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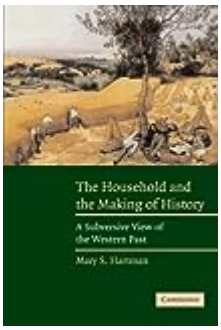

Mary S. Hartman. *The Household and the Making of History: A Subversive View of the Western Past.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xi + 297 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-82972-4; $25.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-53669-1.

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The Rise of the West? Late Marriage for Women as the Key to An Invisible Paradigm

Good historical syntheses of women's and family history show us what history looks like with their subjects at the center rather than at the margins of the story, but great syntheses suggest that our vision of history might not ever be the same. Mary S. Hartman, a long-time advocate of women's history and feminist politics, and a founding member of the Berkshire Conference of the History of Women, has provided us with just such a rare work of scholarship. When historians are drawn to important problems, such as explaining the rise of the West, they generally refer students to accounts of the rise of capitalism and the nation-state. Whatever their merits, these narratives generally privilege the social and political activities of elite males. Hartman proposes a reassessment that shifts our focus to everyday families' contributions to global historical change. She argues that the families of western Europe, and more specifically northwestern Europe, created a marriage and household system that ultimately explains the rise of the West.

Hartman's evidence includes essential work from the past four decades of important research by women's and family historians of northwestern Europe and North America. Despite its breadth, Hartman contends that the scholarship has not succeeded in reenvisioning the basic contours of the western past for at least three historiographic reasons. First, the important findings of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, led by Peter Laslett (d. 2001), focused attention on the nuclear family as the most important demographic characteristic of northwestern Europe. In the process, John Hajnal's argument that the key element within the nuclear family system was women's late age of marriage went virtually ignored.[1] Second, women's historians have been averse to investigating domestic settings because they often saw the family as "the central institution of women's oppression," and thus women's and family historians have not communicated effectively (p. 11). Third, both women's and family historians continue to assume that households are always acted upon by widespread economic, political, and religious transformations, rather than viewing the household as actively contributing to the changes. Hartman thus offers "an interpretive account that links disparate findings in a single line of argument.... [By] provok[ing] reassessments of what we think we already know about the making of

the modern world" (p. 3).

Hartman's argument rests on a comparison between early- and late-marriage systems, and specifically women's position within them. Hartman shows that women's and men's life-cycles converge more in late-marriage settings than they do in early-marriage settings. Early-marriage systems are the most traditional. In this model, women marry relatively young and move into their husbands' households. Early-marriage households help to maintain a supply of laborers and ensure orderly property devolution while managing land and caring for the children and the elderly. Late-marriage systems, on the other hand, are far less orderly and difficult to maintain. In these systems, young women and men leave the household and enter domestic service, working for years to save for marriage. The establishment of separate households, along with increased age differences between generations, means that late-marriage households have more difficulty managing property, and they are less capable of caring for the elderly. The essential difference between the two systems, Hartman argues, is the age of marriage for women. In the late-marriage system, women are more independent for longer periods of time, they have more choice in their selection of husbands, and they are more likely to behave as economic partners within the marriages. She argues that "late-marriage arrangements compelled women to become more independent social agents than their counterparts in early-marriage settings" (p. 26).

Hartman believes that northwestern Europe's distinctiveness is uniquely tied to its development of the late-marriage household. Hartman's ambitious goals are to suggest when and why the late-marriage household emerged in northwestern Europe, and what its likely effects were. Hartman uses the work of Judith Bennett, Barbara Hanawalt, and Lawrence Poos to show that the northwestern European household pattern existed among thirteenth-century peasants, and she relies on David Herlihy's (d. 1991) analysis to suggest that the pattern may have had roots within the Carolingian era, as newly recruited peasant families decided to postpone their daughters' marriages to take "advantage of their field work as a means to anchor and enhance family resources" (p. 89).[2] Over time, this family system created unforeseen consequences, such as more freedom for children to marry, more space between generations, and a gradual reduction in the importance of extended kin groups. These characteristics help to explain legal traditions that emphasized both spouses as producers of wealth and allowed widows extensive rights over household property. Population pressures in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries caused many peasants and urban craftsmen to move toward single-heir systems to preserve land while providing movable goods for daughters and younger sons.[3] Later medieval and early modern households were increasingly dependent on life-cycle servants and outside laborers, and these young men and women thus embarked on nearly a decade, or more, of independent economic activity with the goal of saving for their own marriages and households.

Hartman believes that the divergence between early- and later-marriage households created two very different "gender imaginaries" by the later medieval and early modern eras. The later-marriage household, combined with sixteenth-century demographic and economic pressures "increasingly oblig[ed] men and women to reinvent themselves. Their more parallel life cycles, and the greater dependence upon one another than in most agricultural societies, are keys to the deeper plot line of the Western gender story" (p. 103). Her test case for how different household systems influenced perception and action is a detailed comparison of the situation in fourteenth-century Montaillou and seventeenth-century Salem. Both societies experienced religious and economic crises, and both societies were deeply misogynistic, but they articulated gender and power arrangements in very different ways. In Montaillou, men expressed open contempt for women, but do not appear to have felt threatened by them in any way. Instead, their anger was directed at outsiders, notably wealthy churchmen. On the other hand, in Salem, men outwardly praised women's capacities as mothers, but feared their power. The difference, for Hartman, lay in the household systems. Montaillou's household system encouraged a view that "manhood and womanhood are somehow innate. Their specific features were experienced by women and men alike as fully embedded in their sex-segregated worlds. In Salem, women's and men's day-to-day worlds regularly overlapped, and the attributes of manhood and womanhood were a great deal more fuzzy" (p. 143). These ambiguous roles fostered latent anxieties that, when combined with economic crises, set the stage for the witchcraft phenomenon.

Hartman argues that the late-marriage household system was centrally important to early modern religious reform, debates over systems of political authority, and the rise of the early industrial revolution. She notes that late medieval popular devotion and the emerging protestant movements took shape in areas dominated by late-marriage households. The success of protestantism, she

argues, can be traced to a correlation between the message of personal faith and the "pressures of expanded choices" within late-marriage households (p. 217). In contrast, the stable early-marriage households of southern Europe heard few liberating tones in the evangelical message. In an echo of Sarah Hanley's work, Hartman links the emergence of egalitarian political ideas and the wide discussion of links between family and government to voluntary marriage arrangements that placed women and men on more equal footings than their cohorts in early-marriage settings.[4] As for the early industrial revolution, Hartman points to two specific processes tied to late-marriage households. On the one hand, the difficulty of maintaining land as the primary form of economic sustenance and identity forced families to find other means to manage liquid wealth, fostered increased economic planning, and helped give rise to new investment strategies and opportunities. Peasant families, moreover, incorporated a number of strategies to develop wealth through cottage industry techniques. And the rise of single women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created an opportune labor force.

Of particular interest to many historians will be Hartman's sub-argument that a focus on the later-marriage household system helps to resolve many historiographic problems about changes in early modern gender relations. Did the sixteenth century witness a new emphasis on patriarchal repression, or did women find expanded avenues for power and authority? Were women's economic opportunities expanding or declining in the late medieval and early modern periods? Did protestantism elevate women's status, or subvert it? Contradictory evidence exists for all of these perspectives, but Hartman offers an interesting, pithy explanation: "Secure patriarchs rarely advertise" (p. 216). Hartman believes that evidence of patriarchal resurgence is an expression of social anxiety within late-marriage households ultimately rooted in the fissure between masculine identity and landed property, and a growing recognition of greater economic partnerships between men and women. The social anxiety created a "heightened preoccupation with gender difference and female inferiority" (p. 50). Early modern evidence of patriarchalism should be read not as the beginning of a downward spiral for women, but rather as a reaction, she says, to the convergence of women's and men's lives. Hartman likewise believes that placing the late-marriage household as the central frame of reference helps to solve similar debates among women's and family historians of the nineteenth century. Evocations of the doctrine of separate spheres and the elevation of motherhood were reactions, she writes, of late-marriage households to post-1750 "population explosion, egalitarian political movements, and economic shifts" that forced men to find a new footing for their identities within religion, politics, and new scientific discourses (p. 262).

In this thought-provoking study, Hartman demonstrates that historians have ignored an important level of causation when they dismiss the household as a place of agency. Hartman is a materialist, but her analysis stems from a post-Marxist, feminist perspective that finds its materialism in household structures. Some readers might find it difficult to recognize the household unit as the ultimate materialist base, the ultimate root of change, that Hartman offers to us. Many historians might still prioritize economic changes as the essential base for the rise of the West. Historians of the family in Renaissance Italy may well wonder where their city-states fit into the picture, and why their subjects were essentially left out of Hartman's story, despite the numerous studies available to her. Renaissance Italians were no strangers to explicit defenses of patriarchal systems, yet they exhibited early marriage and mixed household structures. It seems that the rich research on southern Europe is really not the issue for Hartman, and at times her comparative analysis of familial patterns only serves to make a point about the unique qualities of northwestern European family pattern without actually providing any insight into activities to the south.

Like any interesting interpretive, synthetic work, Hartman's model will need scrutiny to determine if her hypotheses are correct. Women's and family historians currently laboring in the archives around Europe should find Hartman's proposals intriguing and in need of further research and testing. Over time, Hartman's analysis of household structure may prove to be a paradigm shift in how historians approach and explain significant changes in western history. It will also undoubtedly prove important for global historians as they search for new paths toward a comparative approach to the development of global civilizations. Hartman clearly sets out an agenda for scholars interested in women's and family history. Taking her path could be very exciting and rewarding.

Notes

[1]. John Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London: E. Arnold, 1965), pp. 101-143; and Hajnal, "Two Kinds of

Preindustrial Household Formation System," *Population and Development Review* 8 (1982): pp. 449-494.

[2]. Judith Bennett, "Medieval Peasant Marriage: An Examination of Marriage License Fines in Liber Gersumarum," in *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. A. Raftis (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981), pp. 193-246; Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); David Herlihy,* Medieval Households *(Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985); and Lawrence A. Poos,* A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex 1350-1525_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[3]. Martha Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in the Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1550* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[4]. Sarah Hanley, "Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Powers in Domestic and State Government, 1500-1800," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): pp. 27-52.

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