

## Book Reviews

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Beshara Doumani (ed.), *Family history in the Middle East: household, property, and gender*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.) Pages 340. £20.50 (paperback).

In August 2001 *Continuity and Change* published a special issue on the Mediterranean Family (vol. 16, part 2). The articles in this issue were written by historians working with legal texts from Christian, Islamic and Jewish societies and interested in the interplay between legal prescriptions and changing historical circumstances. One of the leading questions was the way in which social historians could make use of legal sources to analyse social change. This edited volume on family history in the Middle East forms an important addition to the issues that were raised, and even broadens the scope of the discussion. In this book historians, anthropologists and demographers present highly interesting case studies of family history research based on different methods, such as archival research, the study of legal material and fieldwork, and in doing so they work against dominant views of Middle Eastern families.

In the introduction to this book Beshara Doumani outlines why family history is such an important field of inquiry in Middle Eastern studies. A long-standing and pervasive notion is that Middle Eastern societies are family-based, yet very few scholarly works on the Middle East have tried to historicize and deconstruct the notion of the family. A monolithic and static view of 'the Middle Eastern family' persists and there is little to no attention paid to the flexibility and fluidity of family forms and the diversity over time and space. This is particularly worrying because the family plays such an important role in the three main 'prestige zones' that have dominated Middle Eastern studies in the past two decades, to wit: Islam, gender and modernity.

Instead of presenting an overview of the diversity of family life in the Middle East, the main aim of the book is 'to provide a cross section of the various thematic, theoretical approaches, methodological issues, and sources currently being explored' (p. 2). The contributions deal with the early modern and modern periods (the seventeenth century to the twentieth) and cover the Arab heartlands of the Ottoman Empire and Iran. The book is divided into four sections: 'Family and Household'; 'Family, Gender and Property'; 'Family and the Praxis of Islamic Law'; and 'Family as Discourse'.

The first chapter in the section about family and household is by Philippe Fargues, who analyses the Egyptian census data of 1848 in which, for the first time, the individual became the statistical unit. Fargues concludes that extreme volatility characterized Cairene families and that individuals were not dissolved into kinship relations but were in direct contact with the larger society. Tomoki Okawara compares the household composition in Damascus and in Istanbul at the beginning of the twentieth century. He concludes that Damascene households were large and complex in structure and that 'the Ottoman family' did not exist. Mary Ann Fay analyses why elite women in Egypt promoted a Western-style nuclear family at the beginning of the twentieth century. She argues that the demise of the household as a locus of power meant that elite women lost their economic and social activities and were confined to the domestic sphere. By promoting the Western conjugal family they tried to strengthen their position in the household, and get access to education, work and political power.

The second section, about family, gender and property, consists of three very rich ethnographic studies. The section starts with an article by Annelies Moors about Palestinian women and gold. Moors discusses women's access to property, and in particular gold, and the importance gold plays in family relations. She shows when and why women identify with their families and refrain from claiming inheritance entitlements, and concludes that, despite the changes that have taken place in marriage arrangements and in the meanings ascribed to gold jewellery, women's inheritance strategies have not changed much. Martha Mundy and Richard Saumarez Smith discuss the tensions inherent in women's claims to property in a village in Jordan during the 1940s and 1950s. The chapter consists of three extensive family histories on the basis of which the authors show the importance of people's agency. The last chapter in this section is by Erika Friedl, who discusses changing marriage strategies in a village in Iran and who argues for an approach in which changes in marital customs and relations are directly linked to changes in forms of property holding, in relations of economic production and in political struggles.

In the third section, about family and the praxis of Islamic law, three historians present case studies of pre-twentieth-century societies. Court material is one of the richest archival sources for social historians studying family history in the Middle East but the use of such material is not unproblematic, as the special issue of *Continuity and Change* in 2001 showed. Beshara Doumani analyses lawsuits between individuals related by blood and/or marriage litigated in the Islamic courts in Tripoli (Lebanon) and Nablus (Palestine) in order to learn more about

family life in these two cities and the link between 'kin and court'. Iris Agmon tracks the changes in the process of document production over time and between two courts in Haifa and Jaffa in Palestine in the late nineteenth century. The chapter by Heather Ferguson attempts to see Islamic court records as more than summaries of social negotiations, as 'performances' of a unique social act, through labelling and demarcating the terms of such negotiations.

The last section of the book deals with family as a discourse. The first chapter is by Kenneth Cuno, who takes us back to the Egyptian family in the nineteenth century. Cuno shows that the transition from concubinage and harem life to monogamy in khedival households should not be interpreted as a result of Westernization but as one of the strategies of the khedives to avoid criticism and stay in power. Akram Khater looks at Lebanese families that migrated to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century and in particular at the fluid structure and meaning of the Lebanese family. He combines analysis of newspaper articles with the experiences of immigrants and shows the ambiguities in discourses about the ideal family, changes in family structures and the impact of migration.

This book is a valuable contribution to Middle Eastern studies and in particular to family history in the Middle East. The chapters in the book discuss a wide variety of topics, from many different perspectives and using an interesting combination of methods. In the current political situation, in which simplistic assumptions about the Middle East are the order of the day, well-informed books about the Middle East such as this one are of crucial importance.

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Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of manhood in early modern England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.) Pages xii + 292. £45.00.

This recent study of early modern masculinity is to be welcomed. Through her study of a variety of court records and meticulous reading of prescriptive literature, Alexandra Shepard has increased our understanding of how men's experiences of their gender varied according to their age, marital status and, increasingly, their class. A survey of medical literature provides new insights into how men's bodies were perceived; an in-depth examination of the dynamics of male friendship reveals important differences between this and more competitive notions of camaraderie; and the gestures of fighting men are exposed to demonstrate the centrality of everyday violence to constructions of early modern manhood.

It is Shepard's central thesis, however, which is bound to trigger debate. Like the eminent gender historian of early modern Germany, Lyndal Roper, Shepard has found evidence of young men both resisting and struggling to achieve

the patriarchal ideal of manhood. The undergraduate students and young townsmen of Cambridge, like their counterparts in Germany, participated in a youthful excess of drinking, fighting and illicit sex, behaviour that was far removed from the patriarchal ideals for men of self-control and discipline. Thus Shepard's findings confirm that in the past there was no single pattern or form to men's behaviour. Indeed, as Shepard recognizes from her study of contemporary conduct literature, the many contradictions within patriarchal ideology made this diversity of social practice inevitable. But Shepard takes her findings one step further, and to a conclusion that must merit further discussion. She argues that men who could not or would not achieve the patriarchal model of manhood pursued alternative codes of manhood. The word 'code' is what is problematic here. Patriarchal ideas about manhood constituted a code in the early modern period because they were a set of principles or rules that were widely, although not universally, accepted. This code was explicitly recorded in written form in the conduct books, medical literature and political treatises which have been the starting points of so much research on gender relations in this period. But there is nothing to suggest that the youthful forms of disorder that Shepard uncovers ever amounted to a code in this sense. Those who caused mayhem as young men were rebelling against the dominant code of masculinity, but they were not suggesting a new or alternative code. If these men were engaging in the construction of another, alternative code of masculinity, would the authorities in Cambridge and elsewhere have reacted as leniently as Shepard admits? Shepard argues that heavy drinking 'functioned as a form of initiation into the manhood of excess' (p. 105), that young men saw their social world as an 'alternative theatre of manhood' (p. 113), and even that the alehouse was 'the locus of an alternative society' (p. 211). But why, if this code of masculinity was so 'potent' and attractive, was it subsequently abandoned by so many men when they reached adulthood? At the start of her chapter on 'Youthful Excess', Shepard outlines one case of student disorder, examined by the Vice-chancellor of Cambridge University in 1593. Would two of the participants in this incident of misrule have gone on to achieve the positions of Bishop of Salisbury and Archbishop of York if they and others had viewed their bout of student disorder as a possible first step to achieving manhood via some alternative code? For her argument to be convincing, Shepard needed to provide evidence that demonstrates the existence of this code.

Shepard is right to point to the difficulties that men could experience as they sought to achieve economic independence and, as the patriarchal code prescribed, to be the chief providers for their families and households. But it is going too far to argue that for unmarried men who did not become independent householders, and married men who were reliant upon the labours of their wives and children, patriarchal ideals were an 'irrelevance' (pp. 17, 187). Patriarchal ideals were too pervasive and too important in the structuring of early modern society and its institutions to be so easily dismissed. At least in terms of their relationships with women, men could achieve patriarchal authority

in more ways than just through the control of economic resources. Indeed, it could be argued that in times of economic distress and hardship men compensated by finding other ways of asserting their dominance over women. Anna Clark's *The struggle for the breeches* (1995), for example, bears useful comparison. Clark's study of masculinity at the end of the eighteenth century shows how artisans who faced an uncertain economic future resorted to drowning their sorrows in drink. But far from abandoning the hope of achieving patriarchal manhood, these men asserted their dominance over their wives through brutality and violence when they returned home from the pub. The nature of the patriarchal ideal was such that men could reach its goals of self-control and control over others through different forms of behaviour. This is what has enabled patriarchy to adapt over time, but also what has prevented the emergence of any tenable alternative code of masculinity.

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Beryl Rawson, *Children and childhood in Roman Italy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.) Pages xiv + 419. £25.00; £10.50 (paperback).

Beryl Rawson's book on childhood is the culmination of a career in academia in which she has pioneered and guided the study of the Roman family and her own research on the child in Roman Italy. The book is divided into two parts: the first is on 'Representations of children', a single chapter focussed on the various ways in which children were represented, and the second part is entitled 'The life course', eight chapters on welcoming the child, rearing, ages and stages, education, relationships, public life, death, burial and commemoration. This brief review will concentrate on the methodology utilized with reference to the book's two sections.

The section on representations traces the development of known images of children from the Republic through to the second century AD. The perspective is shaped via chronology and discusses the imagery and texts (mostly legal) in which children appear, alongside literary and historical texts that are used to explain the significance or wider meaning. The imagery produced by the emperors is at the centre of Rawson's account. She sees a change in the representation of children in the second century and reads into the evidence a 'more benign' utilization on the basis of a reading of Pliny's speech, or *Panegyricus*, in contrast to the inclusion of children by Domitian or earlier first-century emperors on coinage and on other public monuments (p. 59). The problem here is one of evidence: Pliny's speech in praise of Trajan is far from objective and was produced to distinguish the new ruler from Domitian and other earlier emperors. An alternative viewpoint is possible. If the visual imagery is read independently of the second-century texts, we find the inclusion of children in public imagery to originate in the

mid-first century AD, notably with the emperors Nero, Vitellius and Vespasian. For example, coinage with the legend *congiarium* that included the image of a child can be found in Nero's reign. Similarly, the coinage associated with the legend *Tutela Augusta* of 69–71 AD prefigures the *Alimenta Italia* coinage of Trajan (see *Numismatic Chronicle*, Ser. 7, Vol. 1 (1961), 129–30). The presence of this evidence undercuts Rawson's reading of the *Alimenta Italia* (pp. 59–61) and of *congiaria* (p. 41) via a rather literal reading of Pliny's rhetoric as fact or the intention of the emperor. Hence, the assertion of a change in the representation of the child in the second century is found to be wanting and to be a product of a change in the type of texts (and the survival of monuments), as opposed to imperial images themselves.

The second part of this book seeks to 'reconstruct children's life courses and their experiences as they progressed through life as children' (p. 92). This is a much longer section, in which Rawson demonstrates her unparalleled knowledge of the textual evidence. There is reference after reference. However, what we do not find in the book is an approach that seeks to explain or elucidate the evidence within a broader context of the historical sociology of the life course, and to establish the factors that shaped or made Roman childhood a unique cultural phenomenon. In fact, there would seem to be an attempt to read the Roman experience as 'normative', for example via reference to ethnographic parallels in other societies to explain the transition at the age of seven (p. 139). There are not similar parallels sought for other points of transition, for example that of puberty and early female marriage. Throughout the book, there is a positive view of the experience of the child, maybe in reaction to syntheses by those outside the discipline of Ancient History (such as De Mause, Shorter and Stone) from the 1970s who stressed cruelty to the child as a feature of the Roman experience (p. 10). What we do not find in this volume is an evaluation of childhood in Roman Italy as something that is alien; instead we read about familiar children and normative childhoods within the context of Roman society. We have positive images presented here, and violence does not appear in the text, either to children or by older children or *iuvenes* (for example in the riot of AD 59 at Pompeii).

Having raised these criticisms, we have to admire the author's knowledge and recognize that the book will become *the* reference book for the study of childhood in Roman Italy.

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