

Book Reviews

Elise M. Dermineur (ed.), *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018). xi, 364 p. ISBN 9782503570525.

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Since the publication of William Jordan's *Women and credit* and Craig Muldrew's *The economy of obligation* in the 1990s,¹ the number of studies on women, gender and credit has slowly but steadily increased. In his synthesis, Jordan argued that there was something significant and distinctive about women's roles in premodern credit networks, whereas Muldrew underlined that premodern debt and credit had as much a social and moral meaning as an economic one. These central questions put forward by Jordan and Muldrew demarcate the thematic outlines of *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial Europe*. This collection of essays, edited by Elise Dermineur, contains thirteen case studies from across Europe. The volume testifies to the vast progress the field has made in the last two decades, as well as the challenges ahead.

The aim of the volume is twofold. First, it wants to lay bare the economic aspects of women's credit activities and to provide empirical data on their market participation. The essays contain a wealth of statistical information on women and credit, thereby successfully addressing the complaint of Jordan in his 1990s overview that 'no numerical precision can be given to words like *substantial* or *considerable*'.² Dermineur rightfully underlines the relevance of this endeavor in her introduction, highlighting that statistical information is urgently needed to allow for more comparative research, but also to integrate the role of women and gender in economic studies on credit and debt – an issue too often neglected by economic historians. Second, the volume aims to shed light on the social dimension of women's credit activities, by looking at issues such as the construction of trust, reputation and emotions. The essays are framed by an introduction by Dermineur and a conclusion written by Laurence Fontaine, which provide a good overview of the current state of the field and the main themes of the volume.

¹ W.C. Jordan, *Women and credit in pre-industrial and developing societies* (Philadelphia 1993); C. Muldrew, *The economy of obligation. The culture of credit and social relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke 1998).

² Jordan, *Women and credit*, 77.

The case studies in this collection focus on the period 1400-1800 and predominantly stem from northwestern European regions. The prominence of British scholarship in the field explains why no less than six out of the thirteen essays discuss England. However, the chapters on other regions – the Low Countries (Zuijderduijn), Sweden (Ågren), Germany (Rosenhaft), Northern France (Dermineur), Italy (Shaw) and Spain (Carbonell-Esteller and Cebreiro Ares) – make abundantly clear that the source material is available to rectify this regional imbalance in historiography. Hopefully, this collection will encourage future historians to explore these issues in continental regions, as this would provide excellent comparative material to weigh in on the topical debate on the North-South divergence in female economic agency in pre-industrial Europa, and its alleged connection to the European marriage pattern.³

A number of motifs resonate throughout different chapters. Many essays underscore how previous research has overemphasized the role of widows in credit markets. Instead, contributions by Spicksley, Stevens, Zuijderduijn, Shaw and Dermineur highlight the importance of not-yet-married or lifelong single women as creditors, due to an increased tendency to provide daughters with monetary inheritances. While these single women could experience empowering effects from their market participation, as Dermineur argues, Zuijderduijn stresses the reverse side of the coin. Paradoxically, he suggests, reduced female property ownership might have driven women to financial markets. Other essays by Ågren, Gayton, Shaw, Cebreiro Ares shed light on married women's involvement in credit relations, which was larger than has previously been assumed. Next to that, the gendered aspects of debt formalization and the construction of trust play key parts in the chapters by Carbonell-Esteller, Cebreiro Ares, Rosenhaft, Shaw and Spicksley.

The question of female decision making power over financial assets arises from several contributions. Zuijderduijn and Shaw consider the possibility that men managed women's capital, and Ågren emphasizes the social pressure and coercion Swedish women could experience when creditors demanded that spouses provided security together. In contrast, Dermineur considers the involvement of married women as co-signers with their husbands in France a form of empowerment. These at times intriguingly opposing conclusions call for further research. The essay by Rosenhaft adds a fascinating and often invisible perspective to that debate, by using the correspondence of a merchant widow to investigate the emotional dimensions of women's involvement in credit relations. She shows how, having little protection against her husband's creditors, the widow's engagement with debt was freighted with risk and anxiety. Navigating these required the widow to rely on male relatives and advisors.

3 For a recent overview of the debate, see: O. Gelderblom and F. Trivellato, 'The business history of the preindustrial world. Towards a comparative historical analysis', *Business History* 61 (2019) 238-239.

Despite the empirical richness of this collection, some themes could have been explored in more depth. Ethnic minorities, such as Jewish women, do not appear in the collection – the reader is referred to Jordan's publications instead. Given the prominent role of Jewish women in credit networks and the time passed since Jordan's studies, a consideration of this topic would not have been amiss. Moreover, as many contributions focus on women's activities, a more explicit comparison with the strategies used by male participants would have been welcome to investigate gender differences and their intersection with lifecycle position. Did younger single men, for example, made the same safe choices as single women did when managing their assets? This remarks aside, *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial Europe*, is a much-needed addition to the field, containing an array of chapters on understudied regions and subjects.

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Dennie Oude Nijhuis, *Religion, Class, and the Postwar Development of the Dutch Welfare State* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018). 340 p. ISBN 9789462986411.

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In *Religion, Class, and the Postwar Development of the Dutch Welfare State*, Dennie Oude Nijhuis describes the transformation of the Netherlands from 'laggard' to 'leader' among welfare states in the advanced political economies. Oude Nijhuis, an Assistant Professor of history at Leiden University and senior researcher at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, offers a comprehensive history of the Dutch welfare state with attention for the most important public welfare reforms since the Second World War. Particular emphasis is placed on the introduction of social insurance programs for old-age, unemployment, sickness and disability. The author consulted several archival collections in the Netherlands, including those of the Dutch union and employer federations, the main confessional political parties and several (semi-)public agencies tasked with welfare administration. The result is a *tour-de-force* around the most important developments in the Dutch welfare state over the course of the twentieth century until the most recent debates on pension reform and precarious employment.

The book is a welcome addition to the relatively small number of English-language publications on the political economy of the Dutch welfare state, the most well-known of which (Cox's *The Development of the Dutch Welfare State* and Visser and Hemerijck's *A Dutch Miracle*) are already several decades old. Since then,