

Review

Rolf Hage, *Eer tegen eer. Een cultuurhistorische studie van schaking tijdens de Republiek, 1580-1795*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2019, 280 pp. ISBN 9789087047665.



Premodern elopement – people marrying without parental consent or forcing their parents to consent to a marriage of their offspring by running away – was a social practice that was far more complex than many scholars have previously thought. Rolf Hage claims that scholarship has wrongfully highlighted a sharp distinction between violent abductions and voluntary escapes. This view, in turn, installed the idea that women in elopement cases were passive figures whose opinions were supposedly of no importance to bystanders and authorities. This observation is particularly true for studies concerning elopement in the Dutch Republic. Ever since Donald Haks published his first research results on the subject in 1982, subsequent studies have repeated this emphasis on voluntary versus involuntary elopement.

In his interesting study, *Eer tegen eer*, Hage provides a convincing alternative by treating elopement cases as social practices determined by honour and honorary codes. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of the different parties involved and their motivations. The author discusses his theoretical framework around the concept ‘honour’ quite extensively in the second chapter of this book. In Hage’s view, honour works internally (self-esteem) and externally (reputation within the community). These notions apply both to individuals and groups (such as families), and are not static but constantly redefined. Hage meticulously examines how the individuals involved used a particular discourse to represent their own behaviour as honourable. He even distinguishes a specific ‘elopement discourse’ that allowed authorities and disgruntled parents to explain how the eloping couple – particularly the young man who allegedly persuaded the minor daughter to run away – dishonoured them. He also uses honour to answer the main question of his book: why did couples in the Dutch Republic decide to elope in the first place? Hage explains how young men could

strengthen their personal honour through marriage, while girls often claimed that their family's refusal to acknowledge their relationship left them no other option but to run away and restore their personal honour. Consequently, honorary codes were imperative for both the eloping couple and the inflicted families, which explains the title of this study: honour versus honour.

Analysing the honour discourse in elopement cases allows the author to divide his corpus of 187 cases (between 1580 and 1795) into five varying figurations. This classification has a twofold advantage: it transcends the anecdotal nature of individual court cases and allows for a dynamic comparison of these cases. Furthermore, it grants the women a voice of their own, rather than focusing solely on the legal attitudes towards elopement in the Dutch Republic and the judicial outcome of particular elopement trials. A first division is made based on whether or not the girl's parents were aware of their daughter's affair with a young man. In the first figuration (chapter four), called 'The Discovery', the young couple was in a relationship without their parents knowing. The elopement resulted from the family's discovery and disapproval of the relationship, in most cases because the man was socially unacceptable to the girl's family. In the second figuration (chapter five), styled 'The Sweeping Off', the secret relationship only became known when the pair ran away. In the other figurations, the family was aware of the young couple's amorous intentions, but refused to consent to a marriage when asked to do so. By eloping the young couple thus hoped to force their parents to give their consent. These cases are part of the third figuration, 'The Refusal' (chapter six). In the fourth figuration, 'The Own Direction' (chapter seven), the young girl complied with her family by accepting their refusal, but the dishonoured young man took matters into his own hands by abducting his partner. The last figuration is called 'The Family Feud' (chapter eight), dealing with power struggles between the girl's relatives who each wanted her to get married with their own favourite. Each of these figurations is illustrated with vivid case studies, and Hage has uncovered fascinating source material to describe these cases. Some official court documents are supplemented with personal letters from the eloping couples under scrutiny. Hage has quite generously made these sources available on www.databankschakingen.nl, a website that begs to be used by lecturers and students as a learning tool in classes on early modern gender history. In the last chapter, the author discusses elopement as a narrative theme in contemporary literature and theatre. Instead of devoting a separate chapter to these literary examples, however, it might have been better to intertwine them with the different figurations throughout the book.

Explaining the motivations of eloping couples by focussing on 'honour' offers intriguing new insights, for instance, on the role of violence in elopement cases (186). While I agree it was a good idea to categorise the source material according to the described honour-related figurations, the monocausal focus on honorary codes sometimes comes across as artificial. This is partly because I would have loved to read more about the differences between Catholic and Protestant attitudes in actual court cases. In the second chapter, the author indeed explains that the medieval doctrine of consensus between youngsters continued to prevail at the Council of Trent, while in Protestant circles no marriages between minors could take place without parental consent (60-64). Yet these different opinions remain somewhat in the background while analysing the different elopement figurations. What

particularly struck me while reading this book was the absence of an international comparative framework. When the author mentions that women in the Dutch Republic had more agency than their counterparts in Mediterranean regions (85), he seems to forget that women in the Habsburg Netherlands had equal privileges and rights – although it must be said that the misleading idea of ‘exceptionalism’ is a common aspect of studies on the Dutch Republic. A more dynamic dialogue with research on other European regions could have strengthened the author’s point that the honorary discourses so vital in this analysis on elopement are local, cultural constructions. These minor criticisms notwithstanding, Rolf Hage has written a convincing study that, as the first general survey on elopement in the Dutch Republic, is bound to attract much attention from scholars working on gender history and criminal history. Moreover, since the book takes consent and the position of women in these elopement cases as important starting points, it is a great example of how historical research is influenced by and can contribute to current public debates.

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