

Abstracts

Lara Campestrin

Charitable dowries. Confraternities in Trentino and Venetia

As studies of well known urban centres such as Florence, Rome and Venice have demonstrated, the extension of dowry subsidies to girls from poor backgrounds constituted one of the principal social aims of religious brotherhoods in the early modern period. As the role played by confraternities in dowry-giving among more peripheral areas has been less well studied, the research presented here concentrates on two communities: Borgo Valsugana in Trentino and Bassano in Venetia. Two very different pictures emerge from the analysis of the respective confraternities, with the Trentine institutions not distributing dowries but those in Venetia making great efforts in this direction. The experience of devout associations in Bassano is thus fathomed in depth in order to bring to the surface the subtle dynamics regulating dowry competitions, the norms for assigning subsidies, and the family strategies put into action to obtain a dowry, which over time became more and more the symbol of an honest Christian life.

Mauro Carboni

Between Assistance and Welfare: Dowries for the “Respectable” Poor

Giving poor girls an endowment was a common concern in Italian cities during the early modern period. Because urban society saw a potential threat to its moral and social stability in women who were without a dowry, what had once been a pious, private undertaking now became the specialised business of a network of self-perpetuating agencies. Mixing credit provision with piety, the Bolognese *Monte del Matrimonio* addressed the difficult task of giving girls of moderate means a chance to marry. Parents, relatives and would-be patrons were invited to plan ahead by opening dowry accounts for daughters and needy girls. By working to shore up the family, the seemingly endangered pillar of early modern Bolognese society, the *Monte* contributed to the updating and forging of a solid network of personal and family ties, which in turn helped to reduce, govern and channel growing social tensions.

Alessia Lirosi

Monastic Dowries: the Case of Roman Nuns in the Seventeenth Century

In 1563, the Council of Trent ruled that no monastery could receive more nuns than it could actually maintain. Hence, throughout the entire Italian peninsula, the obligation to provide a monastic dowry was gradually enshrined into special laws, monastic constitutions, and custom at both central and diocesan levels, according to decisions taken by the Sacred Congregation of

Bishops and Regulars. In Rome, the amount of a dowry varied widely from one monastery to another, depending on the religious order concerned and the particular “specialization” of the different convents in the city. In the cloisters reserved for the aristocracy, there was a significant increase in dowry size during the seventeenth century, before settling at around 1,000 *scudi*. This had a levelling effect on the varying amounts that had been requested by the different religious orders in previous decades. Moreover, in some of the richer monasteries nuns claimed the right to admit poor girls as well, or they asked permission to use part of their monastic budget to provide a dowry to aspiring nuns from the local area, thus demonstrating a considerable capacity for decision-making.

Marina Caffiero

The Dowries of Conversion. Jews and Neophytes in Early Modern Rome

The article analyzes the dowry system in place within Jewish society, particularly in the Rome ghetto, in order to examine the role played by dowries among Jewish converts to Roman Catholicism. It is noticeable that the relatively high average level of dowries given to Jewish girls in the Rome ghetto was maintained by the ecclesiastical authorities for converts as well. By assigning greater amounts than to Christians, the Church seemed to want to uphold the privileged position that these women had enjoyed in their community prior to conversion. Consequently, the supply of subsidies, along with other material and symbolic privileges conceded to recent converts, constituted an impulse towards conversion and a powerful instrument for integration into Christian society via marriage with original Christians. Hence, the dowry exercised an important role in the Catholic Church’s conversion strategy during the Counter-Reformation period.

Marina Garbellotti

Dowries Contested and Dowries Regained in Eighteenth-Century Trent

From Roman law onwards, the main purpose of a dowry was that of contributing to the development and growth of a new family. For this reason, the dowry belonged neither to the wife who brought it into the marriage, nor to the husband who was to administer it, but to the couple jointly. This consideration is valuable for reflecting on dowries in relationship to marriage. More particularly, dowries take on a different meaning and broaden their purpose when they are seen in relationship to the unmarried woman, the husband’s family, the widow, a separated woman, or the woman’s family. In order to comprehend the different meanings and uses of the dowry as an institution, this article analyzes a number of lawsuits brought before the magistrate court in Trent in the 18th century. These cases show that women were well aware of their own rights and personally appeared in court and

fought to obtain the return of the dowry; legal action of this kind allowed separated wives and widows to gain ownership of dowries. Furthermore, it becomes clear that dowries were subject to a number of juridical constraints, which safeguarded them against dissipation and expropriation.

Siglinde Clementi

On the Economics of Honour. Marriage Goods in Tirol around 1600

The article offers a comparative analysis of marriage procedures and strategies by taking two Tyrolean families as examples: the landed nobles of the Wolkenstein-Trostburg family and the town-dwelling, bourgeois Gumer family. Particularly noticeable are the differences in marriage strategy: while the Wolkenstein-Trostburgs broke with their practice of endogamous marriage through connections to inheriting daughters from other Austrian provinces and southern Germany, the Gumers married widows with striking frequency. This difference was legal in origin, because the bourgeois women (both daughters and widows) possessed full inheritance rights, whereas the landed noblewomen did not (the latter only being allowed to inherit the marriage goods apportioned to them). The legal difference affected the type and form of marriage contracts. In the case of the Wolkenstein-Trostburgs, there were very extensive provisions with regard to widows' rights, whereas the Gumer contracts laid down in succinct fashion the stipulations relating to marriage goods and the husband's gift to his new bride after the wedding night (the *Morgengabe*). What the two families had in common was the meaning they attributed to notions of honour, both that of the family group and the individual sense of honour of women and men.

Margareth Lanzinger

Dowry and Marriage Goods Regimes: Variations and Transitions

The article begins with a discussion of the Italian dowry system in order better to analyze the less clearly regulated transfer of marriage goods in German-speaking Central Europe. Unlike in Italy, there was much greater differentiation between 'dowry regimes' in the German states and Habsburg lands, due to different legal cultures and traditions operating in a broader variety of chronological, spatial and social contexts. They varied not just with regard to terminology, but also their legal and gender-specific implications. From a comparative perspective, the author then illuminates the wide range of marriage good practices before examining – on the basis of marriage contracts from two southern Tyrolean judicial districts at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century – the Tyrolean practice of partitioning marriage goods. In conclusion, the author points to the need to reappraise the clearly ideologically influenced legal discourse pertaining to this practice.