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The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, And Gender In Cities Of The Low Countries, 1300-1550 (Women In Culture And Society)



Synopsis

Medieval Douai was one of the wealthiest cloth towns of Flanders, and it left an enormous archive documenting the personal financial affairs of its citizens -- wills, marriage agreements, business contracts, and records of court disputes over property rights of all kinds. Based on extensive research in this archive, this book reveals how these documents were produced in a centuries-long effort to regulate -- and ultimately to redefine -- property and gender relations. At the center of the transformation was a shift from a marital property regime based on custom to one based on contract. In the former, a widow typically inherited her husband's property; in the latter, she shared it with or simply held it for his family or offspring. Howell asks why the law changed as it did and assesses the law's effects on both social and gender meanings but she insists that the reform did not originate in general dissatisfaction with custom or a desire to disempower widows. Instead, it was born in a complex economic, social and cultural history during which Douaisiens gradually came to think about both property and gender in new ways.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Late medieval Douai was one of the wealthiest cloth towns of Flanders, and it left an enormous archive documenting the personal financial affairs of its citizens -- wills, marriage agreements, business contracts, and records of court disputes over property rights of all kinds. Based on extensive research in this archive. The Marriage Exchange reveals how these documents were produced in a centuries-long effort to regulate -- and ultimately to redefine -- property and gender

relations. At the center of the transformation was the shift from a marital property regime based on custom to one based on contract. In the former, a widow typically inherited her husband's property; in the latter, she shared it with or simply held it for his family or offspring. Although Martha C. Howell argues that the legal reform had profound implications for both the social and gender order, she doesn't portray the reform as the triumph of one social group's interests or as a contest between men and women. Instead, she treats the reform as the record of a more complex economic, social, and cultural history in which the meanings of property, social place, and gender were themselves transformed.

Focusing on the history of marriage, this study provokes the reader to re-consider what marriage is about.

Howell does a great job examining how Renaissance women protected their interests, and the interests of their children. her book is extremely detailed and well researched. Although my historical interests are as far away from Renaissance Europe, this book sure raised my interest level

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