

(p. 201). The richness of the evidence is in fact the book's greatest asset, and yet to some extent, the desire to demonstrate the diversity within sibling groups is at the expense of analysis, and Capp raises many issues that will hopefully inspire further contributions to the field. One thing that emerges from the evidence, and deserves greater consideration, is the dynamic nature of sibling relationships. The ties that bound brothers and sisters were forged in the nuclear family unit but developed into kinship networks that were repeatedly transformed during the life cycle of the family, and it is testimony to the strength of such ties that so many of the sibling groups considered by Capp withstood the test of time.

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## **Guido Alfani and Matteo Di Tullio, *The Lion's Share: Inequality and the Rise of the Fiscal State in Preindustrial Europe***

**(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Studies in Economic History, 2019). Pages xii + 232 + figures 29 + tables 21. £31.99 hardback.**

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This short book is a very interesting read that shows economic history at its best. The underlying argument is that the organisation of societies reflects institutional decisions and, as a consequence, that human beings have the power to address societal problems, provided there is an awareness of why things are as they are and a willingness to change the social contract. The authors illustrate their point by considering wealth and income inequality, a matter of new and growing interest among economic historians: the location is Venice and the time frame is the early-modern period. Apart from the two authors' area of expertise in Italian history, there are at least two good reasons for choosing Venice. Firstly, the wealth of the archives of the Republic, including both Venice and the *Terraferma* (the hinterland), allows for an in-depth study of the relationship between institutions and inequality across the period. Secondly, the relative economic decline of Venice from the seventeenth century, following the plague of 1630, which devastated Italy, and the loss of Crete to the Ottomans after the war of Candia (1645–1669), calls for a comparison with another Republic, that of the Netherlands which experienced its Golden Age at that same time.

Arguably, Venice is a proxy for a pan-European research into the evolution of economic inequality in preindustrial societies (or before Piketty's period of

investigation). The book reads less as a monograph of the *Serenissima* than a case study set within a wider geographic framework allowing for comparisons of its fiscal system (chapter 1) and social stratification (chapter 2) with those of other Italian states (specifically Tuscany and Savoy, but also Naples) and European polities. The historians who are interested in these topics will appreciate the expertise of the two authors who bring together the best of the most recent literature in a comprehensive, concise, and yet clear manner. Building upon a robust institutional and social analysis, the book then moves to econometrics: thanks to the *estimi* (tax declarations), Gini indices are calculated to assess economic inequality in the long run (chapter 3). A series of tables and graphs leave no doubt that the trend was 'monotonically' up in all the Italian states. Across the Republic, the richest decile owned 56.8% of all the wealth in 1500, and by 1750, their share had grown to 74.8%.

The last two chapters aim to examine the causes behind the widening gap between the poorest and the wealthiest. Chapter 4 rejects the obvious explanations as benign, in particular economic ones (long-term growth is seen as benefitting the rich without affecting the poor, while recession seemed to hit the latter without preventing the former from getting richer); the impact of the demographic and subsistence crises are also largely discarded, essentially on the grounds that the ensuing proletarianization (sale of land) occurred in waves, while the trend of inequality was rising slowly but steadily throughout the period. The true originality of the book lies in its conclusion that the essential cause behind the economic inequality must be attributed to the rise of the fiscal state from the sixteenth century onwards. Here again, the argument is envisaged as a pan-European phenomenon linked to changes in the art of warfare (the so-called military/naval revolution) and its rising costs. In this respect, three key points are successively made. Firstly, the rise of the fiscal state in the Republic saw the per capita fiscal burden increase from 6.2 daily wages of labourers in the construction industry in 1550–1570, the highest rate in Europe then, to 10.5 daily wages of labourers in 1760–1780, although by that time other states, in particular England and Holland, had long moved ahead. Secondly, analysis of the tax system shows that increased taxation was socially regressive (although less so than in many other European countries) as tax revenue relied heavily on excise duties (approximately 80%). Thirdly, in the age of the fiscal-military state, social redistribution through expenditure was very limited (2% of the budget at best). As a matter of fact, the rich in Venice did pay taxes, but they paid proportionally less than the poor; moreover, the wealthy profited most from state expenditure, as they were able to invest their savings in the public debt which consumed a higher portion of tax revenue, with peaks of 42% of the budget after the war against the Ottoman Empire, than military expenditure, the latter decreasing following Venice's decision to avoid the temptation of warfare.

A distinctive strength of the book certainly lies in its ability to offer credible estimates of wealth and income inequality in Venice in the early-modern period, something which had never been done systematically and over such a long stretch of time. The quantitative technique (explained in the appendix) complements the qualitative approach very well, and the combination of the two methodologies helps the authors to successfully tackle some of the issues raised by the measurement of economic inequality and its institutional foundations. As previously stated, the results are always set against the experience of other polities, not so much for

the purpose of setting out 'national' idiosyncrasies than for identifying variants of a pan-European model of economic inequality and debating the relevant historiography (for instance, the correlation between growth and economic inequality, the social impact of plagues at various times, the role of institutional arrangements such as inheritance laws).

Paradoxically, the two historians finish by asking whether the resilience of pre-industrial societies was – or tended to become – dependent on inequality (unequal contribution justified by social status), tempered in Venice by charitable institutions, as opposed to the modern ideal of social justice and equal opportunities. Here, one regrets that the study did not make space for the middling groups, between the very poor and the super wealthy, for, as the book shows, they carried the bulk of the growing fiscal state. In this respect, the question of the social redistribution may be in need of some refinement which, in turn, would probably require using other sources. On the whole, however, the book is intellectually enjoyable. It is somehow unnerving, though: for it reopens the question of what may have been the benefits of the fiscal state if it only profited a tiny and incredibly rich and richer elite, notwithstanding the problem of the transition to the social state. One should certainly thank the authors of this book for showing that early-modern history is definitely relevant if one wishes to engage with the debates of our time.

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**Michael Lobban, Joanne Begiato and Adrian Green (eds.), *Law, Lawyers and Litigants in Early Modern England: Essays in Memory of Christopher W. Brooks***

**(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Pages x + 373 + figures 9 + tables 2. £95.00 hardback.**

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Professor Christopher Brooks died in 2014 with a body of influential work to his credit but with much more anticipated. This volume offers thoughtful reflections upon the former and useful intimations of what might have come from the latter. Edited by former students and colleagues of Professor Brooks, the volume emerges from a conference held in his memory in 2016 at Durham University. In addition to the introduction and three historiographical essays, the volume includes nine strong contributions that build upon Brooks's work, to one degree or another. The brightest highlights, though, are the two previously unpublished pieces by Professor