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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Raffaella Sarti. *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500-1800.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002. xi + 324 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-08542-6.

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Published on H-Women (November, 2003)

Food, Clothing, and Shelter: The Domestic Realities of Early Modern Europe

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Although influenced by Braudel's "l'histoire universale" approach, author and historian Raffaella Sarti, in her book *Europe at Home*, does not present a distant historical perspective devoid of humanity, as some sweeping historical studies such as hers tend to do. She does have a broad jetliner perspective of family and material culture over time and space (Europe over a three-hundred-year period), but one that touches down continually to the most intimately specific of perspectives. Sarti has artfully brought together the Annales' poles of quantitative data and personal mentalit=, beginning her narrative with the moving story of homeless people, to clearly distinguish between the situations of not having a house or habitation, and not having a family. They were not the same. Often, in this tumultuous early modern period, entire family groups were forced by poverty to beg and roam as a dispossessed and miserable unit–truly "les miserables."

Originally published in Italian in 1999 as *Vita di casa: Abitare, mangiare, vestire nell'Europa moderna*, this English translation has been rendered by Allan Cameron. In addition to the seven chapters here, this edition also includes an updated bibliography, an expanded final chapter, and some clarifications on various topics as diverse as clothing, economics, and the Jews of Europe. The author also provides a helpful summary of conclusions at the end of each chapter. An interesting and engaging center folio includes some eighty-six illustrations (engravings, paintings, drawings, photos of objects and interiors), twelve of which are in color. Subjects range from depictions of servant and master interaction and birth scenes, to kitchens, bedrooms, floor plans, and women delousing themselves in the privacy of their rooms. A lengthy bibliography on studies of the family, dowry, household, and material culture in Italian, French, and English sources should prove useful to anyone interested in this area of inquiry.

As Sarti's thesis is to understand the material life of the past by looking at objects, practice, and beliefs, her perspective is necessarily based on the familial group. She is concerned with the subtle and interwoven processes of production, reproduction, and consumption, and begins in her first chapter by attempting to "gather the threads" of various definitions and traditions involving the private realm across time, geography, and class, even before she is ready to "open the front door of the house" to investigate its material reality. This is an interesting (but somewhat exhausting) process of looking at different types of houses, families, and religious traditions that made up the domestic realities of Europe in the early modern period. Her background discussion continues through chapter two with a brief overview of the multiform marriage practices, including marital assigns, that brought men and women to cohabitation in the first place. Here, we encounter for the first time what will become the conclusion of the book as a whole. Sarti, beginning the investigation of marriage, states "there were considerable differences from one area to another and from one period to another," and a few sentences later writes, "apparently uniform areas were teeming with a thousand differences" (p. 43). Chapter 3 concludes this prefatory excursus as a short, nine-page essay on various configurations of houses and families over time, from Italy to Norway. While furnishing myriad details of social and cultural practices, there is no overarching paradigm which can be drawn.

By the time the author gets us in the "front door" of the early modern European house (in chapter 4), the reader is more than ready to be confronted with some comfort food, like a satisfying "thick description" of the specifics of what exactly a European "home" was like between 1500 and 1800. But here again, even though the author seems to hit her stride in tackling the material culture of the domestic realm head on, we quickly learn that there is no one model of "home." In fact, the differences

of domestic reality are so various and wide-ranging, depending upon whether a family group was rich or poor, urban or rural, Catholic or Jewish, in Hungary or the Netherlands, that while fascinating in their details, any larger meaning is difficult to digest, much less assess. For example, she tells us that nineteenth-century Polish peasant houses had a scant two rooms: a "white" room for sleeping where there was no stove and therefore no soot, and a "black" room for cooking and everything else, where the smoke from the fire could not escape (p. 91). Interesting. From information on the first use of window glass and the symbolic value of fire, to the increasing desire for privacy within the home evidenced by the introduction of corridors, Sarti's seemingly inexhaustible catalog of specifics is prodigious. However, this reader found it a Benjaminian file of Brobdingnagian proportions. I was reminded of Henri Berr's early-twentieth-century comment on a collection of seashells. They might be delightful and fully remarkable to look at, but what do they mean?

Chapter 5, entitled "food," continues her investigation into the realities of everyday life in Europe in this period. Here, she covers topics from "civilized" to "uncivilized" eating practices, the cutlery and table linens used in various homes (including the Italian invention of the fork), food preparation, class differences, and even the ins and outs of breastfeeding. All the above make for interesting reading, but again, to what end? An antiquarian collecting notices of long-forgotten details and customs from the past would be riveted, but how does a historian make sense of it all? This is the question that not only overrides a primal interest in the human domestic realities here laid bare, but also struggles with what to do with this information.

Chapter 6 on clothing tackles the second part of the basic domestic mantra of "food, clothing, and shelter," and again, casts its nets widely. So widely, in fact, that the material presented, while interesting, only piques the historian's desire to know more in depth about one area, one time period, one set of practices. There is no general statement that can be made over three centuries, dozens of cultures, classes, ethnic and religious groups. Local practice in material culture is bound to remain local, based as it is on local parameters of climate, availability of materials, agricultural practices, religious traditions, and the like. In the case of clothing, any attempt to make a definitive statement about it is bound to fall short. Structurally, this chapter is an eclectic mix, beginning with a section on spinning, weaving, sewing, and buying, then turning to underwear and hygiene, then a page or two on "protection and making oneself attractive," a section on colors, one on "clothes that categorized people," and ending with a section on livery. Here, the author covers the clothing of European peoples over three centuries and innumerable geographic locations, in a scant twenty-one pages. What the reader learns about clothing in such a treatment is doubtful. Certainly, one chapter which covers how people clothed themselves, in cities, in the countryside, in the upper classes, in the peasantry, in cold climes, in the Mediterranean, must by definition, skim the surface.

The final chapter of the book is ambiguously entitled "Inside and Outside the Home: A Few Final Considerations." Here, a series of mini-discussions covers such topics as the definition of domesticity in sixteenth-century Brescia (p. 222) and the relative gender specificity of public and private spheres across Europe. The author ends by attempting to wrap up her investigation by reintroducing the notions of production, reproduction, and consumption with which she began. With her extremely broad thesis, Sarti has cut out her work for herself, and she reiterates here that any definitive conclusions on "Europe at home" remain elusive, which is no surprise, at least not for historians. One gets the feeling, however, that the author herself seems to be disheartened by not being able to bottom-line her findings.

Having said this, the author may have betrayed her initial impulse to write this work in her book's dedications, which are to her grandmother, mother, and father, who lived their lives enmeshed in just such material realities. It is to them that this book belongs, in the old Italian literary tradition of writing about antique domestic practice, such as Guido Biagi's *The Private Life of the Renaissance Florentines*, published in London in 1896, or Nino Tamassia's *La Famiglia Italiana nei secoli decimoquinto e decimosesto*, published in Milan in 1910. Like these older historical works, it is to the memory of the Third Estate of Old Europe that this effort really belongs–to the memory of those for whom metanarratives only existed in the spiritual realm, and not in the harsh material world of cruel and ultimate difference.

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Citation: Carole Collier Frick. Review of Sarti, Raffaella, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500-1800.*

H-Women, H-Net Reviews. November, 2003.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8428

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