



## **Women's fortunes. Social and economic changes in the position of late medieval women (1300-1600)**

Workshop, 26-27th May 2016  
Leuven, Belgium

This workshop aims at bringing together a number of scholars to reflect on the changes in the social and economic position of women at the end of the middle ages. According to most historians, the opportunities for female agency diminished in post-Black Death Europe, especially in terms of their socioeconomic empowerment. To explain this, scholars point to changing production conditions and labour markets (Wenksy 1980, Howell 1986, McIntosh 2005, Stabel 2014), the growing control of labour in the male-dominated craft guilds (Bennett and Kowaleski 1989, Stabel 1999), and an increased emphasis on patrilineal preservation of property in family strategies (Howell 1998, Hanawalt 2007, Hutton 2011). However, according to other scholars the late middle ages were a time of expanding opportunities for women (Barron 1989, Goldberg 1992, De Moor and Van Zanden 2010). In the most recent hypothesis, the demographic decline caused by the Black Death gave rise to the proliferation of the European Marriage Pattern (EMP) in northwestern Europe. The EMP is said to have empowered women in late medieval society, especially women in the lower and middle ranks. This occurred in particular in the North Sea regions, where it is alleged to have stimulated economic growth. Although both views ultimately agree on a negative trend for women's participation in the urban economy in the early modern period, their timing differs strongly: whereas the first group of historians argues that women's possibilities were already in continuing degradation in the fourteenth century, the second maintains that the decrease only started to take place from the sixteenth century onwards. Moreover, the early modern decline thesis itself has been challenged for certain regions, such as the ubiquitous Northern Netherlands, but also in France (Crowston 2008; Van der Heijden, Van Nederveen-Meerkerk & Schmidt 2009).

The regional and chronological variations in women's economic opportunities across late medieval Europe have recently been linked to differences in the economic development of regions. High degrees of female economic participation may have been beneficial to economic growth. This hypothesis has attracted a lot of debate, but remains in dire need of more diverse case studies, both geographically and thematically. First, the debate on women's economic opportunities has chiefly been considered from the perspective of female labour, although gender differences on property and credit markets are considered equally central to explaining the relationship between women's position and economic development. Besides labour, this

workshop, therefore, wants to include investments strategies of women in a variety of markets (real property, credit, annuities, ...), as well as the social, cultural and institutional contexts of women's participation in these markets (social networks, creditworthiness, gender roles, ...). Second, the binary geographical divide between marriage patterns in northwestern Europe (with the North Sea areas at its core), and southern and eastern Europe has been challenged (Dennison & Ogilvie 2014), thereby undermining the causal role of the EMP in women's position and economic development. Regional differences therefore need further scrutiny, as women's economic position across northwestern Europe differed greatly, even in the North Sea areas. Regional divergences in women's position equally prevailed across southern Europe. Consequently, geographically diverse case studies are needed to assess the causes and consequences of regional and chronological variations in women's economic participation. For that reason, this workshop aims at bringing together scholars working on a variety of regions across Europe.

## Program

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### Thursday 26 May 2016

13u-14u	LUNCH
14u-16u	SESSION 1  Introduction  Ellen Kittell (University of Idaho) <i>What is in a First Name? Evidence from mortmain payment in late medieval Courtrai and Tiel</i>  James Shaw (University of Sheffield) <i>Women as creditors, debtors and brokers: the informal economy of credit in seventeenth-century Venice</i>
16u-16u30	COFFEE BREAK
16u30-18u30	SESSION 2  Jeremy Goldberg (University of York) <i>Material girls revisited: problematising the social and economic position of women in later medieval England</i>  Andrea Baryn (University of Leuven, University of Antwerp) <i>Crediting women? A comparative perspective on credit markets and gender inequality in late medieval Brabant.</i>

## Friday 27 May 2016

9u-11u	SESSION 3  Lies Vervaeet (University of Ghent) <i>Women and the rural lease market in coastal Flanders, 14th - 16th century</i>  Anna Bellavitis (University of Rouen) <i>Dowry, women's wealth and women's work: the case of Venice in the European context</i>
11u-11u30	COFFEE BREAK
11u30-13u30	SESSION 4  François Rivière (EHESS) <i>Female craft organizations in Rouen and Paris in the Middle Ages: how could women control their own economic activity?</i>  Shennan Hutton (University of California, Davis) <i>Growing the Nest-Egg: women's investments in fourteenth-century Ghent.</i>  Conclusions
13u30-14u30	LUNCH
14u30	CITY WALK (optional) Guided walk through medieval Louvain

### Practicalities

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WORKSHOP LOCATION (to be confirmed)

*Pauscollege Leuven*  
Room MTC 00.59  
Hogeschoolplein 3, 3000 Leuven

### ENROLMENT

The workshop is open for interested researchers. An enrolment fee of 20 € is requested. For registrations, please register by e-mail before May 12, 2016. More information and registration: [andrea.bardyn@kuleuven.be](mailto:andrea.bardyn@kuleuven.be).