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Review Of "The Dutch Gentry, 1500-1650: Family, Faith, And Fortune" By S. D. Marshall

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Review

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not the whole story. The problematic relationship between rules and practices is not addressed here or even alluded to, and so we must always keep in mind the limited nature of Wolfram's project as well as the evidence she uses in her consideration of English kinship. We learn much about kinship rules but little about how they were followed or whether they were followed or who followed them.

The Dutch Gentry, 1500–1650: Family, Faith, and Fortune. By Sherrin D. Marshall. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987. Pp. xxvii + 225. \$35.00.

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Despite general agreement about the nobility's centrality to the Dutch Revolt, historians of the early modern Netherlands have slighted the landed elites. This has probably been because the Revolt issued in a bourgeois society, study of urban classes has been privileged, and even research in rural history has attended more to the peasantry than to the aristocracy.

Not every neglected subject merits investigation, of course, but the considerable light thrown on other European societies by studies of their nobilities suggests the potential rewards of similar research in the Low Countries. Sherrin Marshall's book *The Dutch Gentry, 1500–1650*, encompasses three generations of the lesser nobility, chiefly in the province of Utrecht, but also including everyone married to Utrechters: substantial minorities of men and women from adjacent Holland and Gelderland; a sprinkling from elsewhere in the Netherlands and abroad; and some urban patricians. Socially and economically analogous to the English strata from which their name is borrowed, as members of the legally defined nobility, the Dutch gentry differed juridically from their commoner counterparts in Britain. Yet, despite this status, their political arena was the provincial assembly rather than a national parliament.

Contending that the family constituted the principal determinant of gentry behavior, Marshall examines the life course and daily existence of the class through the lens of family. In contrast to scholars who consider the lineage the primary emotional, financial, and political nexus for the second estate, she argues for the equal material and affective significance of what she terms the "core family unit," a multigenerational family group comprising two sets of grandparents, one set of parents, and the latter's children.

The first half of the book is informed by scholarship and debates in family history. The Utrecht gentry, Marshall finds, conformed to the typical European pattern of late marriage and a significant proportion of celibates. On questions of interpretation, she generally concurs with an emerging revisionist account that modifies the views put forth by scholars

like Philippe Ariès, Lawrence Stone, and Edward Shorter. If these gentry are any indication, the early modern family, for all its undoubted patriarchal structure, was characterized by close and loving parent-child relationships, respect for individuals' wishes, and a balance between core family imperatives and responsibility to the lineage.

Addressing issues in cultural, social, and political history, the final three chapters find that continuity marked the lives of the gentry across a tumultuous century and a half. The religion of the gentry remained practical, Erasmian, and *politique*. Eschewing the alleged extravagance of its superiors, converting properties to shorter leases, and obtaining governmental jobs, the majority held its own across the long, inflationary 16th century. Though the Revolt enforced some geographic mobility, several decades of delayed marriage, and fewer children, only rarely were gentry families decimated or impoverished, property remained substantially in the same hands, and, in the new republican regime, gentry filled the same kinds of positions as before.

Echoing views already current on the 17th century, Marshall insists that a value consensus obtained across classes in the Netherlands, as the principle of reciprocity moderated hierarchic postulates. This observation captures aspects of Dutch mentality, but the author ascribes too much to reciprocal values, underplaying the significance of deference and hierarchy in feudal, patron-client, republican, and personal relations. Similarly, while the idea of the core family unit is a welcome attempt to conceptualize the links between nuclear family and lineage, in fact nuclear families receive the bulk of Marshall's attention—to the neglect of the core's elder generation and the lineage. Though the book contains interesting information about widows and widowers, including gender-specific rates of remarriage and accepted bastardy, overall, this important topic is treated too briefly and diffusely. And despite Marshall's recurrent citation of the issue, the situation of women gets absorbed (once again!) into that of the family.

The Dutch Gentry employs archival and printed sources as well as literary evidence. Acknowledging that the latter material may not be statistically typical, Marshall maintains that it nevertheless provides useful insights into attitudes. One can sympathize with this position yet wish that the author had further explored the ambiguities of prescriptive literature and exiguous sources, since her conclusions about such matters as reciprocity, women's autonomy, and religious sentiments depend heavily on them. The book incorporates numerous figures and tables, not all carrying equal conviction or fascination. Photographed apparently directly from computer printout, the figures are, at times, insufficiently distinct. Regrettably, the material presented visually is all too often discussed in a very summary or incomplete manner (see, e.g., tables 3.2 and 3.3.)

Because the gentry shared status, landholding patterns, governmental activities, and often level of wealth with the greater nobility, and because both strata sat together in the provincial states, focus on the gentry may

prove unduly restrictive. In any event, conclusions about the aristocracy based on Utrecht are likely to need modification before being applied to the southern provinces (present-day Belgium), in which the higher nobility were more numerous, wealthy, and influential, and in which the course of early modern history diverged notably even before the Revolt. Whether they will prove valid for the rest of the modern Netherlands remains to be seen: work in progress on the nobility of Holland will facilitate comparisons with the situation in the dominant northern province. Whatever the results of other inquiries, however, Marshall's case study furnishes much empirical material and many suggestions to ponder for national or international syntheses of the history of early modern landed elites.

The Decline of Fertility in Europe. Edited by Ansley J. Coale and Susan Cotts Watkins. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pp. xxii + 484. \$55.00 (cloth); \$14.50 (paper).

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The Decline of Fertility in Europe represents the culmination of the Princeton European Fertility Project, which began in 1963. In their summary article, Ansley J. Coale and Roy Treadway describe the principal purposes of the project: "to create a detailed quantitative record of fertility in each of the several hundred provinces of Europe during the period of major decline, and to determine the social and economic conditions that prevailed when the modern reduction in the rate of childbearing began" (p. 32). Indeed, the quantitative information alone is a great contribution to our understanding of European social history, and the attempts to analyze the socioeconomic conditions of the period at the beginning of the decline have made a significant contribution to historical sociology.

Coale begins the volume by placing the decline of European fertility in the 18th century in historical context. The rapid increase in the world's population started at the time that the Industrial Revolution was beginning, as newly developed modern science and more rapid advances in technology contributed to a continuous expansion of transportation and trade and to increased agricultural productivity, as well as to the development of mechanized manufacturing. The peoples of Europe (America included) grew more rapidly in number than the rest of the world's population during the early phases of accelerated growth. Beginning in the late 19th century, the fertility of the European populations declined, which made it the first population to return to moderate rates of increase.

In addition, Coale argues, in the introductory chapter, that the decline in fertility that has been almost universal in Europe was a change from (a) moderate fertility, kept from a very high level by late marriage, perma-