



Manon van der Heyden, *Women and Crime in Early Modern Holland* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016, xii and 181 pp., ISBN 9789004314115).

In *Women and Crime in Early Modern Holland*, Manon Van der Heyden convincingly tackles some persistent assumptions about the criminal behavior of early modern women. First of all, women in this period played a larger role in crime than is generally presumed in a range of scholarly disciplines, such as criminology and history. Secondly, criminal women mostly got accused of acts relating to property crimes, instead of sexual offences which is a crime typically ascribed to women in the early modern period. Thirdly, early modern Dutch women were relatively more independent and assertive and they appear to have participated more actively in the public space than historians until recently assumed. This last point is linked to the backbone of this monograph: the author devotes special attention to the relationship between crime and the socioeconomic reality of female offenders. Smoothly combining legal history, gender history and social and economic history, the author discusses the daily experiences, worries – such as poverty – and aspirations of early modern female criminals. The particular urban environment of Holland, which cities had or were close to harbours and were confronted with mass migration, plays a constant role in the explanations of the types of crimes committed by women and the way crime courts and society dealt with female deviance. Analyzing criminal courts, Protestant consistories and civil courts within a particular region also contributes to the historiography on the ‘uses of justice’; a term introduced by the German scholar Martin Dinges. Despite the in practice independent and self-sufficient status of Dutch women, men and women remained unequal before the early modern law. Female victims of incest, for instance, were as likely to be convicted as their male offender. Women were, nevertheless, capable of strategically roaming the court system and seeking alternatives to the ordinary criminal proceedings and were, for instance, more likely to initiate a court case for domestic violence in summary courts (84, 156-158).

This well-written monograph is the first book in a new book series *Crime & City in History* (edited by M. van der Heyden and M. de Koster), which provides new insights in criminality and crime control in urban settings in the past. This first book perfectly fits the central goal as it focuses on urban crime and the socioeconomic experiences of Dutch female offenders in comparison with male offenders. Using her own collection of data as well as information from studies about the Dutch province of Holland, Van der Heyden has

written a concise overview – the book counts approximately 160 pages – of the current state of the art in the research on early modern female crime. Each of the six chapters (not counting the introduction and a chapter about the context) describes a particular form of crime in which women were involved: infanticide, theft, aggressiveness, adultery, rioting and offenses against sexual integrity. Each chapter contains multiple anecdotes, which enhances the author's persuasiveness. For example, the trial of Lijsbeth Jooste, who was convicted for committing infanticide, describes the criminal act itself and shows how the court and society reacted to this particular crime (48-49). The lucid definitions also add to the comprehensibility of early modern crime. For example, on pages 141 and 142 Van der Heyden mentions the contrast in how rape is and was perceived in present and past times. Whereas nowadays rape is considered a severe breach of sexual integrity, this was not the case in early modern Europe. Moreover, victims of rape were often seen as accomplices, especially when the rape involved sexually experienced women. The author explains the notion of prostitution (102) and the division between the private and the public domain (Ch. 5) the same way. The wealth of information combined with constant comparing of early modern crimes with their current definitions ensures that this book is of value for both professionals and the broader public.

Although this book offers many interesting insights in the daily lives of early modern Dutch criminals, it contains some minor drawbacks. Since this book aims at a wider and international audience, it is unfortunate that it lacks a map of the province of Holland and its major cities. Moreover, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Leiden count as best researched cities, and offer a remarkable amount of information, but what about the smaller Dutch cities? The author treats the province as a whole, although she explicitly states that the local context was important, because the difference in migration patterns and the legal status of women influenced female crime rates (23). Thereby the question remains if crimes committed in a small city, such as Gouda, and a major port city like Amsterdam, are fully comparable. The author briefly addresses this issue in her conclusion (163), stating that more evidence from other regions and cities are necessary to fully comprehend the patterns in early modern female crime. Next to this, the urban focus of the book begs the question whether a comparison between urban and rural society would have helped to intervene in the current historiography on crime in the Low Countries. As early modern Holland was a highly urbanized region, as the author recounts several times, the rural perspective is maybe less important in the case of Holland than in other less urbanized regions in Europe. Still, cities and their surroundings constantly interact. How did this interaction have an impact on urban female crime?

Furthermore, Van der Heyden elaborates on the conundrum of the so-called 'Vanishing Female', a concept introduced by the American criminologist Malcolm Feeley, in chapter one: how to explain the higher

female crime rates of the period 1500-1800 compared to today's rates?

An overview of the existing international historiography concerning this 'Vanishing Female' theme is given. Although the author states that this book 'lays the groundwork by sketching the state of affairs' (vii) and does not aim to provide a full explanation for this phenomenon, she could at least have formulated some hypotheses in the conclusion concerning the difference in female crime between the early modern period and today. A smaller comment relates to the scope of deviance and criminals in early modern society, a topic which the author does not address. Although historians can never obtain a complete picture of crime by studying criminal records, it is possible to compare the number of criminals with demographic figures. This allows for grasping the magnitude of prosecuted crime, in this case for the cities of Holland. How likely were early modern individuals to appear before crime courts? However, these comments do not detract from the comprehensibility and the richness of detail *Women and Crime in Early Modern Holland* contains. It has enabled Van der Heyden to bring the early modern sensitivities and perils in the Holland cities to life.

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