Martha C. Howell. *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*. Women in Culture and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Pp. xv, 285. \$25.00

In *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*, Martha C. Howell addresses a problem that has occupied medievalists for the last century: how to account for women's economic participation and social status at the end of the Middle Ages. Carefully reviewing the work of her predecessors, Howell finds no adequate explanation for the process by which women, in great numbers, first entered the labour force and after left it.

Demographers have suggested that women entered trades in a period of population imbalance, during which there was a shortage of men. Women left the market when the natural population balance was again restored. Other explanations have been based on economic theories. During periods of economic expansion women enter the labour force, and during periods of contraction they leave it. Marxist and feminist historians have linked women's withdrawal from active economic participation to the development of capitalism. Howell, however, finds that women's exit from market production occurred when they still outnumbered men, when the economy was still expanding, and that this phenomenon was independent of the development of capitalism.

Howell suggests that the issue of women's work can be explained by the intersection of the sex-gender system and the economic system. By carefully constructing a theoretical framework in which to analyse the status of working women, she develops a compelling explanation of why they left market production in late medieval and early modern Europe.

Rather than assuming that women who perform "men's work" also acquired the status associated with that work, Howell seeks objective criteria with which to establish relative status. She suggests that labour status be dissociated from specific trades and be judged independent from legal, social or political factors. Instead, labour status is used to refer to the extent to which the individual has access to the resources of production and distribution. This allows high or low labour status to be judged consistently, as the importance of individual crafts changed over time and varied from place to place.

Howell concludes that women attained high labour status in market production through their place in the family. Adopting Hajnal's model of the North European family, she sees women's entry into the labour force as part of the household economy as it moved from subsistence to market production. As the medieval economy changed, the role of the family production unit declined. Production became more of an individual enterprise and

less accommodating to persons with household responsibilities. At the same time, guilds assumed more political and governmental functions and women were gradually excluded. These factors combined to curtail women's access to high-status labour.

Through a detailed analysis of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Leiden and fifteenth-century Cologne, Howell demonstrates the soundness of her methodology and the flexibility of her model. These two cities had different forms of economic organization. Leiden was based on small-commodity production, while in Cologne medieval capitalism was developing. Yet in both cities, women had access to high-status labour until the economy shifted away from the family production unit.

Howell's analysis of the records shows that among the overall female work force, married women and widows had greater access to high-status labour. Frequently, but not exclusively, these women participated in the trade of their husband. Yet, in Cologne, some of the most important and active women merchants were single or independent of their husband, an anomaly which warrants further investigation.

Indeed, in spite of Howell's extensive research, the position of single women remains elusive. Such women must have accounted for a significant proportion of the female population in an era in which people generally married late in life and many not at all. It is assumed that single women entered domestic service, a low-status occupation. Certainly, Howell shows that relatively few appear in trades and that, of those, more were in low-status labour than their married sisters. It is suggested that either married women had access to the capital necessary to enter business or perhaps that single women with skills and a business aptitude were more attractive marriage partners.

Howell concludes that "Women's work in late medieval cities changed...essentially because the patriarchal order required it" (p. 178). If, with the changes in economic organization that occurred in the late Middle Ages, women had continued to participate in market production, they would have threatened the very fabric of society. First, these changes necessitated work outside the household and would not accommodate those with family and childrearing responsibilities. While single and widowed women could continue to participate, it was impossible for married women to do so without altering the organization of the household and family. Second, as guilds acquired a political role, their members assumed governmental responsibility. Were women to continue as members and assume such functions, the social organization itself would have been threatened.

Howell presents a cogent and well-documented argument – one-quarter of the volume is notes. An impressive amount of primary research, some from

archives, more from printed sources, supports her conclusions. The studies of the women of Leiden and Cologne are firmly set within these cities' wider economic history. A short comparative section, which treats Lier, Douai and Frankfurt am Main, further indicates the usefulness of Howell's model under a variety of economic systems. *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* will become essential reading for historians of economic change and for those attempting to reconstruct women's past.

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Rona Goffen. *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice. Bellini, Titian, and the Franciscans*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986. P. xvii, 285

Piety and Patronage is something of a rarity in art historical studies: an interdisciplinary study by an author who is equally knowledgeable about theology, church history, civic politics and family history as she is about art history. This is a study of the historical contexts of three altarpieces in the Franciscan church of Santa Maria dei Frari: Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child with Saints Peter, Nicholas, Benedict and Mark*; Titian, *Assumption of the Virgin*; and Titian, *Pesaro Madonna*. The narrow focus on just three pictures allows the author to discuss each systematically and exhaustively in terms of iconography (Franciscan piety) and patronage (mostly of the Pesaro family), and how the one affects the other. Goffen explains in the opening paragraph of the preface how she hopes that each of these microcosms will encapsulate a larger cultural reality:

The church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice is a microcosm. Within its walls it contains, quite literally, the history of Venetian Renaissance art. At the same time, the history of the Frari encapsulates that of the Friars Minor, from their thirteenth-century beginnings to the division of the order in 1517. The theological issues and the compassionate spirituality represented by the altars and decoration of the Frari represent the particular concerns and the character of the Franciscan order while also alluding to the special relationship between church and state in Renaissance Venice. All of this is embodied in the altarpieces painted for the Frari by Giovanni Bellini, the greatest master of the fifteenth century in Venice, and by Titian, the sublime genius of sixteenth-century painting.... The images of the Madonna were intended to convey at once several interrelated meanings, both sacred and civic; and the ways in which they do so are also related. It is as though there were a silent colloquy among them, a discourse about theology and spirituality, about