

Daughters of London: Inheriting Opportunity in the Late Middle Ages, by Kate Kelsey Staples. Later Medieval Europe 8. Leiden: Brill, 2011. Pp. xii+210. ISBN 9789004203112 (cloth); ISBN: 9789004203143 (ebook). \$132 (cloth); \$135 (ebook).

IN *Daughters of London*, Kate Kelsey Staples examines the bequests of real estate and moveable property made to the daughters of Londoners in the Husting wills from 1300 to 1500. Staples explains that she chose to focus on the role of daughters within these wills because being a daughter was an aspect of a woman's life that never changed, unlike her marital status, and by researching this unchanging aspect of women's lives Staples intends to present a clearer image of women's overall role in late medieval society. By using the Husting wills, a type of will that entailed a fee of between 2 s. 8d. and 16 s. 8d. (20) to be registered in the Court of Husting and, therefore, speaks to the last wishes of the middling classes of London, Staples attempts to illuminate the expectations that these late medieval parents, both fathers and mothers, had for their daughters. In particular, Staples is interested in whether these testators intended their daughters to have property solely as a means of negotiating better marriages or if they intended their daughters to use the property in order to become active economic agents.

In order to explore the role of daughters as heirs in medieval London, Staples first examines the testators themselves and how their gender and social status affected their bequests. An interesting aspect of this section of her work is that she demonstrates that women were more likely to bequeath landed property to sons than to daughters, but that fathers bequeathed landed property to sons and daughters in roughly equal amounts. With regard to social status and its effect on bequests, Staples indicates that some occupational groups in London were more likely to bequeath landed property to daughters than to sons, specifically artisans, professionals (defined as those whose occupations required some education and literacy), and nobles. In contrast, those occupational groups in London that preferred to bequeath landed property to sons included merchants, governmental officials, and clergy. Staples argues that while gender and occupation did influence whether and how much property a daughter might receive in a will, all classes of parents clearly wished to provide their daughters with opportunities for social and economic success.

In two separate chapters, Staples examines the inheritance of landed property and moveable property to demonstrate how these two types of property could provide economic opportunities for daughters as well as sons. In her discussion

of bequests of landed property, both domestic and commercial, Staples shows that parents did have an interest in providing their daughters with opportunities for economic and social stability or advancement. Specifically, Staples states that 78% of all daughters received landed property in wills as compared to 86% of sons (72). Staples also provides statistics that represent bequests of certain types of landed property, including tenements, commercial property, domestic property, and rent, a type of property that provided street front housing or commercial space. While tenements were inherited roughly equally by sons and daughters, sons were more likely to inherit commercial and domestic property. Daughters, however, were more likely to inherit rent, 32% compared to 22% of sons (78). Staples argues that these rents offered daughters the opportunity to own and manage commercial real estate.

In her discussion of inheritance of moveable property, Staples shows that sons and daughters received moveable property in equal amounts, both at 18% (114). Moveable wealth in these wills included money, clothing, dishware, household goods, and personal items, such as armor and jewelry. Monetary bequests of between 1 s. and 200 s. were made roughly equally to sons and daughters, while daughters were more likely to receive monetary bequests of more than 200 s. Such bequests often came with stipulations for their use, such as for a dowry, an apprenticeship (more commonly for sons than daughters), for education (sons only), or for religious life (daughters only). Moveable property in the form of objects was bequeathed to both sons and daughters. While daughters and sons were the most common recipients of household goods, daughters tended to receive household goods more frequently than sons. Sons, in contrast, tended to receive more commercial property than daughters. One important distinction Staples highlights is that sons were more likely to receive tools and physical space than were daughters, 33% compared to 7%, which suggests that sons were more likely to carry on the commercial activities of their parents (132). However, the bequests of moveable property and physical space to daughters suggest that such gifts were intended to be multipurpose. Daughters could use domestic wares or physical space to provide for their husbands and children, but could also use the same wares and space to produce goods that could be sold to others, thus providing additional income for the family. Staples convincingly demonstrates that parents viewed bequests of moveable goods as a means of providing social and economic opportunities for both daughters and sons.

Finally, Staples takes this evidence regarding bequests to daughters and compares it with other recent publications on medieval women's history, including studies on women's work, women in urban society, and women's control

of property. Staples finds that while daughters in rural areas were adversely affected by patriarchy and the practice of primogeniture, daughters in urban areas, including London and other towns in England and Europe, were intended by their parents to have economic influence alongside their brothers. According to Staples, daughters were “given access to power through inheritance rather than having their power reduced by inheritance” (165). This argument, which is effectively supported by Staples’s evidence, conforms with recent scholarship that indicates that women in general played an important role in social and economic life in medieval Europe.

In the end, Staples’s statistical analyses of bequests of landed and moveable property and her analysis of how gender and social status influenced such bequests combine to create a very detailed and authoritative study of daughters as heirs in late medieval London. Staples’s primary argument that, contrary to common perceptions that all women were adversely affected by the patriarchal constructs of late medieval Europe, daughters, particularly in urban areas, could and did inherit property that allowed them to be active economic agents in their communities, is strongly supported by the evidence from the Husting wills. Most importantly, Staples demonstrates that both parents and daughters worked within these patriarchal constructs to provide and pursue economic opportunities. These examples of people who worked within the patriarchy, as opposed to working against it or being victimized by it, further our understanding of women’s lives and opportunities in late medieval Europe.

Lizabeth Johnson
University of New Mexico