

Book Reviews

Chanelle Delameillieure, *Abduction, Marriage, and Consent in the Late Medieval Low Countries* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024). 253 pp. ISBN 9789463724074.

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With varying levels of success, studies of abduction in medieval Europe have long grappled with thorny questions of consent and control. This exciting new volume from Chanelle Delameillieure offers a fresh voice on these debates through a multilayered exploration of marriage-making in fifteenth-century Brabant and Flanders.

The book draws on over 650 abduction cases from across the Low Countries with a particular focus on the cities of Ghent, Antwerp, and Leuven. While placed in the context of contemporary legal statutes and ordinances, this study primarily analyzes how various attitudes and interpretations of marriage-making happened in practice. Its source base comprises an impressive range of court records, including the secular records of criminal justice and the consistory courts, alongside records of voluntary jurisdiction and pardon letters from the dukes of Burgundy, all illustrating the overlapping jurisdictions with interest in abduction cases. Such a rich variety affords insight into the actions of people both inside and outside the courtroom and the decisions negotiated therein. In so doing, it draws on cases of named individuals whose marital and personal histories do not ordinarily come to light.

An enviable surviving source base is not the only reason the Low Countries provide fertile ground for a history of abduction and marriage-making. It was also where the criminalization of abduction occurred earlier and more severely than elsewhere in Europe. Delameillieure draws a causal link with the inheritance system operating in the Low Countries, which allowed both daughters and sons to inherit property on an equal footing. Scholarly analysis has generally viewed this parity positively: a favorable legal position providing women with more opportunities for independent decision-making than was usual in Europe. What this study argues, however, is that it also raised the stakes

in marital decisions where poor choices could have serious implications for the transfer of property and businesses, power and social standing. An influential urban elite in the Low Countries with concerns over property rights and reputation grew increasingly intolerant of marriage outside a family's control. They developed protective structures and supported strict legislation over partner choice. In these ways the agency of women (and indeed some men) in marriage-making was drastically reduced.

The importance of the socio-economic context is reinforced through analysis in chapter 2 of the 'who, how and why' of abduction cases. A revealing focus on the abductor and his motivations extends to those listed as his accomplices. The latter are not always considered in analyses of abduction cases, and by doing so the study illustrates how abductions were not simply the action of a single male abductor of a female abductee, but involved "multiple people with conflicting interests", including the broader family network.

This aspect has a crucial bearing on the interpretation of abduction cases. Delameillieure defines abduction as "taking a woman for the purpose of marrying her or being 'romantically' involved with her, with or without her consent" (p.15). By careful reading of some frustratingly formulaic legal texts, the question of what that consent means is unpacked throughout the book and considered in depth in chapter 3. Delameillieure resists simplistic pronouncements on victimhood or agency and argues that consent constituted "a range of decisions made over time" with varying levels of willingness lying behind them. Such a process was not detached from familial desires, expectations, and strategies. On the one hand, the pressurized circumstances in which the women found themselves constrained their choices. This might mean consenting to an abduction or a marriage not previously wanted, yet which had become the least bad choice. On the other, it did not mean that these women had (ever) intended to defy their families. The book further debunks the view that abduction cases were mainly elopements by couples trying to circumvent family demands. Rather, the evidence from the Low Countries suggests a context of intrafamilial feuds where conflict was not necessarily split along generational lines. The beneficiaries of consensual abduction could include the abductee's own family, and young women understood parents' motives and conventions around honor and property.

This finding does not mean that a women's voice mattered little or had no impact. Indeed, a woman's expressed consent appears to

have been considered as mitigation leading to a more amicable settlement or even an acquittal. This feature is one of the various factors considered in the final chapter exploring judicial settlements. Here the contrast between the severity advocated in legislative texts and the realities of practice is thoughtfully explored. Our attention is drawn to inconsistencies within ecclesiastical and secular courts, as well as the notable differences across region and time. A detailed discussion on penalties reveals that while extreme punishments, including execution, could occur and act as a deterrent, this judgment was not common. Fines were far more likely, or pilgrimages, and there are examples of secular authorities waiving penalties altogether. Legislators appear to have provided space for interpretation by judges. Delameillieure explores the different approaches within cities and jurisdictions, concluding that there was not always an obvious reason why one case was treated more leniently than another, but were context specific. At times, a pragmatic use of the law recognized that differences could be resolved through private settlements rather than court appearances, which all parties could use to their advantage. It all adds weight to the conclusion that these strategic uses of the law are testimony to the depth of legal knowledge among women, their relatives, and abductors.

Ultimately, what comes across in this fascinating book is the complex nature of abduction cases and the multivalent, nuanced readings required to understand different marital practices in the late medieval Low Countries. For this reason, Delameillieure resists generalization and firmly advocates analysis on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, by drawing attention to patterns in the evidence, she raises key questions about women's consent and property rights, which demand testing and comparisons in further studies of this kind.

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Jeroen J.H. Dekker, *Children's Emotions in Europe, 1500-1900. A Visual History* (London [etc.]: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024). 320 pp. ISBN 9781350150706.

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This volume is the summation of forty years of work by the author on children's emotions. Jeroen Dekker, professor of History and Theory