

# Rafaella sartis europe at home



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E@H Rafaella Sarti's Europe at Home Rafaella Sarti's book tackled the "diversity and development of the material culture of the household in Europe during the ancient regime" shedding substantial light on the general preoccupations of a household in the Europe of that age but the book has its own share of flaws with regards to Sarti's attention to detail and the major contrasts presented by the key points of her research subject (Schuurman). In the sum, Sarti uncovered " trends," the " central contrasts of male/female, city/countryside, nobility/farmers, rich/poor, Northern Europe/Southern Europe, Protestants/Catholics," impressed that " reality is not as schematic" as it seems, and paid " strong consistent attention to differences according to gender" but the originality of Europe at Home was flaunted through its being a combination of historical demography - a refined mix of family history, history of material culture, and women history (Schuurman). Furthermore, Sarti not only studied material objects from their " economic point of view, but also in their symbolic and cultural cointexts" (Schuurman). More truly, Sarti exhibited less interest in general economics, and more in the diversity of gender, religion and wealth instead of in explaining the formulation or dynamics of those differences. As a matter of fact, Schuurman stated that there was " no direct relationship between the choice of research area and the research questions asked of it," when social history should have been more about the " choice of theme or social group" and not about the " choice of region."

In the introduction, Sarti discussed the spatial and chronological boundaries, and

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the three functions of a household, namely, reproduction, consumption, and

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production, with much emphasis on consumption. However, she paid no attention to the production sphere although she has included this as one of the functions. And even with the consumption sphere, Sarti unfairly left out the objects that played a large role in the diversity which she centrally addressed, those related to tea and coffee.

The first chapter was about the complexities of the house and the family, and how the different religions and states within Europe viewed marriage and family. However, geographic and social emphases relied too much on the countryside and the nobility, and rendered not enough attention to the households of the middle class in villages and towns. When, in fact, the bourgeoisie played a large role in bringing about the changes throughout Europe, both publicly and privately.

The same biases on class and geography applied on the second and third chapters which were about marriage from its start to finish and its material implications, and how individuals lived together, in what houses, and what kind of family formations and sizes, respectively.

The fourth and fifth chapters discussed the home itself and its material objects, and about food, while the sixth chapter was about clothing. These were the central concerns of the book and yet still flawed as almost no attention was paid to the general agrarian and Malthusian character of the early modern economy (Schuurman). Sarti was also "less interested in the possession and use of books and paintings" when literature and the arts always and without fail reflect the consciousness and distinction of any people in a given age.

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The last chapter on the role of women in relation to consumption Sarti

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applied her fairest concentration, about the changing relations between family members connected with developing distinction between public and private spheres.

Europe at Home is a well-structured book and can deliver a good introductory approach on family and material culture. However, it clearly has its biases regarding the major points mentioned that can reflect a rather single-faceted point of view which is too much in favor of the aristocratic lifestyle.

#### Works Cited

Sarti, Rafaella. Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500-1800. New Haven and London, 2002

Schuurman, Anton. " Review: Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500-1800." Institute of Historical Research. 9 Sep 2004. Institute of Historical Research. 4 Apr 2006