important to examine the economic dealings of women in this period. The history of one family, whose activities are located between the old statutes of the early modern era and the new norms of civil law, is at the centre of the contribution. The focus is on the areas of action of the two daughters, Giulia and Rosa Gentili, who initially received no dowry – which at the end proved to be advantageous. Here the social and cultural significance of property for women can be observed.

Isabel Hernández, *From Spain to the Americas, from the Convent to the Front: Catalina de Erauso's Shifting Identities*

The volume “*Historia de la Monja Alférez, Catalina de Erauso, escrita por ella misma*”, edited for the first time in 1829, offers an autobiographical account of the life of one of the most remarkable Spanish women of the 17th century: Catalina de Erauso (1592–1650). Forced by her family to enter a convent, Catalina seizes the first opportunity she has to run away and embark on a long voyage, during which, dressed as a man, she travels across Spain and then sets off for South America. There, in disguise, she is able to enjoy a freedom she has never known in her home country and to experience many adventures, of the kind that are traditionally reserved for the opposite sex (she enrolls in the Spanish army and is awarded the rank of a lieutenant). This woman’s account – combined with the type of material generally found in the travel literature of the time, and the picaresque style, which was common during the Spanish Golden Age – contributes to shaping a very particular genre of travel and adventure literature, halfway between literary fiction and history, in which the journeys travelled play a significant role in the construction of literary identity from the very first moment.