

Chapter Two: Individuals in Society, 1450-1600

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1. Recipe for Wild Boar's Head, c. 1550

Manuscript cookbooks survive from the Middle Ages, and printed cookbooks from the late 15th century on. The following comes from one of the earliest cookbooks by a woman, that of Sabina Welserin of Augsburg, about 1553. For an English translation of the entire cookbook, see:

http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Sabrina_Welserin.html

For links to many medieval and early modern cookbooks and culinary texts, see:
<http://www.uwm.edu/~carlin/>

How to cook a wild boar's head, also how to prepare a sauce for it. A wild boar's head should be boiled well in water and, when it is done, laid on a grate and basted with wine, then it will be thought to have been cooked in wine. Afterwards make a black or yellow sauce with it. First, when you would make a black sauce, you should heat up a little fat and brown a small spoonful of wheat flour in the fat and after that put good wine into it and good cherry syrup, so that it becomes black, and sugar, ginger, pepper, cloves and cinnamon, grapes, raisins and finely chopped almonds. And taste it, however it seems good to you, make it so.



Illustration from a cookbook from northern Spain, c. 1500. Most cooking in the early modern period was done over an open fire in pots, on spits, or on grates. In urban areas, bread was purchased from a baker, not made at home, as enclosed ovens were a fire hazard and were expensive to build.

2. Book of Manners for Children, c. 1480

Books of manners were a popular genre among early printed books, designed to teach literate middle-class people how to conduct themselves in all social settings. Most of these “courtesy books,” as they were called, were designed for adults, but some were specifically written for children. This is an anonymous English courtesy book for children from the late fifteenth century, in original spelling with a modern transcription.

<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/lifemann/manners/childbk.html>

3. Bishop’s ruling about children and parents sleeping the same bed, Spain 1583

In order to keep them safe and warm, infants normally slept with the parents in the same bed. Unfortunately, some children were smothered by the bedding or by their parents’ bodies. During the sixteenth century, authorities grew increasingly concerned with the problem of accidental infanticide. In this excerpt from a sixteenth-century diocesan synod in northwestern Spain, the bishop, Juan de San Clemente, attempted to solve the problem. (Libro de Visitas, Santa Eulalia Bouses, Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Ourense, 27.2.5, 16 May 1583. Translated by Allyson Poska)

We mandate to the priests and the curates that they admonish their parishioners to put their infant children in crib and cradle, because we have seen and we see the enormous and grave sins which the mothers and the fathers cause the children, and we place upon the penalty of four ducats. . . They have been advised to make cribs and cradles quickly in which to put the children because some have not complied, and sleeping with their children has resulted in many asphyxiations and deaths that the parents cause their innocent children as we see almost every with such pain. . . and we mandate to said priests and curates that as soon as they hear that some woman in their parish is pregnant they mandate that within 15 days they [the parents] make a crib and cradle in which to put the child, and if the woman and her husband do not comply, prohibit them from the mass and divine offices.

4. Royal ordinances regarding inheritance, Portugal 16th century

National and local governments in early modern Europe all had rules regarding inheritance, which differed widely; local traditions added even more complexity to this picture. In some areas, the eldest son inherited almost everything (primogeniture), while in others all the children or at least all the sons divided the landed property and goods (partible inheritance). The ability of girls to inherit also varied widely, particularly if the inheritance included a family estate. Portugal was one of the areas with somewhat egalitarian inheritance regulations; royal ordinances from the sixteenth century state that daughters and sons had equal rights of inheritance, though some stipulations were made that were clearly gendered. The example highlighted here emphasizes the greater control parents had, or were expected to have, over the sexual and marital conduct of daughters than of sons. Although Article 1 of Titulo LXXII mentions sons or daughters, the section begins

with a specific reference to daughters, as does Article 2. Some of the grounds for disinheriting children of either sex are also noted, thus revealing some of the concerns of the period, including children's involvement in witchcraft, or children's lack of diligence in releasing their parent(s) from captivity. (Source: Ordenações do Senhor Rey D. Manuel, Volume IV (Coimbra: Na Real Imprensa da Universidade, 1797), 183-188. Translated by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira)

Titulo LXXII. If any daughter before the age of twenty-five years sleeps with any man, and gets married without permission from her father, or from her mother, for that very act she shall be disinherited, and deprived of all the goods and property of the father or mother, even if by them she is not explicitly disinherited.

1 And if at the time of death of the father or mother there is another legitimate son, or sons, who have not committed the same error, the father or mother cannot bequeath the daughter, who erred thus, against the will of the legitimate son, or of the legitimate daughter who did not make a similar error, the legitime [i.e., inheritance] that by right would come to her. And if at the time of death of the father or mother there is no other legitimate son or daughter, or grandchildren, or legitimate descendants from both sides, in this case they can, and each one bequeath an inheritance on the daughter that erred against them, as and in the amount they consent; because whereas the said injury was done solely to them, with just reason they can forgive her, since there is no other son, or daughter, or grandchild to whom that would be prejudicial.

2 But if the said daughter married a person who is notably known for having married better, and more honourably than what her father and mother could have her marry, in this case the said daughter is not disinherited, and deprived of all goods and property, as noted above: but the father or mother can only disinherit her, if they wish, of half of the legitime that lawfully belongs to her from the death of each of them; and not having disinherited her explicitly of the said half for the said reason, she shall freely have the entire legitime, as if the marriage had been consented by the father or mother, and this is so whether at the time of the death there is another legitimate son or daughter, or grandchild of each of them, or not.

And the other reasons, for which a father or mother can disinherit a son or daughter, is as follows:

3. First if a son or daughter violently lay their hands on their father, or on their mother.

4. Likewise if they insult them with grievous and injurious words, and especially in a public place where the father or mother with reason will experience more shame; and it is up to the arbiter to appraise if the injurious words were grievous, or trivial.

5. Likewise if the son or daughter criminally accuses the father or mother of some crime, that does not affect our state.

6. Likewise if the son or daughter use witchcraft, communicating with the witches.

7. Likewise if the son or daughter give poison to the father or mother, or undertakes to give it to them, and if it was not given by him [or her], or gives the opportunity, favour, or advice, or consent to someone else to purposely give it.

8. Likewise if under any other guise or manner by him [or her], or by another, he [she] seeks his [her] death.

9. Likewise if the son had affection, or carnal union with the wife of his father, or with his [female] concubine, that with him he had at home maintained, and governed; and thus we say of the daughter that similarly had affection for the husband of her mother, or her [male] concubine that she had with her at home maintained.

Primary Sources

10. Likewise if the son or daughter gave notable information of the father or mother to the Justice for which the father or mother received some dishonour of their person, or damage to their goods and property.

11. Likewise if the father or mother are imprisoned for some debt, and the untrustworthy son did not wish to pledge to release them from prison having the credit, and the wealth with which to release them from it, and having it requested of him.

12. Likewise if the son or daughter impede the father or mother from doing their will as they wish; for in such a case the father dying at this time without a will, that son or daughter shall be deprived of their inheritance, and if after they outlive they can freely disinherit that son or daughter, that prohibit them thus.

13. And if any father or mother loses their natural judgement, and the son or daughter, or any other their creditors... be negligent in caring for their infirmity, this [son or daughter] can be disinherited by that father or mother, or grandparent, they regaining their judgement, and discerning understanding, in such a manner that they can freely make their wills.

14. And dying either intestate [i.e. without a will], or with a will that they made before losing their judgement, the inheritance will not be gotten by those heirs, that were remiss, and negligent in serving them, and seeking their health; for it can be presumed, that if they return to their full understanding they will not leave them their inheritance due to the ingratitude, that against them they committed.

15. And losing any man or woman their judgement and understanding, and he whose inheritance was entitled to inherit, either from a will or intestate, was remiss or negligent in serving him and taking care of his infirmity, and some other outsider appealed to him to look after the health of that insane person, if not he [the outsider] would attend to and care for his health, and this one to whom this request was made, was remiss and negligent regarding the said request, and this petitioner attended to the insane person, and worked for his health as well as he reasonably could, in such a case he will have the inheritance from the insane person upon his death, having died without understanding, and the other who should have had the said inheritance shall be grasping due to the ingratitude, and thus as unworthy shall be deprived of the said inheritance. 16. Moreover if the father or mother are placed in captivity, and the son or daughter are negligent in rescuing him, and liberating from the said captivity, and this father or mother from their own good diligence are free from the said captivity without the help, or advantage of the son or daughter, the father or mother thus rescued from the said captivity can disinherit freely that son or daughter, that thus were negligent in redeeming their liberty; and if the father or mother thus put in captivity die in it due to the blame or negligence of their son or daughter, this son or daughter, thus negligent in the redemption of liberty of their father or mother, shall be totally deprived of all their inheritance, for the blame and negligence that they thus committed in not redeeming their liberty.

17. Likewise if the father or mother are Catholic Christians, and the son or daughter are heretics, who completely does not believe in our Holy Catholic Faith, digressing from the precept of the Holy Mother Church, in that case the father or mother can freely disinherit that son or daughter.

18. And all that is said regarding the father or mother is applicable to the grandfather and the grandmother, on the part of the father, as of the mother.

5. Inheritance by children, Denmark 1556-59

Courts in many parts of Europe contain records regarding the inheritance by children. The following notices are taken from the records of the City Council Court of Malmø, Scania, Denmark, which also functioned as a probate court. According to Danish law from the early Middle Ages until the 19th century all siblings received an equal share of their paternal and maternal inheritance - equal in the sense that everybody received a share, but brothers received a double share, sisters a single. However, this was not always followed (see first notice). The records also reveal the different career patterns that boys and girls were expected to follow. (Malmø stadsbog 1549-1559. Rådstuerettens, bytingets og toldbodrettens protoko, Einar Bage, ed. (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til dansk Historie, 1972) Pp. 324, 441. Translated by Grethe Jacobsen and Pernille Arenfeldt)

The paternal inheritance of the children of Erik Knudsen

Monday after Trinity Sunday [June 1st, 1556] Jep Laage, Tyge Tolfsen, Hans Nielsen, Niels Samsing, Hans Skinder and Laurits Tækkere guaranteed with raised hand for this child inheritance which Oluf Willumsen, who married Gertrud, Erik Knudsen's widow, put forward for his stepchildren, Oluf Eriksen and Bodil Eriksdaughter, to him 100 mark and to her 90 mark to be handed over when he comes of age and in the meantime [Oluf shall] keep him with clothes, meals, learning and food, and the girl when she has entered into honest service and then in addition help her with clothes and wedding expenses and in between also clothe and feed her and pay no other rent of the said money. But the house shall remain undivided between the mother and the children.

Determining the maternal inheritance of Rasmus Hesse's children

Monday after St. Lawrence [August 14th, 1559] Rasmus Hesse appeared with his brother-in-law Hans Fickeson and his wife's brothers, Hans Matsen, Laurits Matsen and Christoffer Matsen, and he allotted his children, Mads, Jens, Johanne, Elline and Margrete all together 150 mark as their maternal inheritance in all movables as well as debt and demands, excepting the house which they will keep as common property. The aforementioned sum will be paid to the children when they come of age and are provided for. In the period in between he will be obliged to keep the children honest and well with clothing, food and discipline.

The maternal inheritance of Jørgen Væver's children

The same day Jørgen Væver appeared and with him his wife's mother's brother Peder Mikkelsen of Vintrie and the mother's brother's son Rasmus Jensen of the same place and aforementioned Jørgen allotted his children Hans, Margrete and Inger as their material inheritance each 10 thalers and each girl 1 pound of cobber and the boy free board, lodging and schooling until he is 12 years and also to keep the girls honest and well. Niels Erlandsøn and Rasmus Hans Lollike set surety for him with raised hand.



Illustration of children playing games, from an anonymous Book of Hours—a manual for private devotion made around 1500 in Bruges. Marginal illustrations of religious texts often showed contemporary scenes of work and leisure activities. The entire Book of Hours can be found on the website of Syracuse University Library:

<http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/m/MedievalManuscripts/ms07/ms07.htm>

6. Adoption of an orphan, France 1540

Orphans who were abandoned or had no relatives willing to care for them could be formally adopted in early modern Europe. In this contract, a couple adopts a very young boy whose parents had died in one of Paris's poor relief institutions, the Hôtel Dieu. The adopting couple's stated intention to make him their heir indicates that they probably had no other children. Notice that the young child had other relatives who freely agreed to the adoption, but they apparently could not or would not take him in. (Paris, Archives Nationales, Minutier central, Étude XXXIII/25, 11 November 1540. Translated by Carol Loats.)

Guillaume Percheron, day laborer living on the rue de Copeaulx in the dwelling of the Carmelites [an order of friars] of Paris, and Jehanne Goret, his wife, she authorized in this matter, affirm that, for the great love and attachment that they have and declare for Batiste Bernard, aged three years or so, they have taken and retained him and by this contract take him in their custody, to raise him.

[Batiste Bernard is] the minor son of the late Symon Bernard, who while living was poor and a day laborer living in the said street, and [the late] Catherine Corbillon, his wife, the two previously the father and mother of the boy, who were natives of Saint Martin d'Étampes, and who died, it is said, at the [poor relief hospital of] Hôtel Dieu of Paris after Saint Jehan Baptiste past.

[Percheron and Goret] have promised and promise to supply and deliver what he needs in terms of drink, food, fire, bed, lodging, and light, as much in health as in sickness; to instruct him in good morals; and to maintain him in all his clothing and other necessities whatsoever, all well and duly as appropriate and as if he were their own child.

And [they also promise] to provide for him in marriage or otherwise as appropriate to his standing and according to the ability and property of the said Percheron and his wife.

And in consideration of the things said here, they give him all and each of their possessions that they may have at the time of their passing on, to take as if he were their own child and rightful heir.

Present for this [was] Estienne Papillon, plowman of vines, living at Bonyeres les Cellees, near the said Étampes, uncle of the said minor through Martine Bernard, his wife, who was the sister of the deceased [father] of the said minor; and Audrye Papillon, wife of Jehan Gaillard, living at Saint Michel in Paris, rue du Puys de Fer, cousin of the said minor, who have given and give the said minor to the said Percheron and his wife as is stated; and they state positively that this is for the benefit and welfare of the said minor, who has no possessions or kin who are able to provide for him.

Promising, etc., obligating, etc., each in his own right, etc., renouncing. Done in duplicate and passed, that is by the said Percheron and Estienne Pappillon and Audrye Papillon on Thursday, the 11th day of November, the year 1540, and for the said Jehanne Goret, wife of the said Percheron, on the day of [blank], 15 [blank].

7. Orphanages for non-Christian children, Italy 1576

Adoptive homes could not be found for every child, and churches and city governments began to found orphanages in the fifteenth century; some of these were for all children orphaned or left as foundlings in an area, though others had specific purposes. The Catecumeni, founded in Venice in 1557, housed men, women and children of Jewish or Muslim origins with the primary aim of converting them to Christianity. This institution was the delivery point for non-Christian children who had been either orphaned or captured in a war. Once at the home, they were converted, given religious instruction, and sometimes adopted by Christian families. Some petitions for adoption have survived, including one by Bortholo and Madalena, a couple who eloquently expressed their desire for a little girl named Caterina. (Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione (IRE), CAT, c.1, Catastico di Catecumeni, 1576, pp. 34-35. Translated by Monica Chojnacka)

Finding themselves, Bortholo of... the parish of San Vido, and..., the modest lady Madalena, husband and wife, without children, and at an age at which they are unlikely to have them, and desiring to adopt a little girl for consolation and comfort in their old age they have insistently requested the..., governors of the house of the Catecumeni to grant them as an adopted daughter Caterina who at one time was Turkish, raised in the above-named house the said couple will accept her as an adopted daughter, treating her and governing her and instructing her in good behavior, and persevering with her in good faith, as if she had been conceived and born of the couple themselves (The governors) of the above-named house of the Catecumeni... have granted, and grant, to said sr. Bortholo, and Madalena, husband and wife,...; said Caterina, who is 7 years of age.

8. Guardian's defense of an orphan's interests, Ottoman Empire 1541

Poor orphans might be adopted or sent to orphanages, but wealthier orphans were often given guardians. In Muslim societies, Islamic law made it the duty of the local judge to appoint a fit guardian for orphan minors and, when necessary, to draw on the public treasury to support indigent orphans. In the following case from the court records of Aintab, the woman Gulshah, guardian of the orphan girl Halimeh, is summoned to court by Ahmed, who claims a vineyard in Halimeh's possession; Gulshah's counterclaim prevails when Ahmed cannot provide proof of ownership. Women often served as guardians of orphans, suggesting that they were assumed to be knowledgeable about the management of property as well as the legal status of orphans. (National Library, Ankara: Gaziantep Sicii 2, folio 323c. Translated by Leslie Peirce)

Ahmed son of Mevlana Nureddin came to the court and summoned [the defendant] Gulshah daughter of Mustafa, who was the legally-appointed guardian of Halimeh, daughter of the deceased Haji Sundek. He said: "I demand the vineyard of 250 vines that is located in the agricultural area known as Tashgun and bounded in the direction of prayer [the south] by Arab's vineyard, on the east by Merchant Ahmed's property, on the north by Ibrahim's vineyard, and on the west by a stream. This property is a family trust that used to be cultivated by my father Mevlana Hamza." Whereupon the

defendent said, "The aforementioned vineyard belongs to my ward Halimeh as a legal inheritance from her father. It is her property." When the aforementioned Ahmed was unable to provide proof of ownership, the vineyard was judged to belong to Halimeh. The foregoing was recorded at the request [of the defendants]. Dated September 28, 1541.

9. Laws requiring unmarried people to register or leave, Denmark 1549

Despite the fact that people in northern Europe often waited until they were well into their twenties to marry, political and religious authorities regarded young, unmarried people living away from their parents as likely to upset morality and public order. They passed laws requiring them to live with older adults or otherwise restricting their behavior. This is the law from city of Malmø in Denmark. (Malmø stadsbog 1549-1559. Rådstuerettens, bytingets og toldbodrettens protokol. Udg. v. Einar Bager (Copenhagen : Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til dansk Historie, 1972) P. 35. Translated by Grethe Jacobsen and Pernille Arenfeldt)

Anno domino 1549, December 14th, the Mayors, the City Council and the Royal Reeve decided to issue this bylaw, which is as follows:
First it was gravely determined, decided and agreed upon that no one should be sitting and drinking alcohol during the sermon on Sundays or other holy days, nor should anyone wander around in the street or in the chapel behind the choir during the sermon. Nor should any cellar be opened on aforesaid days before the noonday sermon is over, unless it is done for the sake of strangers and travellers who arrive and want to leave at once. Whoever breaks this rule will be punished accordingly.
Similarly, all single men and unemployed menservants should at once appear at the City Hall and swear an oath to the Mayors and the Council acting on behalf of His Royal Majesty and the city of Malmø or they should at once be expelled from the city. Similarly, all girls who are self-supporting [lit. self-feeding] should enter into service again or be expelled from the city at once.
Then about those whores and poor women of the city, it was decided that whoever is found in the city after New Year's Day and has not been provided with an honest man and she is caught wearing a cape or a headdress while she keeps up such a life, she will lose this clothing and be punished according to the law.

10. Unmarried woman's registration as an honorable woman, Denmark 1554

In the years following the issuing of these ordinances, several single women appeared in court to obtain a written testimony, confirming that they were honest and decent maidens. Notice that the woman is not accused of any specific act, but must swear to her honorability simply because she is not married. (Malmø stadsbog 1549-1559. Rådstuerettens, bytingets og toldbodrettens protokol. Udg. v. Einar Bager. (Copenhagen : Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til dansk Historie, 1972) p. 193. Translated by Grethe Jacobsen and Pernille Arenfeldt)

18th June 1554 the bearer of this letter, Anne Pedersdatter, our burgheress [female citizen] was (in court) and brought with her these aftersaid honest men and women, her neighbours: [the names of 10 men and 7 women] whom she has summoned to

appear in front of us and asked and urged them for God's and justice's sake that they would give her a true and honest testimony concerning how she had lived and behaved herself among them and whether she had consorted with wicked people or loose company with drink, bad behaviour, been a tapster [woman who sold beer] or in any other way led an evil life or stayed in any unsuitable house or in any way heard or learned anything about her, in secret or in public, except that which was honest and suitable in every way.

Which aforesaid honest men and women all and each in agreement stepped forward and with the proper oath swore by God and the salvation of their souls that they had never at any time heard or learned, secretly or publicly, any dishonour, dishonest lifestyle or loose behaviour nor (that she had) stayed in a disreputable house but (that she had) always as a maiden and a women behaved and led a life and associated with neighbours and everyone honestly, modestly, suitably and well early as well as late in every way. To further witness that thus has been recounted, sworn and testified in front of us, we have sealed this our open letter with the seal of our city, given and written year and day and place as said above.

11. Episcopal decree regarding several single women, Spain 1571

Though the Danish ordinances regarded both unmarried men and unmarried women with suspicion, women who did not marry received the most intense scrutiny. In this excerpt from the decrees of an Episcopal visit to a small parish in northwestern Spain, a representative of the bishop condemned the actions of a number of single women and admonished their parents to control their behavior. (Libro de Visitas, Santa Maria Amarante, Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Ourense, 24.1.13, fol. 17r (23 July 1571) Translated by Allyson Poska)

Item: His Honor ordered that as he has discovered information against some single women of this parish whose way of living is so bad and who are bad examples . . . that from now on Margarida, daughter of Vicente Asiana, and Catalina, daughter of Olinda de Dacon, María de Negrellas, single, María dos Casares, blind and single, Herena de Dacon, and Luzia de Amarante, from here forward live honestly and chastely, not being bad examples, under the penalty of one silver mark . . . he orders that henceforth, if they do not comply, the fathers and mothers of the aforementioned should punish them so that they might live properly.

12. Ordinance prohibiting girls from living with their mothers, France 1665

Restrictions on unmarried women usually focussed on the women themselves, but sometimes also on those who gave them room and board. This might even include their own mothers, as this ordinance from Strasbourg in 1665 makes clear. (Strasbourg Archives Municipales, Statuten, vol. 33, no. 61 (1665). Translated by Merry Wiesner-Hanks)

Numerous complaints have been made that some widows living here have two, three, or more daughters living with them at their expense. These girls go into service during the winter but during the summer return to their mothers, partly because they want to wear more expensive clothes than servants are normally allowed to and partly because

Primary Sources

they want to have more freedom to walk around, to saunter back and forth whenever they want to. It is our experience that this causes nothing but shame, immodesty, wantonness and immorality, so that a watchful eye should be kept on this, and if it is discovered, the parents as well as the daughters should be punished with a fine, a jail sentence, or even banishment from the city in order to serve as an example to others.

13. Advice on choosing a wife, Portugal 1540

*Courtesy books (Source 1 above) were not the only type of how-to book for early modern Europeans. A wide range of (largely male) authors also wrote many advice books on marriage, which often discuss whether one should marry or not, and provide specific advice on choosing a spouse. The example provided here, written by a Portuguese scholar, is divided into four parts, each presenting a set of arguments on questions of matrimony, with the pro and anti sides narrated at great length. Part four contains twelve prerequisites for the start of a happy marriage, and some apply to both partners, including good health, no children from previous relationships, and [sexual] potency. Other suggestions are more specifically gendered; a man contemplating matrimony was supposed to be able to support a wife and household, and the future wife was supposed to be a virgin and of average good looks. In the excerpt below it is obvious that the intended audience for this book was men, as they are advised on the advantages of courting within their own circles. (Doctor João de Barros, *Espelho de Casados*, second edition, edited by Tito de Noronha and António Cabral (Porto: Imprensa Portuguesa, 1874 [1540]), f.LVIIIv-f.LIX. Translated by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira)*

The eleventh essence or quality that some say a good marriage must have is that it be with a known neighbor daughter of his native neighbor, because as the proverb goes: the woman and the cow are found out back. The neighbor is aware of and knows the defects of his neighbor, and knows the customs and faults of his daughter, and the [female] outsider he never saw at times is very different from what he wants or from what pleases him. What is more appropriate is for the man to marry with his native than with the [female] outsider, for with this he honors and adds to his land and the Republic where he lives, and his neighbor knows what are his qualities: of what sort and of which customs and if these suit hers: or are disagreeable. He will also know if she is content with him or not for many [women] marry against their will to obey their parents who make them do it. Others marry men they never met who promise them oceans and mountains and after all there is nothing and [they] find themselves greatly deceived. When a man and a woman are neighbors they cannot deceive one another, and neighborliness is the cause of much love. The neighbor presumes that he knows the deeds of his neighbour, and of him Solomon says that he is better than a brother far away. The law has ordained many things in favor of neighbors that they cannot torment one another, and have to be friends with their neighbours: they cannot throw something that hangs from the neighbour's house: nor do something that smells badly and they are obliged to repair the fountain between him and his neighbor's house that broke down...and by law of the Realm he cannot make a door in front of the neighbor's door, and if his house is falling apart he is obliged to repair it. This way I say that the marriage with a [female] known neighbor is good and Joam Fabro says that he who marries should see if he can test the customs of the woman with whom he

will live, and therefore the marriage with the [female] native and neighbor is better and more certain.

14. Qualities of the ideal wife, England 1617

Prose works and poems describing ideal wives and husbands were a popular genre; some of these were reissued several times, which means that they found a good market of readers. The following is a very typical one, titled The Bride, and published by Samuel Rowlands in London in 1617; works detailing the duties of husbands were less common and much shorter.

You that intend the honourable life,
And would with joy live happily in the same,
Must note eight duties do concern a wife,
To which with all endeavour she must frame:
 And so in peace possess her husband's love,
 And all distaste from both their hearts remove.

The first is that she have domestic cares,
Of private business for the house within,
Leaving her husband unto his affairs,
Of things abroad that out of doors have been
 By him performed, as his charge to do,
 Not busy-body like inclined thereto.

Nor intermeddling as a number will,
Of foolish gossips such as do neglect,
The things which do concern them, and too ill,
Presume in matters unto no effect:
 Beyond their element when they should look,
 To what is done in kitchen by the cook.

Or unto children's virtuous education,
Or to their maids, that they good housewives be,
And carefully contain a decent fashion,
That nothing pass the limits of degree:
 Knowing her husband's business from her own,
 And diligent do that, let his alone.

The second duty of the wife is this,
(Which she in mind ought very careful bear).
To entertain in house such friends as his
As she doth know have husband's welcome there:
 Not her acquaintance without his consent,
 For that way jealousy breeds discontent.

Third duty is, that of no proud pretence,
She move her husband to consume his means,

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With urging him to needless vain expense,
Which toward the counter or to Ludgate leans,
 For many idle housewives (London knows)
 Have by their pride been husband's overthrows.

A modest woman will in compass keep,
And decently unto her calling go,
Not diving in the frugal purse too deep,
By making to the world a peacock show:
 Though they seem fools, so yield unto their wives,
 Some poor men do it to have quiet lives.

Fourth duty is, to love her own house best,
And be no gadding gossip up and down,
To hear and carry tales amongst the rest,
That are the news reporters of the town:
 A modest woman's home is her delight,
 Of business there, to have the oversight.

At public plays she never will be known,
And to be tavern guest she ever hates,
She scorns to be a street wife (idle one)
Or field wife ranging with her walking mates:
 She knows how wise men censure of such dames,
 And how with blots they blemish their good names

Fifth duty of a wife unto her head,
Is her obedience to reform his will,
And never with a self-conceit be led
That her advice proves good, his counsel ill:
 In judgement being singular alone,
 As having all the wit, her husband none...

When as the husband bargains hath to make,
In things that are depending on his trade,
Let not wife's boldness power unto her take,
As though no match were good but what she made:
 For she that thus hath oar in husband's boat,
 Let her take breech, and give him petticoat.

Sixth duty is to pacify his ire,
Although she finds that he impatient be,
For hasty words, like fuel add to fire,
And more, and more infenceth wrath's degree;
 When she perceives his choler in a fit
 Let her forbear, and that's a sign of wit.

Many occasions unto men do fall,
Of adverse crosses, women not conceive,

Primary Sources

To find us honey, they do meet with gall,
Their toil for us do their own joys bereave:
Great shame it were, that we should add their woe,
That do maintain, and keep, and love us so.

If that a hasty word sometime be spoke,
Let us not censure therefore they are foes,
Say tis infirmity that doth provoke,
Their hearts are sorry for their tongues, God knows:
Since we by proof each day and hour find,
For one harsh word, they give ten thousand kind.

The seventh duty that she must endeavor,
Is to observe her husband's disposition,
And thereunto conform herself for ever;
In all obedient sort, with meek submission:
Resolving that, as his conditions are,
Her rules of life she must according square.

His virtues and good parts which she doth find,
She must endeavour for to imitate,
The vices whereunto he is enclin'd,
She must in patience bear in mild estate:
So that the meekness of her loving carriage,
May be peace-maker of all strife in marriage.

She must not do as foolish women use,
When they are met about the gossip's chat,
Their absent husbands with their tongues abuse,
But utterly abhor to offer that:
Resolving that a husband's least disgrace,
Should cause the wife to have a blushing face.

The eighth last duty she must take upon her,
To bind all t'other seven to be done,
Is love and chief regard to husband's honour,
Which if at true affection it begun,
Then be he poor or sick, or in distress,
She still remains most firm in faithfulness.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Peasant Wedding, 1568. The Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel frequently painted scenes from rural life, including this of a peasant wedding, one of the most famous images of village life in the sixteenth century. The bride wears a wedding crown and long flowing hair, both signs of her virginity. Original at the Kunsthistorischemuseum, Vienna; this image taken from the Internet Shakespeare Editions website at the University of Victoria, Canada:

<http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/literature/>

This website has many resources about Shakespeare's writings and times.

15. Men, marriage and service to the King, Portugal, early seventeenth century

Despite the difficulties in choosing a spouse, remaining unmarried was not an option for me who hoped to enter certain guilds or professions. In this ordinance, the King of Portugal made clear the importance of marriage to men who hoped for government careers. (Jose' Sustino de Andrade e Silva, ed., Collecção Chronologica da Legislação Portuguesa (1603-1612), (Lisbon: Imprensa de J.J.A. Silva, 1854), p. 189. Translated by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira)

I, the King, make it known to those to whom this charter reaches that... it is prohibited and ordered that Ministers and Justice Officials of the Realm and

Dominion cannot serve in their offices without being married for more than a year, for it serves me and Justice to have it so. Even though the Court Chief Justices have made an order that another year be granted in which they can serve in their offices without being married, I demand that no more time whatsoever be given them than the said year by the Ordinance, the said Order notwithstanding, which in this part be annulled; and I demand that it not be used, nor the said Court Chief Justices grant further said licenses to said Justice Officials to serve unmarried; and so it pleases me that from this day forward the duties of Chief Justices, *Corregidors*, Purveyors, Magistrates, Judges, and Lawyers not be served by unmarried [men]; but this does not apply to the Chief Justices who presently serve me and who prior to starting their service and taking up their duties were already 40 years of age. In the residencies in which these *Corregidors*, Purveyors, Magistrates, External Judges and other Officials serve, the *Arbitrors* will ask if they are married; and in the acts of said residencies there will be special mention of this; and those found to be unmarried will not be able to return to service and promoted in said offices without first marrying.

16. Marriage contract for a first marriage, France 1546

People in many parts of Europe, including those who were not especially wealthy, made marriage contracts specifying their mutual financial commitments. In Paris, contracts might or might not mention goods or money that constituted a dowry brought by the wife to the marriage. By legal custom and common practice the bride as a possible future widow received a promise of a dower, a pre-set or customary amount that would be hers if her husband died before she did. Such an arrangement was also common in parts of England and Germany. In this brief document, two people acting on their own behalf record their intentions to marry, and arrange for the future of the woman if her future husband should die before she does. Although the woman's father is alive, he lives in another part of France, and so she acts on her own, though with his consent. (Paris, Archives Nationales, Minutier central, Étude XI/26, 16 May 1546. Translated by Carol Loats)

[Were present] the honorable Jehan de la Place, merchant butcher, *bourgeois* of Paris, living at the butchery Saint Genevieve, in his own name, on the one hand, and Jehanne Picquevel, daughter of Michel Picquevel, farm worker, living in Chavline en Brye, also in her own name, on the other hand. [The parties] willingly, etc., in the presence of Jehan Brenant, merchant living at Saint Marcel in Paris, cousin by his wife of the said Jehanne Picquevel, and with the will and consent of the said Michel Picquevel, father of Jehanne, and other kin and friends of the said Jehanne Picquevel, they say, affirm that they have made, will make, and make, together and one with the other, the contract of marriage, agreements, gifts, and arrangements which follow. That is to say, the said de la Place has promised and promises by this [contract] to take the said Picquevel as his wife and spouse, and she on her part promises also to take him as her husband and spouse if God and our Mother Holy Church allow, as soon as this can simply be done and is decided between them, their kin, and friends, with the possessions, rights, and material interests that they have on one side or the other.

And therefore and in consideration of this the said de la Place has given and gives to the said Jehanne Picquevet, his said future wife, the sum of 40 *livres tournois* as pre-set dower, to be paid one time, . . . to have and take as soon as dower takes place,

without holding back, from all and each of the inheritances and possessions of the said de la Place, according to the customs of the city, *prévôté* [provost under the king] and *vicomté* [larger regional government] of Paris.

Because thus, etc., promising, obligating, each in his own right, etc., renouncing, etc. Done and passed in duplicate in the year 1546, Sunday, the 16th day of May.

17. Marriage contract for a second marriage, France 1540

Second and even third marriages were also formalized before notaries. Although widows could legally act on their own behalf, some widows were represented by their fathers as the marriage contract was formalized. The arrangements made in these cases sometimes reflect the previous marriage. In addition to these factors, the following marriage contract also brings the bride's future inheritance into the current marriage arrangements. (Paris, Archives Nationales, Minutier central, Étude XIX/155, 12 June 1540. Translated by Carol Loats)

Present in person were Blanchet Moreau, *hacquebutier* [maker of a particular sort of early firearm], living in Paris, in the name of and stipulating in this [matter] for Anne Moreau, his daughter, widow of the late Jehan Gibert, who while living was also a *hacquebutier*, on the one hand; and Alexandre Loiseau, similarly *hacquebutier*, living in Paris, for himself in his own name, on the other hand.

The parties, because of the marriage which, to the pleasure of God, will be made and solemnized in front of the Holy Church between the said Loiseau and Anne Moreau, acknowledge and affirm that they have made and make between them the contracts, agreements, dower, promises, and arrangements which follow.

That is to say, the said Blanchet Moreau has promised and promises to give the said Anne, his daughter, according to the name and law of marriage, to the said Loiseau, who has promised and promises to take her as his wife and spouse tomorrow, if God and Holy Church allow, free and clear of all debts whatsoever.

In consideration of [this] marriage the said Blanchet has promised and promises in the said name to give and pay to the said future couple, without the least advance, the sum of 20 *livres tournois* in cash, with the personal property which follows.

That is to say, a bed [frame] of wood, a bed and bolster stuffed with feathers, a white canopy, a cover of red linen, six sheets of hemp cloth, six tablecloths, a dozen table napkins, a locking oak chest, a table, two trestles, a sideboard on a lockable counter, which property the parties estimate among themselves at a value of 15 *livres tournois*, which brings the value, including the cash, to the sum of 35 *livres tournois*.

[This sum] the said future couple will be obliged to postpone by half, as coming to them by inheritance from the said Blanchet Moreau and from Moudette Louprat, his wife, father and mother of the said Anne.

And the said Blanchet further pledges to give and pay to the said future couple the sum of 10 *livres tournois* payment and wages to their said daughter for serving her said father and mother since the death of her said dead husband up to now.

The said Loiseau affirms that he has received from the said Blanchet three *livres 10 sous tournois* toward the two sums in cash, with which he is satisfied and [which he] considers Blanchet to have paid, saying that he can release and releases the said Blanchet of obligation for the cash that [Blanchet] has received for [Blanchet's] daughter as her customary dower . . . and has renounced and relieves the heirs of the said Gibert, her first husband, of obligation, and [releases Blanchet of obligation for]

all other things which . . . [have come to] his said daughter for whatever cause there might be, from the past up to today.

And therefore the said Alexander Loiseau has given and gives the said Anne Moreau, his future spouse, the sum of 30 *livres tournois* in cash, to pay once as pre-set dower and without return, for all right to dower, if there is a surviving child or children of theirs at the time of the dissolution of their said marriage, for her to have and take as soon as dower takes place, and beyond her rights of common property, from all the belongings which belong to the heirs of the said Loiseau at his death . . .

And further the said Loiseau has willed and wills that if he dies before his future spouse without a surviving child or children of the two of them from legal marriage as is said, that she have and take by priority right and before any dividing up with the heirs, all her clothing, rings, and jewelry she has in use at that time.

Thus has the content above been received [by the notaries], passed and agreed between the said parties. Promising, etc., obligating, each in his own right, etc., renouncing. Done and passed in duplicate, in the year 1540, Saturday, the 12th day of June.



Marten de Vos, The Marriage at Cana (1596-97.) As do so many artists, Vos

Primary Sources

puts the Biblical characters, including Jesus turning water into wine, into a contemporary setting, here a city in Flanders. The participants and guests are much wealthier than those in Bruegel's peasant wedding, but much of the symbolism remains the same. The original is in the Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp; this is taken from the Web Gallery of Art, a virtual museum and searchable database of European painting and sculpture from 12th to mid-19th centuries

<http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/welcome.html>

18. A petition to reclaim a dowry because of bigamy, Germany, 1539

Because divorce was not allowed before the Reformation, or in Catholic areas after the Reformation, and was difficult in any case, people seeking to leave unhappy marriages often simply moved apart. If they traveled far enough, they might move beyond the area where people knew they were married, and marry again. In this lawsuit, a woman seeks repayment of her dowry and an annulment of her marriage, because her husband had a previous wife. Petitions such as this are written in formal legal language and in a way that will best help the supplicant achieve his or her aims. It is thus difficult to say if everything in them is exactly accurate, but they are certainly based on the real circumstances of the case. This is a petition from Ursula Kolhauffer to the city council of Munich. (Munich Stadtarchiv, Urgichten, Nr. 87 (1539). Translated by Merry Wiesner-Hanks)

Honorable, wise, just, and careful sirs, I, Ursula Kolhauffen, Adam Wagner's wife, would like your wisdoms to know about the case involving me and my husband Adam Wagner, which your wisdoms certainly already know about in part. That is, that he is supposed to have another wife [besides me]. The situation that your wisdoms put to me, is that I was supposed to bring proof that she is still living, and I ventured to do this. But God called to me in the meantime, and I delivered the child with which I was pregnant. I was ill because of the child, and I had nothing other than what pious people shared with me. When the child was two weeks old, I got up and went with the child to Gaissing in the duchy of Fürstenberg, and I found her [the other wife] myself. I wanted to vindicate the case myself, but I did not have the power or right to do so. The authorities in Gaissing told me that if my husband Adam Wagner himself were there, they would handle the case quickly and help me gain what I sought, determine whether she was his wife or not, and whether I could set myself against both of them, as I had requested. He [Wagner] was seeking [to keep] my dowry, which I will swear on my life. For he heaped shame and insults with no justification on me, which threatened my body and life. That is, in the mayor's house in Gaissing, a man whose wife was standing next to him said that my husband publicly said in Zell and elsewhere that I had dishonored myself twice, and was a murderous piece of goods. He also said this to me when we were home--that I dishonored him twice and also sought to dishonor the children--so he used violence against me. After that he said further that I had moved away from him for whorish reasons and was now moving from place to place like a whore. But I can prove that when I moved out of Munich, I lived with pious honorable people, and supported myself and my child with hard work. Further, he said that the child that I had was not his, but I can prove to the day and hour [that it is]. I have already testified to all of this in writing, and sent it by messenger to the judge in Freising. The judge said to the messenger that he would not

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order him [Wagner] to appear because he did not have jurisdiction over the case because it had been started elsewhere. I asked not for his life or bodily punishment, but that he be compelled to give me my dowry back and to declare me free of him. He then offered, in the presence of two men, namely Jorgen Dylger and Franntz Federmacher, both citizens of Munich, to pay it back to me year by year and declare me free of him. That is exactly what I am now petitioning and requesting. If you will not agree to this, I will protest, and prove to your wisdoms that I made my request properly according to the law in the proper place, and the law itself is at fault here. I have done everything according to the law, and have revealed everything to you about his [Wagner's] actions. It is now my request and supplication to your wisdoms, that you prevail upon him to do what he himself agreed to do in front of Jorgen Dylger and Franntz Federmacher. I place myself under the care and protection of your wisdoms. Dated the eleventh of April, 1539. Your wisdom's obedient subject, Ursula Kolhauffen.

19. Disappearance and remarriage, Spain 1591 and 1594

In many areas of Europe, men left regularly to do seasonal labor in other regions or to fish in faraway seas. During times of warfare, husbands were conscripted into the military. The long absences often left the abandoned wives unsure whether their husbands were alive or dead and whether they should remarry. In document a, a case brought before the Spanish Inquisition in 1591, Marina de Castro was charged with bigamy when her long absent first husband suddenly returned home. In document b, we see that women who checked into the exact circumstances of their husbands' deaths fared much better with the Inquisition, as is evident in the trial of Margarida Lopez from 1594. (Document a: Relaciones de Causas, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Inquisición, legajo 2042, no.26, fol. 13 (1591). Document b: Relaciones de Causas, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Inquisición, legajo 2042, no. 34 folio 6v (1594). Translated by Allyson Poska)

a) Marina de Castro, inhabitant of Verin (Ourense), accused of having been married two times, said that her first husband had left her alone and that she was notified that he was dead and having information that it was so, she married for a second time . . . she was absolved, but because we [the judges] are suspicious that the said information was false, she was reprimanded . . . and she was mandated not to live with either of the husbands until the ecclesiastical ordinary might determine with which of them she might make her life.

b) Margarida López, the wife of Sebastian López of Pongin (Ourense), forty three years old, accused of having been married two times . . . said that it had been more than twenty-eight years ago that she had married the said Sebastian López in the eyes of the church and had made a married life with him for five years. At the end of that time, the said Sebastian López had left the land and was absent from the land for twenty years at the end of which, understanding that he was dead, she had married a second time. Certain witnesses testified that it had been four years that they had said that her first husband had been dead and that they had found his burial place in the monastery of Valparaiso. . . she was absolved.

20. Ordinance about marital separation, Portugal, early sixteenth century

Divorce with the right to remarry was prohibited in Catholicism, but “separation from bed and board” was sometimes granted in extreme cases.), ordinances were compiled, organized and consolidated. Although these laws were not necessarily written during his reign, they are an indication of what was in effect at that time. The ordinance below, compiled during the reign of King D. Manuel I (1495-152), regulates such separations, and makes a child's upkeep primarily the responsibility of the father, whether it was born in or out of wedlock. (Ordenações do Senhor Rey D. Manuel, volume IV (Coimbra: Na Real Imprensa da Universidade, 1797), pp. 175-76. Translated by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira)

Titulo LXVIII. Upon the birth of any child of a legitimate marriage, and while the said marriage lasts between the husband and the wife both have to care for it at their own expense, and give it what it needs according to its station and rank; and upon the separation of the marriage for whatever reason without the death of either [parent], the mother shall maintain the upkeep of the child until it reaches three years of age, and this in milk only, and the father shall cover all other expenses that are necessary for its upbringing; but if the mother is of such station and rank, that she could not reasonably nurse her child, the father shall maintain at his expense the wetnurse, for the said period of three years, for the milk, as well as whatever other expense, that is necessary for its rearing.

1. And if the child is not born out of a legitimate marriage, be it natural or spurious, and of whatever other manner, the mother shall maintain the upkeep of the child in milk for the said three years, and all other expenses, in the said period, as well as after, shall be done at the expense of the father, as has been said of the legitimate child. And if in those said three years the mother has any expenses concerning this child, that is the obligation of the father, she can in all cases recover it, and have it from the said father, for she did it, when she was responsible for it.

2. And in all cases where a father is responsible to pay the upkeep of his child, if he does not have the means to do it, it [the expenses] shall be paid out of the child's inheritance; and if the child has no inheritance its upkeep will be at the expense of the mother, in as much as she can do. . . .

21. A wife's will, Spain 1628

As many early modern married couples struggled to survive, a woman's financial contribution could mean the difference between comfort and misery. This was particularly true in the parts of Europe where women received significant portions of inheritance through partible inheritance, in which the inheritance was divided equally among all of the heirs, male and female. For instance, in early modern Spain, women often brought significant financial resources to the marriage and actively participated in the investment of those resources. The last will and testament of María Fernández, the wife of a carpenter from Santiago de Compostela in Spain, reveals how she and her husband were not only man and wife, but partners in a number of land holdings. (Testament of María Fernández, Archivo Histórico Universitario de Santiago de Compostela, caja 1530/1188, folio 112 (1628). Translated by Allyson Poska)

Item, I say that my husband and I lease out the benefice of Santiago de Numide next to the middle bridge. . . . I leave to the said Jacome de mata, my husband, the said quarto and a half of produce from this year that we have collected for him entirely, and the other quarto and a half from next year, I leave to my son-in-law, Alonso da Silva, that he have it and collect it entirely, with neither of them putting an impediment on the other.

Item, I say that I and my husband have some cows in San Esteban de Trasmontes and San Julian dos Cabaleiros. . . . I order that my husband and my son-in-law divide these in half. . . . Item, I say that I and my husband, jacome da Mata, between us two, bought and rent the house where we live at present in La Algaria de Arriva. I want and it is my will that I leave the usufruct of the entire house and the part that is mine to the said Jacome da Mata for all the days of his life and after his death my heirs may have it. . . .



Albecht Dürer, Peasant Couple, c. 1500. Scenes of normal married couples are quite rare in Renaissance art; in this drawing, Dürer captures a sense of mutual dependence. The original is in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan; this is taken from the Web Gallery of Art, a virtual museum and searchable database of European painting and sculpture from 12th to mid-19th centuries

<http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?welcome.html>

22. Stipulations on a widower's raising his daughter, Germany 1569

Death of a spouse was a common occurrence in early modern Europe. Inventories taken at the time of death usually simply listed the property and goods that the deceased had owned, along with debts and financial obligations, but sometimes they included stipulations about the raising of children. Children who had lost one parent, as well as those who had lost both, were given guardians in many parts of Europe, who could intervene for the interests of the child even if the surviving parent was the father. Thus widowers' as well as widows' power over their own children was often limited. (Nuremberg, Stadtarchiv. Inventarbuecher, Nr. 17, fol. 112. Translated by Merry Wiesner-Hanks)

Hans Maier must raise his little daughter, and provide her with the necessary food and clothing, until she has reached her twelfth year and reaches maturity. If however, Hans Maier does not support his child as she deserves, and because of her, truthful, basic

grievances arise, the guardians shall have the power to take away the child (when it has not been reasonably cared for) from the father and send her elsewhere where she can be cared for according to her needs. This is with the stipulation that the father still provides the money for board, room, and upbringing, as he himself has offered and agreed to do.

23. A widow petitions for assistance, Italy 1566

Widows were often left vulnerable to their husband's creditors and with a murky status professionally. In this petition to the Pien Collegio of Venice, a sort of appeals court, a widow, makes reference to past injustices, and also emphasizes her vulnerable position as a widow and a mother caring for her family. Note that she asserts not only that she is not practicing her husband's trade, but also that she is not supervising another artisan; this suggests that some widows in Venice did carry on their husbands' businesses. (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Pien Collegio, Suppliche, filza 2, no. 17, April, 1566. Translated by Monica Chojnacka)

I, Justina widow of Mr. Donato, a dyer, have begged for mercy from Your Serenity [the Appeals Court, representing the Republic of Venice], that you will concede to free me from the taxes placed on my husband for his occupation as dyer and other [occupational] activities in which he was involved leading up to his death. . . . I have found myself named as the debtor for the taxes leveled by the Decima [an office charged with leveling a head tax] and for taxes for practicing the art of dyer and other occupational activities that my husband practiced leading up to his death. . . and since I, a poor widow, have not practiced either dying or other commercial activity since his death, and since I have been named responsible for these debts even now, I humbly beg you to concede out of goodness to free me from this Decima tax [dating] from the death of my husband to the present, since I have neither practiced the craft of dyeing nor any other commercial activity, nor have I commissioned such activity, but I have only looked after my poor, numerous family. And I commit myself in God to these Lord Governors and with all due reverence recommend my soul.

24. Widower's petition for assistance in supporting his elderly father-in-law, England 1706

Most of the sources about individuals whose spouses had died concern widows, for men were only rarely identified as widowers. Widowers faced many of the same problems that widows did, however, and they remarried at a faster rate than did widows. The following is a court case involving two parishes in England, Myddle and Preston Gubballs, about who was responsible to care for an elderly blind man, Andrew Weston. (The poor at this time in England were generally expected to seek assistance in their parish of residence if they had no family to support them.) Weston had earlier made a contract with his then son-in-law, Thomas Williams, arranging to be cared for, but Williams had been widowed himself and had recently remarried. The lawyer for the parish of Myddle argues that Williams has the obligation by law to care for his father-in-law, while the lawyer for Williams argues that he is too poor. (From Richard Gouge, Antiquities and Memoirs of the Parish of Myddle, County of Salop, (London, 1875), p. 167. Spelling and orthography modernized.)

This was concerning Andrew Weston, who had lived some while in Marton, in a tenement [house] of above £10 per annum, under Mr. Thomas Harwood, who married the widow of Richard Atcherley. This Weston being aged, and his wife dead, went to Merrington to Thomas Williams, who had married his daughter and gave him all his goods and cattle on condition he would maintain him during his life. Not long after Thomas Williams's wife died, and Weston became blind, and altogether helpless. Upon this Thomas Williams prevailed with the Parish officers of Preston Gubballs [another parish near Myddle] to procure an order, and to send his father-in-law, Weston, into the Parish of Myddle, being the place of his last settlement, which was done accordingly. . . . We of the parish of Myddle. . . fetched a witness from Wrexham to prove the bargain between Andrew Weston and his son-in-law Williams; but Mr. Berkely [lawyer for Myddle] insisted upon the Statute of the 43rd of the Queen, cap. 2, whereby it is enacted that the grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers and children of any poor, lame, blind, &c., being of sufficient ability, shall make such allowance for the maintenance of such poor, &c., as the Justices at their Quarter Sessions shall allow. Here says Mr. Berkely, the grand-father-in-law, the grandmother-in-law, the father-in-law, the mother-in-law, the son-in-law, the daughter-in-law, though they be not named in the Statute yet by the equity of the Statute they are obliged, and so it had been resolved in that Court and in several other cases which he showed. Mr. Atkis [lawyer for Williams] did not gainsay [deny] any of this, but he insisted upon these words in the Statute, *being of sufficient ability*, and that Thomas Williams was a poor man and not able to do it. To which Mr. Berkely answered that Thomas Williams did hold a tenement of about £16 or £18 per annum, and had stock upon it. . . that he had lands in fee simple of about £8 to £10 per annum. . . that he had lately married a second wife with £100 portion [dowry]. . . Upon this the Court resolved that Weston's settlement was in Myddle parish, and that Thomas Williams ought to maintain him. . . This was accepted and he [Williams] took the blind man home with him.

25. Elderly man's petition for support, England 1648

Elderly people with no relatives to support them could obtain public assistance in some parts of Europe by the seventeenth century. The following is a petition presented to the Quarter Sessions of Walsingham, a regional court held four times a year, in the county of Norfolk in England. The justices ordered the petitioner's parish to support him with 12d. a week. (Norfolk Record Office, C/S3/38. Cited in Tim Wales, "Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle," in Richard M. Smith, ed. Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 388. Spelling and orthography modernized.)

The said poor petitioner [Edward Messenger of Ashwicken] being aged fourscore [80] years, almost blind, and very lame of his ankles, by which infirmities he is made unable by labor to sustain himself any longer or to travel abroad [i/e/, out of his house] to gather relief from charitable people, and is allowed but six pence by the week [as poor relief] from the town wherein he inhabits, which in these hard times of dearth and scarcity will not buy any considerable or competent maintenance for his relief; also the house wherein he dwells for lack of repair (which he is utterly unable to bestow upon

it) will not shelter and defend him from wind and rain. . .so that he perceives such distress coming upon him in his decrepit old age that he is likely to perish by hunger and cold, and sees no means left to him whereby to escape that imminent misery which otherwise will inevitably come upon him, but only by making known this his pitiful distressed condition to your Worships the Justices at this present Session, hoping that you will not turn away your eyes and ears from the cry of the poor, but rather cause them to whom it belongs to allow some more competent relief and provision for supply of these his great wants made known unto you.

26. Old age and senility, Spain 1588

Despite the fact that the average life expectancy during the early modern period was no more than 40 years, those statistics can be deceiving, for they are skewed by very high infant and child mortality. Those men and women who survived into adulthood had an excellent chance of living to ripe old ages, and sometimes to be very old, even by today's standards. Old age brought many of the same problems that it does today, however. As the Inquisition increasingly regulated the speech of its Spanish parishioners, some outspoken elderly unwittingly made heretical statements. In this blasphemy trial from 1588, the Spanish Inquisition decided not to punish a 90-year-old farmer despite the outrageousness of his ideas. (Relaciones de Causas, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Inquisición, legajo 2042, no. 22, fol. 1, 1588. Translated by Allyson Poska.)

Alonso López de Avelleyra, a farmer from Santa María de Duancos, 90 years old . . . During a conversation with others, he had said that he had had intercourse with twelve cleric's concubines, and having been reprimanded, he said that having intercourse with a cleric's concubine gained forty days of pardon and equaled a work of mercy// because he was such an old man and confessed, he was reprimanded and condemned to pay six thousands maravedis in court costs.

27. Inventory of a very poor elderly man, Germany 1544

In many cities, inventories were to be taken at all deaths to prevent conflicts among heirs or creditors. Sometimes these inventories reveal great poverty among the elderly. (Nuremberg, Stadtarchiv, Inventarbuecher, Nr. 4, fol. 41 (1544). Translated by Merry Wiesner-Hanks)

Absolutely nothing was on hand except for his daily clothes, specifically a tattered blouse and a pair of pants, and the same type of thing from his late wife. They had both been ill so long and had used everything for their necessities. There is therefore no need to take an inventory other than this.

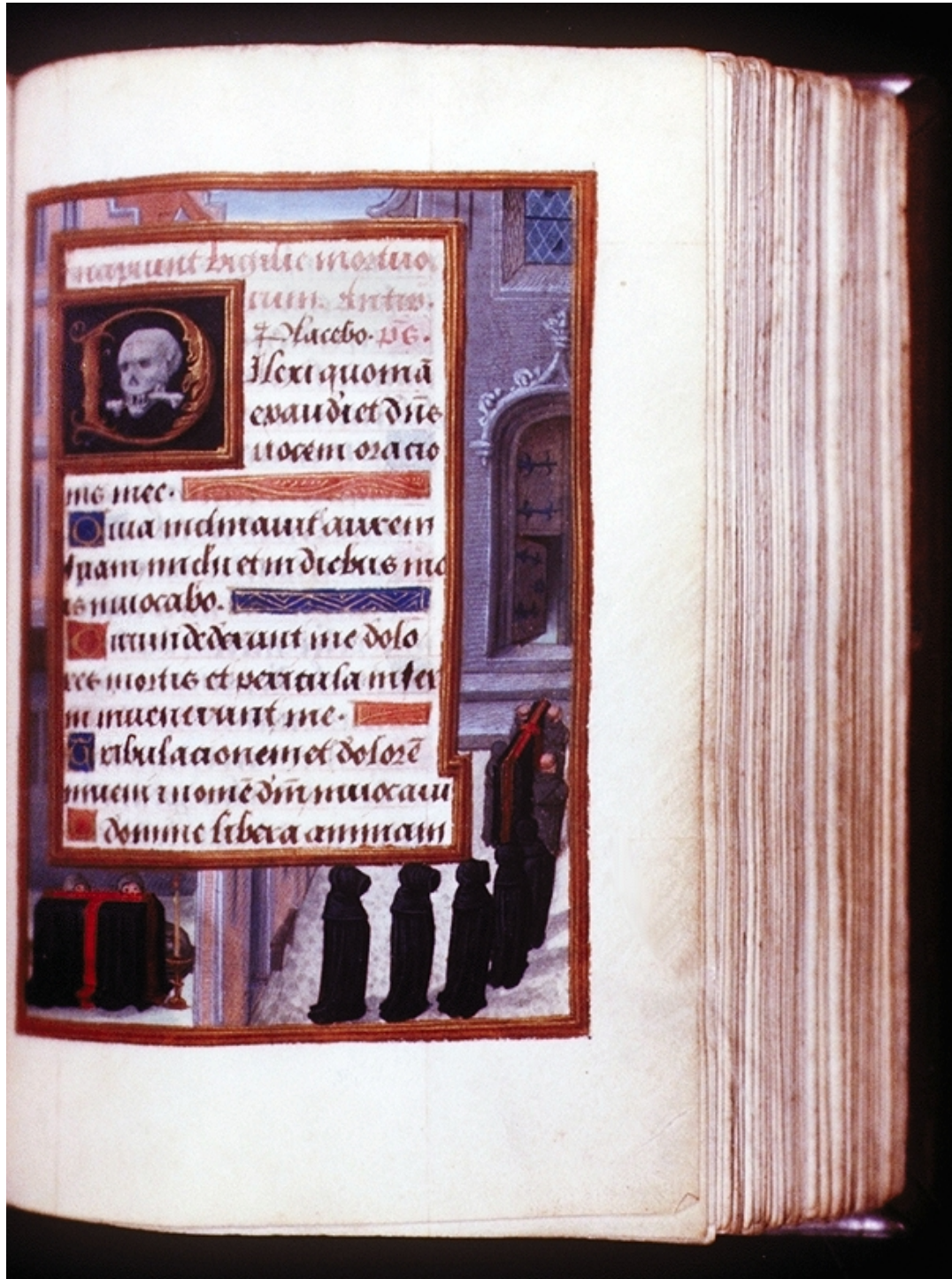


Illustration of two events in the common Christian burial ritual, sitting with the body and a lighted candle, and processing to church. This is from the same anonymous Book of Hours as the picture of children's games, made around 1500 in Bruges. The entire Book of Hours can be found on the website of Syracuse University Library:

<http://libwww.syr.edu/digital/collections/m/MedievalManuscripts/ms07/ms07.htm>