

Review - Ingram, Martin, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 480. ISBN: 978-1-316-63173-7.

In the conclusion to this marvellous book Martin Ingram defines its aim as being to examine:

... the pattern of sexual regulation in London and provincial England in the century or so from the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth century: the courts concerned, the agencies involved in working them ... patterns of prosecutions, the jurisdictional conflicts ... institutional innovations and ... numerous gradual changes and developments in prosecutions and punishments (pp. 390–1).

The first substantive chapter surveys the historiography of social regulation, marriage formation and divorce in late medieval and early modern Europe, and Ingram identifies some key weaknesses, namely that such studies tend to focus on marriage and divorce or on single jurisdictions, with little consideration of what came before or after the Reformation depending on the chronological starting point. Chapter two discusses how marriages were formed and contested in late-medieval England, with Ingram emphasising that although most people recognised the importance of solemnised unions, women and men debated how these were created in practice, not least because failure to secure a legitimate marriage mattered greatly when maintaining sexual honesty was important for both sexes.

The remaining chapters focus on specific geographical regions, with Ingram utilising secular and ecclesiastical records to examine the scope, intensity and effectiveness of sexual regulation. Chapter three focuses on rural society before 1530 when church courts prosecuted adultery and fornication rigorously. In some instances even those who subsequently wed risked being prosecuted and made to do penance for sex before marriage, but officials were pragmatic if a case was not clear-cut and had no wish to disturb social relations unnecessarily. Chapter four profiles urban centres in the same period where sexual transgressions were a more persistent problem due to the presence of public houses and prostitutes. Many secular urban courts prosecuted sexual offenders with penalties included fines, imprisonment and corporeal punishment, and civic governors, influenced by a combination of Christian morality and ideas of commonwealth, looked towards larger cities and the crown when considering how to reform manners.

Chapters five, six and seven turn to London, Westminster and Southwark where opportunities to engage in illicit sex abounded, but despite the presence of numerous stews and bawdy houses, sexual immorality was condemned and the first two decades of the sixteenth century witnessed ideological and jurisdictional shifts, with a more self-conscious promotion of the dignity of marriage alongside the growing prominence of civic courts in detecting and prosecuting offenders. Parading and public shaming were common

punishments, and strong hostility was shown towards 'common' women and bawds, whilst patriarchal householders were expected to show a good example by exercising sexual self-control and restraining the behaviour of their dependents. Priests too were expected to be good examples, but as Ingram outlines in chapter eight, clerical incontinence was a persistent problem which is probably under-represented in surviving records.

Chapter nine, ten and eleven move forward to the mid-Tudor and early Elizabethan periods. Between 1530 and 1558 London witnessed a 'radical and severe programme of moral reformation' (p. 267), but elsewhere the impact of religious change was less coherent, with penances remaining traditional in form but physical penalties becoming harsher, and sweeps and searches common. In the 1560s and 1570s corporeal punishment in church courts declined, but penances began to be performed in public spaces such as marketplaces as well as within parish churches. Some urban courts abandoned claims to jurisdiction over sexual offences, but others maintained or extended policing, introducing harsher punishments in the process. These measures built on pre-Reformation practices, but one significant change came with the establishment of the Bridewell hospital in London as a workhouse, prison and house of correction, a measure Ingram describes as 'the greatest innovation in the sphere of sexual regulation in England throughout the whole period' (p. 355), although he notes that whilst the language of the court-books was moralistic, it was not distinctively Protestant, and that the underlying principles of the governors were not novel despite the procedures and severity of punishments implemented by them being so.

*Carnal Knowledge* concludes with a summary of the main arguments and a snapshot of sexual regulation across England in 1600 when secular policing in London was declining but there was little sign of slackening in the provinces, with greatest attention paid to bastardy, illicit pregnancy and (briefly) bigamy. The overall message conveyed by Ingram across more than 400 pages is thus a complex one which emphasises both changes and continuities across more than a century. The reformations of the sixteenth century are an important part of his analysis, but the real strength of his work is an awareness not only of religious, but also of national political and economic trends, alongside a sensitivity to regional legal, cultural and social particularities. This is an intricate masterpiece produced by one of the finest practitioners of the historian's craft.