

viation systems may function well under normal conditions but fail miserably when food supplies drop, and vice versa; elites may be intent upon avoiding starvation and providing relief during famines so as to legitimize systems of structural inequality and poverty; famines may trigger major historical events, contributing, for example, to the fall of dynasties from China to Ethiopia; if markets function efficiently, food may still not reach the poorest individuals and regions due to lack of effective demand and entitlement failure.

Most book titles that include '*An economic history of...*' then specify a country or region, providing a fairly clear (albeit broad) entry into what readers might expect. In this case, the title is somewhat enigmatic. Unfortunately, the significance of famine resilience for economic history remains underdefined throughout the book. Famine resilience may intersect with economic historians' broader research agendas in several ways. First, historical famines can be studied as economic events on their own terms, potentially yielding broader insights into individual and collective behavior, as well as the functioning of markets and institutions. Second, famine resilience can be compared across time and space as an entry point for understanding broader processes of economic change. The impact of famines, for example, may allow us to 'measure a society's temperature' concerning market integration, state capacity or socio-economic inequality. Third, famines can be analyzed as 'critical junctures', putting societies onto a different trajectory of (economic) change, sometimes even triggering wholesale revolutions. This volume yields insights relevant to each of these broader agendas, but the authors do not explicitly engage with them. It is unfortunate, indeed, that the introduction itself is brief (10 pages only). While ultimately, therefore, an overarching economic historical narrative on famine resilience is still needed, this volume takes substantial strides in that direction.

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Jan Luiten van Zanden, Tine de Moor and Sarah Carmichael, *Capital Women. The European Marriage Pattern, Female Empowerment and Economic Development in Western Europe 1300-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). 288 p. ISBN 9780190847883.

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This volume is a groundbreaking attempt to include women, their work, and their economic activities in the 'grand narrative' of the economic development of Northwest Europe and of the Low Countries, in particular. The book

comes at the end of a series of articles and prognoses by the three authors and intends to be part of the debate on the very controversial and much discussed concept of the 'Little Divergence'.

The starting point is decidedly contemporary: the Gender Inequality Index (GII), i.e., the relationship between female schooling, girls' age at marriage and fertility rate, which reveals that where parents' investment in their daughters' education is low, the age at marriage is low and the fertility rate is high. Breaking this vicious circle requires external intervention, i.e., ad hoc state policies. All this is well known and can be demonstrated with quantitative data for the contemporary world, but is it possible to apply the same model to past centuries, in the absence of equally abundant and reliable statistical data? This is precisely the challenge, of fundamental importance, that Jan Luiten Van Zanden, Tine De Moor and Sarah Carmichael wanted to launch on the basis of the documentation available for the last centuries of the Middle Ages and for the early modern age, within a restricted territory, though with a very rich history.

The starting point is Hajnal's thesis on the European Marriage Pattern (EMP), which is said to have emerged west of the Trieste-St. Petersburg line, later clarified by Peter Laslett, who, within the EMP, distinguished Northwest from Mediterranean Europe. The hypothesis of the authors is that the EMP (in its Northwestern pattern) is characterized by power balances between husband and wife and between parents and children. Marriage is based on consent of both spouses (as prescribed by the Catholic, though not the Protestant religion), and women have a relatively large say in the marriage itself, especially when they contribute to the income of their households. The book analyzes the diffusion of female wage earners and the role of women in credit activities, and the idea that indicating the age of the subject it portrays is an index of the diffusion of 'numeracy' is particularly interesting, as is the use of the concept of 'numeracy' instead of 'literacy' to measure female education levels. Also very interesting is the chapter on 'beguinages', understood as places of female freedom, including economic freedom, since beguines did not have to renounce their earthly possessions, unlike nuns (at least in principle). The data and analyses on the chosen area are interesting and convincing, but the attempts at comparison with the Mediterranean region and Italy, in particular, are much less so, at least from the perspective of a historian of early modern Italy.

The reference text is the fundamental research of David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber on the Tuscan *Catasto* of 1427. The problem is that these data cannot be extended to the whole of Italy or to the whole historical period under consideration, nor can they be compared with much less numerous data on Holland in the eighteenth century. In the *Catasto*, for instance, the data on the age at marriage of girls are much more abundant for the wealthy

groups (because the dowry paid to the daughters was deducted from the taxes), i.e., the groups in which, all over Europe, it was much more probable that marriage was decided by the families and that girls married earlier. The dowry system is one of the fundamental elements of the argument, as it is indicated as the cause of the lack of labour investment of young women and also of wives, since the dowry had to be provided by the families of origin and the wife would recover it in case of widowhood. Moreover, the fact that spouses' assets were not pooled would not have encouraged wives to take an active part in building up the common wealth. The fact is that, even in Italy, in the lower classes both men and women had to work, before and after marriage; indeed, the fact that the dowry, at least in theory, was indispensable to marriage encouraged girls without an inheritance to leave the family and to emigrate to the cities to find work in crafts or in service. In charitable institutions, poor or orphaned girls worked to earn a dowry while learning a trade that they could continue to practice later. The paradox of the dowry system, all aspects of which have yet to be fully explored, is that all the economic responsibility for the marriage fell on the woman, and it is no coincidence that the marriage contracts of sixteenth-century Venetian craftsmen included a 'counter-dowry', a contribution from the husband. The further down the social scale one goes, the more marriage is based on reciprocity and the pooling of resources. As early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, credit activities carried out by women were documented in Italy, and the diffusion of salaried work arrived just as early in Italy where, unlike much of northern Europe, even apprentices received a wage and rarely had to pay a 'skill premium' to the master, thus confirming the diffusion of wage relations though raising the question of the relationship between training and work. Finally, recent research has convincingly and conclusively demonstrated that Laslett's pattern of the Mediterranean family has no historical basis.

To affirm, in line with the most recent research of contemporary economists, that the 'Girl power index' and a higher rate of gender equality have been factors of economic development in the past is a very interesting approach, and there would be many other things to say about this book. We can only hope that in the future there will be a greater exchange of ideas and information among European historians, so that finally even the 'Little Divergence' will be reconsidered from a less schematic and rigid perspective.

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