

Andrea Griesebner u. Evdoxios Doxiadis (eds.), **Gender and Divorce in Europe: 1600–1900. A Praxeological Perspective**, London/New York: Routledge 2024, 249 p., ca. EUR 54,– (paperback), ISBN 978-1032369341.

Over the past three decades, family history in its broader sense has flourished and broadened considerably in scope. Part of the significance of this renewal has been the shift in attention from stable structures such as marriage and the household to broader, more diverse and dynamic social networks and relationships. Today, there is a growing emphasis on delving more deeply into areas that may at first appear to be outside the family framework, such as loneliness or the lives of single and non-marital individuals. In this sense, and probably since Lawrence Stone's pioneering study *Broken Lives*, the end of the formal family, separation and divorce have attracted growing attention from researchers across a range of disciplines.

Against this backdrop, *Gender and Divorce in Europe: 1600–1900. A Praxeological Perspective* is an important contribution to the historical study of the family, proposing a broad comparison between different regions, contexts and periods. The editors' introduction sets the scene and offers different keys to interpretations, emphasising four dimensions that are found in the chapters of the book: the different definitions and terminologies of "divorce from marriage", "the regulation of the consequences of divorce", "making a living" and the question of the "well-being" of divorced women and men. The book insists strongly on the economic and material conditions of the spouses involved in divorce proceedings, while at the same time pointing out some of the limitations imposed by the sources and the state of research.

The list of historical contributions to this interesting volume opens with a cross-sectional article by the Swedish historian Maria Agren on "Women and Work" (pp. 16–30). The main thesis of the article is not difficult to sum up: despite ideological notions about divergent gender roles in the family, almost all early modern "households must have been based on a two-supporters model according to which both spouses were expected to contribute to the common economy" (p. 27). This model presupposed that both husband and wife could take on a wide variety of tasks and had to have some authority to administer and govern their households. This is important because women, who in most of the cases sought separation or divorce from their husbands, had to see themselves as capable of leading an economically independent life. As the editors point out in the introduction, economic rules and arrangements prove crucial in order to understanding the chances and limits of divorce litigation and the material conditions of married life or, especially for women, of an independent existence.

Agren's work is a frequently cited reference in the chapters that follow, probably because of the book's emphasis on economic matters. However, the relevance of Agren's conclusions for the different countries and cultures considered in the volume is not self-evident: can the Scandinavian case studies be seen as representative for Europe – for example for the southern Catholic countries – and for the Ottoman Empire? A

contextualisation by the editors would certainly have been useful, all the more so as they strongly underline in their introduction the huge degree of regional, cultural and religious variation associated with separation and divorce.

The following contributions to the volume are divided into two main parts: Part I deals with “Divorce from bed and board”, Part II with “Divorce with dissolution of the marriage”. This structure confronts the reader with a terminological and conceptual problem, which is discussed in the introduction to the volume and recurs in several contributions: it is indeed questionable whether a separation of wife and husband without dissolution of the marriage can be assimilated to a divorce. In the Catholic tradition, this is basically seen as a temporary separation – separation from bed and board – although in practice the break can last for the rest of the spouses’ existence. Since the separation does not allow husband and wife to remarry, it is not a true divorce. The editors of the volume point out that this fundamental difference is often not so clear in practice. This is certainly true. But it represents an important doctrinal and legal distinction between different confessions concerning the very nature of marriage.

Nevertheless, reading the different chapters provides many interesting elements for understanding the variety of forms of separation. As some chapters in part I demonstrate, the theoretical subordination of wives to their husbands was not absolute: in several cases women could achieve a certain degree of economic autonomy, running their own estates and businesses. In this field, social variation is indeed astonishing.

A number of contributions focus on the laws governing the material conditions of separated spouses and on the practical arrangements which might be made between spouses in a national or regional context – (Andrea Griesebner and Susanne Hehenberger, Habsburg Monarchy; Krista Kesselring and Tim Stretton, England; Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi, Bilbao; Claire Châtelain, France; Zuzana Pavelková Čevelová and Jessica Reich, Bishoprics of Prague and Trent, Birgit Dober, Lower Austria).

Marie Malherbe’s contribution to the volume stands out for its micro-historical analysis of a single case: the “divortio” trial between Marianna Valmarana and her husband Sebastiano Mocenigo in Venice in 1785 (pp. 97–109). As in other regions, the number of “divorzii” increased significantly between 1775 and 1800, and in most cases it was the women who demanded separation: separation from bed and board in this case meant the separation from property. In the aristocratic Republic of Venice, divorce was perceived as a threat to the order of state and society. Despite this conservative tendency, the intertwined ecclesiastical and civil processes left families some room for manoeuvre. In particular, the ecclesiastical courts were accused of being too tolerant towards Venitian women who wished to separate from their husbands. In fact the ecclesiastical courts were often a safeguard against domestic abuse, a feature that Intxaustegi Jauregi observes in Bilbao (pp. 70–83).

Malherbe’s micro-historical approach shows that Marianna was supported by her brother and probably by a broader kin group. This aspect underlines the importance of a favourable social network – especially since the *publica vox et fama* was decisive for

women at court. The availability or lack of a solid kin network proves to be a crucial factor, especially for women. This partly nuances the book's emphasis on the individual material backgrounds of the spouses. Even though Marianna won the civil case, she had to live apart from her children and suffered a social burden: the dimension of "well-being" of divorced women and men was not only a material issue.

The merit of the second part of the volume is that it brings together examples from various regional and religious cultures: the focus is not only on Catholic or Protestant Western European couples, but examples from the Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina and Jewish couples under the Austrian Civil Code are also described and analysed. The contributions (by Iris Fleßenkämper on the County of Lippe; Evdoxios Doxiadis on Greece; Ninja Bumann on Bosnia and Herzegovina; Ellinor Forster on Jewish couples in Austria) focus in particular on the different options for arrangements and economic solutions for separated or divorced men and women, highlighting the bewildering variety of legal frameworks, social conditions and actual situations.

Gamze Yavuzer's essay on "The Indistinct Line between Marriage and Divorce. The Ambiguous Nature of Marital Status in the 17th-Century Ottoman Empire" may be of particular interest to Western readers, as it allows comparison with a different political and religious context. The author emphasises the strong reliance on orality in the Ottoman Islamic world: in this legally "obscure atmosphere", marriage was often an ambiguous and precarious status, especially for women, which could be terminated by the husband with a simple sentence. All the more so as different forms of divorce were available: "Talāk" could be decided unilaterally by the husband, but he had to respect formal financial obligations towards the divorced wife. "Hul", on the other hand, could also be requested by the wife, but required the consent of the husband. "Feish", a third form of divorce, required the formal intervention of the courts, but could only be granted in special cases, such as impotence or apostasy. The complex and ambiguous definitions of divorce opened up wide spaces for negotiation and manipulation by both spouses, especially if they could rely on favourable witnesses to support their case. In this context, the written legal document is only the final formalisation of an essentially oral process.

In conclusion, Griesebner and Doxiadis's volume is an original and important contribution to the comparative study of marriage and divorce. Its strong focus on economic aspects fills a gap in family history studies – although recent research cited in the volume has already paved the way for a renewal – and opens up new avenues of investigation that will certainly prove fruitful in the years to come. Such a book remains an ambitious undertaking: it is in part a difficult book, considering a wide range of cases and situations, involving different confessions and religions – Catholic and Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican, Jewish and Muslim – in various geographical regions and therefore often different legal frameworks, as well as covering a wide period of time, from around 1600 to the First World War. As the subject is not simple and depends on

many institutional, legal, religious and cultural variables, the comparison remains a challenge. In this respect, *Gender and Divorce in Europe* is a courageous undertaking.

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Theresa Earenfight, **Catherine of Aragon. Infanta of Spain, Queen of England**, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 2021, 251 S., ca. EUR 35,-, ISBN 978-0271091648.

Wie verfasst man heutzutage die Biographie einer Person, die derartig im Rampenlicht ihrer Zeit sowie im Zentrum zahlreicher Kontroversen der Nationalgeschichte stand, wie Katharina von Aragon: spanische Prinzessin, politische Botschafterin, Ehefrau von zwei englischen Königen, Regentin und Heerführerin von England und – last but not least – für den scheidungswilligen Tudorkönig Heinrich VIII. Ursache (wenn auch nicht Auslöserin!) des religiösen Schismas und der Entstehung der anglikanischen Kirche? Und wer wäre für diese Aufgabe besser geeignet als Theresa Earenfight, die einen Großteil ihrer universitären Karriere dem vormodernen spanischen Königtum gewidmet hat? Der Ansatz, den Earenfight als Biographin wählt ist dreifach: Erstens handelt es sich um einen resolut feministischen Ansatz, der hauptsächlich die weiblichen Protagonistinnen in den Blick nimmt und die männlichen Personen nur wo nötig in die Geschichte einbringt. Die persönlichen wie auch politischen Beziehungen zu Katharinas Ehemännern Arthur und Heinrich VIII., zu Politikern wie Thomas Cromwell oder zu ihrem Vater Fernando werden nur dort relevant, wo sie Katharina direkt betreffen. Hier seien beispielsweise neueste medizinhistorische Analysen zu einer möglichen Erbkrankheit Heinrichs VIII., dem McLeod-Syndrom, erwähnt, das eventuell die Ursache für die zahlreichen Fehlgeburten, die Katharina erlitt, gewesen sein könnte (S. 117). Earenfight's Ansatz ist zweitens auch dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass er Katharinas Persönlichkeit und ihre Handlungen von ihrer spanischen Herkunft ableitet: Insbesondere ihre Mutter Isabella I., Königin von Kastilien und León aus eigenem Recht und damit Vorbild und Lehrerin Katharinas, ihre enge Verbindung zu ihren spanischen Hofdamen und Familienmitgliedern sowie vor allem ihre lebenslang am englischen Hofe hochgehaltene „Hispanität“ in Verhalten, Mode und den sie umgebenden Personen bilden ein Erklärungsraster, um Katharinas Person und Positionen zu verstehen. Drittens fokussiert die Autorin in der vorliegenden Biographie auf eine materielle Ebene, indem sie Bildzeugnisse wie Portraits, aber auch Architektur oder Widmungs-Handschriften, Rechnungsbücher sowie erhaltene Stoffe, Objekte und Kleidung für ihre Analyse heranzieht. Orte, an denen Katharina verweilte, sowie Materialien, die ihr oder Zeitgenossinnen gehört hatten, werden so als Quellen stark gewichtet, mit dem erklärten Ziel, so nah wie möglich an das Forschungsobjekt heranzukommen.