

Title : Reconsidering the southern Europe model: dowry, women's work and marriage patterns in pre-industrial urban Italy (Turin, second half of the 18th century)

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate and analyse the impact of the dowry and the endowment system on marriage and household patterns and on the labour market in 18th century Turin. At the same times it enquires into the reliability of the northern/southern Europe pattern for the study of this topic. Two points are developed. Firstly the paper shows that the dowry system coexists with a relatively high age at marriage because of the specific role played by the dowry in Turin society. Indeed, this was not a once-and-for-all established asset but was a negotiable and flexible resource that could be manipulated by the different actors concerned in the endowment. Moreover, the payment did not always take place immediately upon marriage, nor was the money quickly available. At the same time the paper examines the economic role of dowry in *Ancien Régime* households: by means of a juridical procedure couples could alienate this property, and use or invest it to ensure their well-being and/or their economic situation. Finally, the second part investigates the relationship between the dowry system and the participation of young girls and married women in the local labour market: their significant and crucial presence demonstrates that the dowry and its expectation was not a sufficient incentive to keep them out of the labour market.

Keywords Dowry; Women Work; Marriage Patterns; South Europe Model; Servants; Italy 18th century

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1 Abbreviations : AST, Sez. Riun. = Archivio di Stato di Torino, Sezioni Riunite; AST, I Sez.= Archivio di Stato di Torino, I Sezione; AAT = Archivio Arcivescovile di Torino; ASCT = Archivio Storico del Comune di Torino.

This paper aims to investigate and analyse the impact of the dowry and the endowment system on marriage and household patterns and on the labour market in 18th century Turin. The study of family and marriage patterns in pre-industrial Europe has a long historiographical tradition. In a famous article, Hajnal identified a European marriage pattern (EMP) – spreading to west of a line from Saint Petersburg to Trieste – characterized by late age at marriage and a high rate of celibacy (Hajnal 1965; Hajnal 1983). According to subsequent studies by Peter Laslett, this pattern was part of a more general European family model (specifically in north-western Europe), based on the predominance of the nuclear family, on the neolocality of the new couple and on the diffusion of life-cycle servanthood - a crucial experience for young people leaving home before the beginning of conjugal life and a practice that allowed individuals to delay their marriage (Laslett 1965, 1977; Laslett, & Wall 1972; Guttormsson 1988). Laslett also identified a “Mediterranean model” the features of which included, among others, the prevalence of complex households, early marriage of women, very low rates of permanent celibacy and low proportions of life-cycle servants (Laslett 1983). These studies started a remarkable and successful debate involving demographers, historians and anthropologists, with some theoretical consequences for the approach to the European history of the family. This North/South dichotomy remains to this day an important model for analysis and has found favour with scholars. In a recent article, for example, David Reher (Reher 2004, pp. 52-53) reasserts the methodological validity of this model for contemporary society and concludes that the life-cycle servanthood of North-West Europe encouraged a sense of individualism which, even today, still makes people face up to their responsibilities, while in the South risks and difficulties were (and are) shared by the family which plays the role of protector for their members until marriage and beyond.

Using the same perspective, recent studies established a strong link between the EMP and Western Europe's economic development (for instance, De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010; De Vries 1994). Tine De Moor and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, for example, argue that the EMP “emerged in north-western Europe because of a combination of three socio-economic and ideological factors: first, the stress on consensus instead of parental authority for the formation of a marriage; second, the position of women in the transfer of property between husband and wife and between parents and children; and third, the accessibility to, and size of, the labour market” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p.4). Undoubtedly, every one of these factors is worthy of analysis and discussion; nevertheless, it appears that the transfer of property – from parents to children and from bride to

groom – is considered the crucial element in understanding the rapid diffusion of the EMP in north-western Europe as well as the consequent intense economic development of the area that took place from the medieval to the early modern period. As the authors clearly explain “the southern European system is often referred to as 'separatist' because the property of either spouse brought into the marriage was considered to be distinct, and a conjugal fund was not created at wedlock. The northern European situation is described as 'conjugal'. The property that a bride brought into the marriage was not held separately (...), but was instead merged into a communal account that was under the full control of the husband but to which the widow also had rights” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 8).

And of course these different conditions of property transfer could affect marriage patterns. Firstly, the authors claim that “there was probably a direct relationship between marriage age and the property transfer between parents and children (...). If a woman had the right to her parent's inheritance without having to marry [that was the most common case in north-western Europe] there was no financial incentive for an early marriage” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 9); rather, the necessity/will to amass resources with a view to marriage encouraged young, unmarried girls to delay their marriage and to choose the path of temporary service. In contrast, according to the authors, “the southern dowry system created incentives for both parents and girls to arrange early marriages” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 9).

Secondly, the authors point out a specific relationship between the marital economy and female participation in the labour market. Indeed, in north-western Europe, the existence of a conjugal fund would stimulate the presence of women in the economy and in the labour market: “wives could contribute to their conjugal fund and profit from its growth”; in addition, they would contribute “to their future share of the inheritance in the knowledge that they would receive their share of the conjugal fund eventually” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 8). In the South, on the contrary, the endowment system would have kept women away from the labour market since their position would be more or less fixed by the presence of the dowry, “regardless of what economic activities they undertook” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 8). This would not have stimulated the entry of young girls into the labour market – because, in theory, they had no need to store up resources for marriage and they would acquire their share in the estate as a dowry. At the same time, married women – and then widows – would have had few opportunities (and little interest) “to take over their deceased husband's business because they did not necessarily receive a share of the

inheritance” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 10). In conclusion, these conditions would have permitted individuals and families to develop explicitly “labour-market oriented” strategies (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 10) and that, in a long term perspective, enabled the rapid and great economic growth of the area.

At first glance, some features of the North/South dichotomy are not totally unrelated to some marriage and labour force behaviour – for example, the age of the bride and groom and the different rate of rural life-cycle servanthood in the two areas (Viazzo 2003) - or to systems of property transfer through the generations. Nevertheless, scholars supporting these theses limited their observations to specific regions, such as the South of Italy (“the deep south”); in addition they were obliged to admit numerous exceptions and never to clarify the real extent and the limits of applicability of this model. Thus, it appears that the “Mediterranean model” is not appropriate for describing the great regional variability of marriage and family patterns in southern Europe where, according to studies of the last two decades, factors can acquire different configurations and change rapidly across the regions and from city to countryside (Barbagli 1991; Kertzer, & Brettell 1987; Kertzer 1991; Cavallo 1998, 2006; Viazzo 2003). Also the *longue durée* of the model across the centuries and up to the present day proposed by Reher (Reher 2004) seems not to hold true in face of the great variation in contexts. Similarly, the economic and cultural meaning of inheritance system and endowment system as well as their consequences on the life of individuals and families could seriously change.

For example, in the article by De Moor and Van Zanden, the dowry appears as a fixed and immobile property, strictly established once and for all by inheritance law, and intended to ensure powerful marriage alliances between families and to affect seriously and permanently the destiny of a woman. This may be the case in Renaissance Tuscany – to which the authors refer - but there is no evidence to suggest that this situation was widespread in all Mediterranean Europe (whose borderline remains blurred) or through the centuries. For this reason it may be interesting and useful to investigate the connections between the dowry system, marriage patterns and the participation of women in the labour market, by means of a case-study – namely Turin in the second half of the 18th century - in order to verify the pertinence of the North/South dichotomy as an analytical framework for the understanding of social and economic dynamics. Two points will be developed. Firstly, the local marriage pattern will be discussed and subsequently its relationship with the endowment system. In some ways, the Turin case-study is representative of the difficulty of applying the

northern/southern Europe model and of the risk of simplification it causes: even the marriage pattern of middle and lower classes was characterized by late marriage age, weddings were always completed by an endowment act. In addition, terms and conditions of dowry and of its payment were more complex than those established by law and were usually influenced by local *coutume*. Even if by that time the dowry was in most cases the female inheritance portion of the family estate, the concrete transfer of property did not always take place immediately upon marriage, nor was the money quickly available to the couple. This paper will also discuss the practical employment of the dowry in the household economy: it will be shown how couples alienated and made use of it – or, more frequently, a part of it - in order to assure their survival, to acquire employment or to achieve upward social mobility. Thus, in specific contexts the dowry was a negotiable and flexible resource that could be manipulated by the different actors involved in the endowment. In conclusion, the first part of the paper suggests that the dowry system was not sufficient *in itself* to incentivise early marriage or to determine *a priori* a girl's destiny.

Secondly the paper investigates the relationship between dowry and labour market. In particular, it will be shown that the separate property regime (the dowry system) did not have negative effects on the presence of women in the labour market. Very often in the middle and lower classes the dowry consisted of the earnings and savings of the girl, or at least of a combination of sums of different origin in which the money earned by the bride was quite significant. Furthermore the difficulty in obtaining the dowry-heritage and the delay in payment even after the marriage encouraged young girls and married women to develop (or continue) other family survival strategies, such as entering the labour market, and even developing high-level skills, in order to assure incomes.

From a methodological perspective, the paper suggests the importance and the fertility of a micro-analytical approach as well as a situational analysis of phenomena in order to grasp the relevance of social and economic dynamics. In this way, by means of the analysis and the valorisation of local differences and similarities of the crucial factors capable of explaining different situations and phenomena, it will be possible to avoid the risk of generalization caused by a rigid application of the northern/southern Europe model. Indeed, differences in family formation were not the result of two cultural and socio-economic blocks, which existed *a priori*, but rather, of *different ways of obtaining and of managing resources* intended to assure the formation and sustenance of a new household.

The paper is organized as follows. The first part describes the marriage pattern and the endowment system in 18th century Turin with the goal of evaluating its impact on the household economy. In particular the paper investigates how couples employed the dowry in everyday life by means of the *alienazioni dotali*. The paper also will show how, in some cases, it was difficult to obtain the actual payment of the dowry and, how the *alienazioni dotali* were a legal way to facilitate access to this property, promised and never paid. Finally, the second part enquires into the relationship between the endowment system and the presence of women in the Turin labour market.

1. *Marriage patterns*

One essential point about the EMP concerns the age at first marriage; starting from a large range of studies, Hajnal and others concluded that the average age of spouses in western Europe was always 24 and over (Hajnal 1965). Available data for 18th century Turin falls in line with that shown by Hajnal and Laslett's research. In a sample of 286 *processicoli matrimoniali*² registered from 1760 to 1792 in the Turin parish of *Santi Processo e Martiniano*, the average age at the first marriage (all social groups included) was 24.1 for brides and 28.7 for grooms. According to civil marriage acts set up during the period of the Napoleonic invasion of Italy, between 1803 and 1814, it was 24.4 for brides and 30 for grooms³.

Hajnal and Laslett's statements referred mainly to the countryside, but as has been suggested, the situation in towns and cities was more stratified with different types of urban economies across various social groups (Lynch 1991). If we consider the social and economic background of the brides in turn, some remarkable differences in marriage age emerge. For example, brides involved in crafts married at 24; but their age rises to 26.3 for women in retail and trade and reaches 28.3 and 28.7 respectively among brides are that stated to be well-off (*benestanti* or *redditieri*) and among others who declared a service activity, (as servants, housekeepers, cooks, laundresses)⁴. The social and economic environment of women also seems to play a role in the likelihood of permanent celibacy; according to the population census, more than 55 per cent of

2 The *processicoli matrimoniali* were set up by the catholic authorities with the goal of certifying the civil status of the spouses and verifying that they fulfilled all the necessary requirements to enter into wedlock. AAT, *Fondi Parrocchiali, Sezione XVIII*.

3 ASCT, *Atti di matrimonio*, vol. 1-16. Civil marriage acts of the Napoleonic age were transcribed partly by a team of students from the Department of Economic History at the University of Turin, coordinated by Prof. Maria Carla Lamberti and partly by Prof. Luciano Allegra. I thank them for allowing me to use the complete database.

4 Source : my elaboration from civil marriage acts of Napoleonic age.

unmarried women aged over 30 were involved in service activity, 23 per cent in craft and only 2 per cent in retail.

A second factor was crucial in affecting the marriage pattern in Old Regime Turin: the migration experience. During the century, Turin grew rapidly and, as in other European cities, migration was a structural feature of this development. In the second half of the 18th century, migrants (people not born in the city) accounted for up to 60 per cent of the male population between 26 and 60 years old and 44 per cent of the female population between 15 and 40 years old⁵; they arrived from the countryside and the mountains around the city, attracted to the labour market of the capital. People who definitely wanted to settle in the city were obliged to reorganize their social and working life and to network in the new *milieu* and in this context one of the most evident consequences was the delay of marriage. Indeed, in Turin, as in many other European cities, migrants of both sexes also married later than their peers born in the city (Brodsky Elliot 1981; Bardet 1983; Poussou 1983; De Vries 1984). This delay is of course a significant proof of the effort required by new residents to settle into the new situation and, as Jan de Vries wrote, “may also reflect the existence of differences in the size of obstacles that stand in the way of establishing the economic basis for marriage” (De Vries 1984, p. 192), such as the labour market niches that migrants were likely to occupy.

The sample of 286 marriages shows that in the second half of the 18th century, native girls celebrated their first marriage at 22.9 years old on average while migrant brides were older (25.8 on average). In addition, while 75 per cent of the natives were from 16 to 25 years old, migrant brides were only 54 per cent in the same age cohort as they married frequently (more than 35 per cent) between 26 and 35 years old. Results are analogous for men: native men married for the first time at 27.6 while immigrants married at 29.6; and about 40 per cent of the latter were in the age cohort age from 26 to 30⁶.

2. *Endowment system and inheritance pattern in 18th century Turin*

Research on Renaissance Tuscany showed that there was a direct correlation between age at marriage and the amount of the dowry (Herlihy 1976; Herlihy, & Klapish-Zuber 1978; Botticini 1999); similarly, De Moor and Van Zanden (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010) concluded that, in southern Europe where the dowry system was widespread, this allowed – and even encouraged –

⁵ Source : my elaboration from the population census of 1802.

⁶ AAT, *Fondi Parrocchiali, Sezione XVIII*. My elaboration from the *processicoli matrimoniali*.

marriage at a young age. This clearly refers to a specific context, such as the Tuscan society of the *Quattrocento*; 18th century Turin is not part of this model since late marriages were affected by different factors not considered for Tuscan society – such as migration and the employment experiences of spouses – and coexisted with an endowment system which, as will be explained in the following chapters, did not assure a direct and simple access to dowry but incentivised, and even compelled, girls to delay marriage and to participate actively in the labour market.

Since the Middle Ages and until the 19th century at least, in countries employing Roman law the dowry was indispensable for girls of every social group in order to enter the marriage market. The dowry was usually drawn up by a notary's deed – the endowment act – signed by the bride, the groom, and by their parents or relatives⁷. In 18th century Turin, the dowry was composed of two parts: a sum of money, usually paid in cash or with a credit or a private deed (or more rarely with a house or land), and goods – clothes, linen, furniture, jewels – known as the “marriage trousseau” (*fardello* in the Piedmontese dialect). Often, amongst the lower classes, the dowry was made up exclusively of these goods, while the cash part was lacking. According to the law and customs of the Kingdom of Sardinia⁸, the dowry and the *trousseau* were the personal property of the bride; nevertheless, during married life, they were put under the control of the husband who had ownership and the right to manage them for the well-being of the family. Despite this, and in order to protect female property rights, as a general rule the dowry was inalienable. When the husband died, the dowry was returned to the widow by the husband's heir(s); then, during widowhood, the woman had the right to control and freely manage it. Of course, the value of the dowry as well as the origin of the money or goods allocated varied according to the social status of the family and its ambitions; in 18th century Turin most dowries were valued at up to 500 *lire*. According to a sample of 753 Catholic dowries established here throughout the 18th century, 50.34 per cent were worth up to 499 *lire* and 17.55 per cent between 500 and 999 *lire* (Allegra 1996, p. 177).

The dowry was undoubtedly closely connected to the inheritance system and often paid as the inheritance portion *tout court*. According to Diane Owen Hughes's famous article (Owen Hughes 1978), the Old Regime dowry system was the result of extensive and meaningful changes in inheritance systems that took place at the end of the Middle Ages and which continued into Early

7 Particularly, on Turin and Piedmont see: (Pene Vidari 1980-81;1983).

8 Since the 16th century Turin and the Piedmont were part of the Dukedom of Savoy. After the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession and as a consequence of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the Dukedom of Savoy became firstly the Kingdom of Sicily and some years later, in 1720, the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Modern western Europe. During this period, a patrilineal inheritance system spread; families started to privilege a transfer of goods and estates towards male heirs, while daughters, and more generally females, were excluded from the family inheritance. In order to balance the loss of these rights, dowry – in use since the time of Roman civilisation – was paid as an inheritance portion; when obtaining a dowry, daughters were obliged to renounce formally all other inheritance rights. This was also, at least in theory, the situation in the Kingdom of Sardinia during the 18th century. The Constitutional Charter (the *Regie Costituzioni*), enacted in 1729, stated that «in order to promote the pride and honour of families, every girl to whom was formally constituted, or paid, or promised, an appropriate dowry [‘una dote congrua’] be excluded from other inheritance rights by means of said dowry» (Duboin 1818-1869, pp. 218-219)⁹. Thus, the dowry was considered the girl’s inheritance right from the whole family estate. According to the law, an appropriate dowry was a sum adequate to the social rank of the family and the bride. Clearly, the priority of the law was to protect and to assure the unity and continuity of the great estates of aristocratic and wealthy families; nevertheless, in the 18th century this principle was a commonly accepted fact in all social groups, as notarial deeds testify. Despite this, as will be explained in the following chapters, endowment practices were the result of more complex dynamics and were also shaped by important factors – such as the identity, the economic and social background of the people involved, and timing and delay in payment – until now neglected by scholars.

2.2 *Who paid the dowry? And when?*

The dowry as the female inheritance portion of the family estate – father's estate or mother's estate or both – was not the only possibility. The endowment was established by a range of actors and methods, depending on the social and economic context of the bride and groom and on the material and nonmaterial resources of the families. This means that the dowry was not always a certainty: amassing a dowry or waiting for it could take a while and oblige girls to delay marriage. In order to understand the complex dynamics and the plurality of factors involved, we focus on a sample of 261 endowment deeds signed in Turin between 1760 and 1785 and fully transcribed.

⁹ «per la conservazione delle famiglie e il lustro dell’agnazione vogliamo che ogni femmina, alla quale sarà lasciata, promessa, o costituita una dote congrua, si da di lei ascendenti paterni, o materni, che trasversali, s’intenda, mediante il pagamento di detta dote». *Libro VI, titolo XIV: della successione degli agnati, ed esclusione delle femmine.*

Tab. 1 Individuals formally involved in endowment (1760-1780)		
	n.	%
father (alive) of the bride	76	29,1
bride	63	24,1
charity dowry	45	17,2
<i>relatives of the bride (tot 22,6%):</i>		
brother	23	8,8
brother + uncle (father's brother)	3	1,1
mother	8	3,1
brother + mother	7	2,7
uncle (father's brother or mother's brother)	4	1,5
aunt (father's sister or mother's sister)	3	1,1
other relatives or groups of relatives	11	4,2
made up by different actors (charity dowry + other sums)	6	2,3
groom	3	1,1
unknown	9	3,4
tot	261	100

As shown in table 1, when alive, the bride's father had a leading role in endowment (76 notarial deeds, equal to about 30 per cent). Also other members of the kinship network were important (they account for more than 22 per cent). Two reasons explain their presence. If the father and/or mother were alive at the time of the marriage, they could establish and pay a dowry directly. Otherwise, if they were deceased, they could prescribe by will to leave a sum that must be expressly paid by the universal heir (or heirs) to the daughter. This explains, for example, the presence of the bride's brothers and uncles (to which one can add the bride's widowed mother in her capacity as tutor). Indeed, in 18th century Turin, a patrilineal logic in inheritance systems was found in male and female wills of all social groups; and usually the universal heir was a male member of the family. But members of the family could take part in the endowment not only in compliance with the last will of a relative but also in their private capacity and by way of familial solidarity. Thanks to their bequests by will, or gifts when alive, uncles, aunts and grandparents could help a poor girl to acquire the indispensable prerequisite to marriage. Furthermore, since the dowry really was

indispensable for a girl, in Catholic countries “charity dowries” (*doti elemosinarie*) paid by charitable institutions or individuals were also very widespread (17 per cent of the whole sample)¹⁰, while a dowry paid by the groom was quite exceptional, though not impossible (1.2 per cent). Finally, the dowry could be established by the girl herself; depending on the situation, the capital came from her inheritance rights on her parents' estate or from her work and earnings. In the sample here analysed, for example, 11 girls out of 63 explicitly claimed that their dowry was the result “of their labour”. I shall return to this important point in a following chapter, when the relationship between the dowry system and the labour market will be discussed. Here it is important to emphasise that the data shows the plurality of actors involved in endowment; thus the endowment does not appear as such a linear and direct transition from parents to daughter but a wider “family or community affair”. As a result, very often the dowry was a composite of different sums. According to the endowment act of Francesca Alloi, for example, set up in 1775, the dowry is composed of 230 *lire* – coming from her father's and mother's inheritances and from an uncle's bequest – plus another 720 *lire* – saved up while working as a *femme de chambre* at the house of Earl Osello di Nichelino¹¹. At the same time, in 1762, Teresa Vittonetto's dowry amounts to 400 *lire*, 200 coming from the father's will and 200 from her work as *faseuse* (bonnet-maker)¹².

But a second aspect of the dowry prevents us from easily claiming that the dowry system was an economic incentive for girls to get married young: the timing, terms and conditions of payment. These factors have seldom been taken into account by scholars, but according to my research they are really crucial points in order to grasp endowment dynamics¹³. In 18th century Turin, the wedding ceremony, the formal establishment of the dowry by notarial deed, and the payment of the sum, hardly ever took place at the same time. In the sample under analysis, 131 dowry acts – equal to 50 per cent of the whole sample (261) – were signed after the celebration of the marriage. For about a third of them (38 out of 131) the wedding took place at least one year earlier, and in some cases even 8, 9, or more than 10 years earlier. Furthermore, things were no easier as regards payment, as shown in table 2.

10 On the topic see: (D'Amelia 1990) and (Groppi 1994). Of course charity dowries, too, were often just a component of the overall dowry and combined with sums offered by members of the family, patrons and even by neighbours.

But in Turin very often the charity dowry deed was dressed up by the notary of the institution that paid the dowry; thus other sums were not declared by the bride at that moment.

11 AST, Sez. Riun., *Insinuazione di Torino*, a. 1775, l. 5, ff. 1336r-1338r.

12 AST, Sez. Riun., *Insinuazione di Torino*, a. 1762, l. 4, ff. 749r-750v.

13 For important remarks on the topic see: (Scardozi 1998).

Tab. 2 Terms and conditions of payment of the dowries		
		%
payment deferred until the future	28	10,7
full payment at the moment of the signing of the dowry act	137	52,5
portion of payment in the past + portion of payment at the endowment act	10	3,8
full payment already made in the past	29	11,1
portion of payment at the moment of the endowment act + portion promised in the future	30	11,5
unknown	27	10,3
total	261	100,0

More than 52 per cent of couples (137 cases) received the dowry at the time of the signing of the act, before the notary. This percentage decreases if we do not take into account the charity dowries (which were always paid at the moment the notarial deed was signed) and the dowries consisting of the girl's savings (which was of course immediately available). At the opposite end, another 10 per cent of couples signed the dowry act but did not receive the money at all; rather, they got an official promise of payment or a private credit deed while the cash was delayed until some future time. On the other hand, 11 per cent of couples had already obtained the whole sum prior to the wedding ceremony, and in this case, the notarial deed was just to formalize something which had already happened. Finally, for another 14 per cent of the couples, payment was delayed and made in several steps; 11.5 per cent of them got a portion of the dowry at the signing of the deed but were obliged to wait for the remaining sum; only 3 per cent had already obtained the first portion in the past and the second portion at the moment of the notarial deed.

Two reasons for these delays can be shown. First of all, in some cases, this was a precautionary measure, intended to protect female property against bad administration or economic wastefulness on the part of the husband. For this reason, for example, the father of Francesca Maritano, a silk dyer, declared that the dowry “will be paid only when the couple have a stable and secure occupation”¹⁴. Until that moment the 3,315 lire would be held by the bride's father. Indeed, the person charged with paying the dowry was also considered legally responsible for it and if his evaluation of the husband's capacity or honesty was wrong, he risked having to pay a second dowry. On the other hand, for many families endowment was an economic strain and in a situation of

¹⁴ AST, Sez. Riun., *Insinuazione di Torino*, l. 4, a. 1760, ff. 1065r-v.

penury it was difficult to put together quickly a sum as large as a dowry. When the payment was delayed, it was often after the death of the father and/or the mother (or whatever other relatives were involved). In these cases, the dowry was in the charge of the sole heir(s); but the problem is that, in many situations, payment was not immediately assured, even by the heir(s). Indeed, as *post-mortem* inventories reveal, the family inheritance could be heavily burdened with debts and the only heir left in financial straits.

In conclusion, this evidence shows that we should avoid considering the dowry as an estate immediately available upon marriage. Waiting times could be long. The data shows that for a not inconsiderable proportion of couples, the formal endowment did not imply a prompt payment of the dowry, but dealt with different formal and informal actions over long lapses of time and it could concern several members of the family and even different generations. As a consequence, the dowry frequently remained an unpaid credit of the bride to her husband and her family. Moreover, when delays passed from one generation to another the heir (or the heirs), were not always ready to pay the cash.

3. The “*alienazioni dotali*”

According to previous studies, the amount of dowry a family could provide was revealing about its social position and its ambitions for social mobility (Herlihy 1976; Klapish-Zuber 1990; Molho 1994; Bellavitis 2001). Thus, a very large dowry was considered indispensable in order to assure good marriage opportunities and to build up alliances with the most wealthy and influential families in society. On the contrary, an inadequate dowry obliged the family and the bride to find a groom in a lower social group. For the same reason, a groom from a family involved in the process of impoverishment or loss of social rank was obliged to settle for a girl from a lower social group and to accept a more modest dowry. In spite of the importance of these results, which emphasise the relationship between the dowry and the social and economic position of the family, research has neglected to pay attention to its economic role or to its practical role in married life (with the exception of: Owen Hughes 1975; Fazio 1992; Lanaro, & Varanini 2009). This point will be discussed in the following chapter. Indeed, even though the dowry was an inalienable estate by law, in 18th century Turin couples could remove this constraint by a juridical procedure and a civil trial known as *alienazione dotale*. For this reason, it is possible to argue that the dowry was not a fixed property intended to be conserved and transmitted over the generations and to be used only to

assure the survival of the widow but, on the contrary, that it was a genuine and concrete resource for the household economy, to be spent or invested.

Since Roman times, the dowry had been inalienable female property, even if, as declared in the Emperor Justinian's civil code, it was intended for the economic sustenance of the family (“ad sustinenda onera matrimonii”). However, its inalienability was little by little called into question during the Middle Ages. In many areas of Italy, the impact of Lombard law promoted the diffusion of a *dos aestimata*, that is a dowry paid in cash and by goods other than lands or other real estate. This transformation opened the way for the cash dowry and, of course, for the possibility of its alienation (Bellomo 1961). During the 18th century, in the Kingdom of Sardinia, the couple had the right to sell the dowry – or a part of it – or to obtain its payment rapidly in cash. According to the *Regie Costituzioni*, this was permitted in a situation of economic difficulties, for the advantage of the members of the family, to free someone imprisoned for debts, in order to support a familial economic activity, such as a craft *atelier* or a shop or, as a general rule, in order to assure the sustenance of the family (“il sostentamento della famiglia”) (Duboin 1818-1869, pp. 398-411)¹⁵. Alienation of the dowry was possible through a civil procedure; couples had to address the civil courts of the city, for example the *Senato di Piemonte* – the supreme court of the state where the judges were Senators of the Kingdom – or the *Giudicatura*, the most popular civil court, active in all the cities of the Kingdom. To open a civil procedure of *alienazione dotale*, couples sent the King a plea; they outlined the terms and conditions of the endowment, the motivations for the request and the economic situation of the family. Once the royal patent had been obtained, couples went to trial and, before the judge, they had to present witnesses and proofs. Finally, if the judgement was positive, they obtained the dowry in cash from the creditor or they sold the goods and/or the estate. At the end of the procedure new notarial deeds were set up. Then the trial documents and the deeds were conserved in the archives of the notaries employed at the courts. In this research I set up a sample of 188 trials held in Turin, at the *Giudicatura*, between 1765 and 1780, a period during which this kind of juridical procedure was widespread and well known. For example, the notary-chief of the *Giudicatura*, Gio' Batta Franco, registered more than 34 *alienazioni* on average over these years, with peaks of 46-48. In order to grasp how the dowry was employed in daily life and how this could contribute to economic development, the following points will be discussed: 1) the

15 Lib. VI, Tit. XXIII, *Dell'alienazione de' beni de' minori, delle femmine ed altre persone e corpi privilegiati*.

reason why the dowry was sold and used; 2) the social and professional positions of couples who required alienation.

3.1 *A flexible household resource: economic use of the dowry and family life-cycle*

According to previous research, alienation of the dowry was an expression of the husband's marital authority and his control over his wife's property. The dowry was often sold by the husband in order to pay his creditors, that is, for his personal interest and not for the advantage and the well-being of the whole family. The husband exploited his wife's capital in order to remedy the results of bad management, bankruptcy or business difficulties. Thus, alienation of the dowry represented the greatest danger to female property (Fazio 1996; Scardozzi 1998, p. 101).

In spite of the historiographical relevance of this approach, my research shows the crucial role played by alienation of the dowry in assuring the survival – and even the social and economic mobility – of Turin families during the 18th century. Let us consider, for example, the reasons that compelled couples to sell this property. According to the law, in the notarial deed set up after the judge's decree, the couple was obliged to pay off its debts; acts are rich in detail and the name of the creditors, the reasons for the debts and the amounts were recorded. If there were no creditors, the couple kept the entire dowry. In the sample considered here, one third of the couples involved in alienation – 57 alienation procedures out of a total of 188 – obtained the money but did not use it at all. On the other hand, the remaining couples (131) employed the dowry money immediately, as shown in table 3.

Tab 3. Debts paid off by the couples immediately after dowry alienation decree (131 cases out of 188), 1760-1780		
		%
purchase of a craft shop/inn/retail shop; purchase of goods and items for a craft shop/inn/retail shop*	55	42,0
house rents in arrears	46	35,1
money loans from individuals	40	30,5
purchase of foodstuffs	21	16,0
money loans from Jewish pawnshops ("banchi feneratizi")	20	15,3
purchase of furniture, clothes	12	9,2
medicines	8	6,1
surgeon	3	2,3

apprenticeship	2	1,5
money loans from Catholic pawnshops "Monti di Pietà"	2	1,5
wetnurse	2	1,5
payment of local fees	2	1,5
creditors of the husband	1	0,8
* in 4 cases, goods and items were expressly bought in order to supply the wife's retail shop or craft activity		

The main goal of alienation was to make a direct contribution to the economic establishment and development of the household. In 55 cases out of 133 (equal to 42 per cent), couples used the dowry to take over or open a shop/inn or to pay suppliers for goods or items for their commercial activity. We can consider, for example, the case of Domenico Riccio and his wife Benedetta Novo. In March 1780 they bought up an inn (« un negozio di osteria ») priced at 810 *lire* and 6 *soldi* from Giuseppe Simonda and Giovanni Toso. The couple paid 30 *lire* immediately, and two months later asked for the alienation of Benedetta's dowry. Thanks to this, they obtained 750 *lire* and paid off the inn¹⁶. The same arises from the case of Michele Vigada and his wife Francesca. In April 1770, Michele took over a distillery and a shop selling homemade candies and preserves, priced at 6,000 *lire*. Michele paid 4,500 *lire* immediately, and two months later he added another 2,000 *lire*, the amount of his wife's alienated dowry¹⁷. In both situations, the short delay between the purchase of the inn/shop and the procedure of alienation highlights the strategic use of the dowry.

Although access to the labour market was the most important reason for selling the dowry, there were of course other pressing causes, more directly connected with the survival of the family. More than 37 per cent of the households (62 in all) needed to pay back money to private creditors or to redeem clothes, linens and jewels from the city's pawnshops (the Jewish *banchi feneratizi* and the Catholic *Monti di Pietà*). Charges and daily expenses for survival were also reasons for selling the dowry; more than 35 per cent of couples had to pay house rent arrears, while more than 25 per cent were obliged to buy foodstuffs, clothes and furniture on credit. A minority used the dowry to pay a surgeon, or for some medicines or for a wet nurse or for an apprenticeship for their children, while in one case only was the money explicitly used to liquidate the husband's debts. Clearly, in

16 AST, Sez. Riun., *Notai di Torino, I versamento*, vol. 2777, ff. 349r-359v.

17 AST, Sez. Riun., *Notai di Torino, I versamento*, vol. 2754.1, ff. 449r-461v.

some situations, debts and funds for craft or commercial activities could overlap and the dowry was used for both. But what about couples without creditors to reimburse immediately after the alienation? We cannot exclude the possibility that they had debts and creditors or invested the dowry somewhere even if this does not appear in the deeds¹⁸; secondly, as will be shown in the following chapter, the fact that some couples did not make any direct investment suggests that this procedure was also a legal expedient in order to obtain the payment of the dowry which was still in the hands of the family of the bride.

Evidence of the main role of the dowry – though not the only one – as a resource that could allow the economic establishment of the couple and its access to local economic activity is also provided by the couple's social and economic background as well as by the phase of the life-cycle in which the dowry was alienated. According to the sample, husbands were mostly concentrated in artisanal and commercial activities. They were shoemakers, tailors, distillers, wig-makers, tanners, goldsmiths; they were merchants, retailers, shopkeepers and innkeepers; they traded in textiles – especially in silks, clothes, bonnets, trimmings, leather goods and foodstuffs. Of course, other jobs and professions were concerned too. Their presence as domestics, waiters, cooks and porters was notable, as well as soldiers. Finally, there were lawyers, notaries, employees, penmen, and only one nobleman¹⁹. Concerning women's work, we can find all the typical female jobs and occupations of the Old Regime: they were seamstresses, waitresses and they ran little food retailers.

In their pleas, couples described in detail the terms of the endowment; thus, we can carefully establish a correlation between the beginning of married life and the moment at which the spouses decided to sell and actually use these assets. Considering only couples applying for the first time – 103 cases out of 188 – three different patterns can be discerned:

- more than a half of the couples (46 cases) had been married for between 5 and 15 years;
- 22 couples had been married for more than 15 years;
- 15 couples had been married for between 1 and 2 years²⁰.

18 In order to verify this hypothesis I researched some of these couples in the notarial registers of Turin, without result so far.

19 In the case of these professions and social groups, the objective of alienation was mainly to pay off debts. In addition, the limited presence of couples from the aristocracy or from the higher social groups of the city does not mean that they did not ask for dowry alienation; because of the considerable values involved, they were obliged to address their pleas to the *Senato* of Piedmont, where, indeed, we can find their civil trials. See for example : AST, Sez. Riun., *Senato di Piemonte, Alienazioni dotali*.

20 For 20 couples at the first alienation procedure, the data is not sufficient to describe their marriage and endowment patterns.

In the first case, it appears that 25 couples out of 46 have children and babies, and one wife declares that she is pregnant; in addition, more than 70% of them have debts. Here alienation of the dowry was clearly set up in order to allow families to bear up in a difficult phase of their life-cycle. Thus, when the household resources were not sufficient to assure the survival of all the members of the family, the dowry was a strategic choice. Secondly, 22 couples asked for alienation in another crucial phase of the life-cycle, that is more than 15 years after the beginning of their married life. This pattern concerns older or ageing couples; in this case alienation aims to assure the survival of the couple no longer able to work. On the contrary, if we turn our attention towards recently married couples (15), we discover that alienation was mostly connected with the need to take over or buy a shop or an inn or to provide a retail or craft shop with supplies. In this case, the dowry was a long term investment intended to assure the future – and prosperity – of the new household. The already cited Michele Vigada and his wife Francesca, for example, stayed all their life in the distillery and candy shop, for more than 20 years. In the craft tax roll of 1792, Michele, by that time master, has a journeyman in his workshop, and in 1802, aged 71, he still works and has four children²¹. In conclusion, the analysis shows that alienation of the dowry was prompted by different family strategies; the decision to ask for alienation and to go to trial was determined by the phase of the household life-cycle and by economic circumstances and demographic events. Moreover, since the dowry was directly employed to improve the family's access to the labour market or to its well-being, it played a crucial role in economic development and growth. Thus, the dowry was really a flexible resource and not only capital intended to be maintained and transmitted across generations.

3.2 Alienating the dowry in order to obtain it: a strategic mechanism for the family

Some important details suggest also another use of alienation: it could be used by the couple as a strategic way to simply obtain payment of the dowry in cash, and thus to freely manage it, even if there were no pressing debtors or imminent investments, as 57 couples of the 188 did. Indeed, as previously explained, dowry payments were very often delayed; in this sense, alienation can be interpreted as a legal and efficacious way to obtain in cash a dowry that risked being always promised but never paid. This comes out in the expressions and words used by the spouses in the plea. Gio' Battista Mocaglieri and Felice Rosalia, for example, explained that in the endowment

21 Sources : AST, I Sez., *Materie Economiche, Commercio, Cat. I, mazzo 2°*, I addizione, “Volume contente li nomi, cognomi e patria de' mastri e padroni e de' loro rispettivi lavoranti ed apprendizzi delli arti e mestieri”; population census of Turin 1802.

act, established in November 1751, the bride's brother, Francesco Antonio, promised the payment of a dowry of 728 lire within one year. Nevertheless, three years later the dowry had not yet been paid and thus, in 1754, the spouses asked to alienate half of it. In other words, by means of the *alienazione dotale* procedure, they obliged Felice Rosalia's brother to pay. Furthermore, 12 years later, they had not yet received the second half of the estate, and therefore they again claimed for it by means of alienation. Of course, Gio' Battista and Felice Rosalia also had other reasons to alienate; for example, they had several debts for foodstuffs and for their baby's wet-nurse, while Gio' Battista had a modest income as a blacksmith²². But, of course, different strategies could overlap and a situation of lack of cash and of debts could be transformed into an opportunity to settle other issues, such as the definitive payment of the dowry. The same arises from the case of Bernardo and Lucia Schira. They obtained permission to alienate their dowry, valued at 200 *lire*, in 1770, about 3 years after the notarial deed, signed by the bride's father and not yet paid²³. In this situation, the need to build up a brazier fund was also the occasion to obtain the dowry in cash from Lucia's father.

Archival sources do not reveal whether there was any opposition from the family of the bride or from the person charged with paying the dowry, who were clearly often hostile to an immediate payment just after the marriage, and temporized because the husband had to demonstrate that he had sufficient property or a secure job to offer as insurance for the dowry, or, alternatively, that he had the means to transform it into a safe investment. At the same time fathers, brothers, brothers-in-law, uncles and nephews were often called as witnesses to the condition of neediness and to the future good use of the estate, in other words, in favour of alienation. Thus, we can possibly speculate that for the people responsible for the dowry, this was a safe, official and legal way to discharge definitively their responsibilities for the administration of this female property before the courts. Finally, even though the law was not always explicit on this point and though the King or the judge only sometimes refers to it, the rights of the bride were not at all lost with the *alienazione* but were transferred to the family's new investment, guaranteed by the shop or the other venture acquired with the dowry money. In addition, in order to complete the procedure the formal agreement of the bride was explicitly requested and registered in the deeds by a formula. On the

22 AST, Sez. Riun., *Notai di Torino, I versamento*, vol. 2750, ff. 23r-33r.

23 AST, Sez. Riun., *Notai di Torino, I versamento*, vol. 2755, ff. 177r-183r.

other hand, the wife could not start the *alienazione* procedure without the agreement of her husband, since by law she was considered as a minor in legal matters²⁴.

4. *Women's work, dowry and professional patterns*

Let us now turn our attention to the second point under discussion: the relationship between the dowry system and the participation of women in the labour market. According to the research by Laslett and Hajnal, servanthood was a crucial feature of the EMP; it was a life-cycle event that took place in the early teenage years of boys and girls and finished with marriage, at a quite advanced age (Hajnal 1965; Laslett 1965, 1977; Laslett, & Wall 1972; Guttormsson 1988). According to Van Zanden and De Moor, life-cycle servanthood was “a particularly important source of female wage labour” (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, p. 11): during this period, girls saved and amassed money and goods with a view to future marriage, leading to a “market-oriented” behaviour in the young, closely connected with the economic development of north-western Europe (De Moor, & Van Zanden 2010, pp. 14-15). On the contrary, the low rate of life-cycle servanthood found in southern Europe led scholars to suggest that the dowry system did not stimulate women to enter into the labour market; the certainty of having a right to this estate was sufficient to persuade them that their future condition and well-being were already decided. For the young girls of Renaissance Tuscany the expectation of a dowry – that was higher, the younger the girl (Botticini 1999) - coming from the family, did not encourage them to work or to do anything to accumulate resources for marriage. Similarly, married women were not attracted to the labour market because of the lack of a conjugal fund and in the case of future widowhood, their economic resources were already more or less fixed by the dowry.

As has already been shown, in 18th century Turin long delays in payment, or the hesitancy or financial difficulties of families obliged the girl to “earn” her dowry or to wait for it for a while and this of course not only did not encourage early marriages but was the impetus for a widespread participation by women in the local labour market. In the following chapters, we will concentrate firstly on the work of young girls and we will then investigate the role of married women. Research findings about Italian servanthood are much debated questions because of the complexity and variability of local situations from north to south of the peninsula, and also from city to countryside.

²⁴ We cannot evaluate the percentage of cases in which the alienation was granted or not because notarial archives only store successful pleas. Nevertheless, we know that it was rejected if the wife appeared without her husband, as we can read in the pleas of couples asking twice or three times.

Hajnal and Laslett's data concerned the countryside but rural servanthood was less important in Italy where the predominant small landed estate did not require servant labour²⁵. On the contrary, research reveals *a specific* Italian (and maybe European) *urban pattern* – a point that has not been considered sufficiently in the application of the northern/southern European model: since the 16th century servants and domestics were concentrated in cities where they worked for the noble families and socio-economic elites. They were mainly unmarried women and men, aged over 30 years old, with a long experience of loyalty and service (Arru 1990, 1992; Sarti 2005, pp. 420-421); long co-residence with the master discouraged marriages (or compelled its postponement for a while). In addition, as shown by other research, in specific contexts – such as in Renaissance Tuscany or 17th and 18th century southern Italy - female servanthood was the object of social condemnation since it endangered the girl's honour (Klapish-Zuber 1986, 1992; Chabot 1990; Da Molin 1990, p. 521). In conclusion, for all these reasons domestic service in Italy was for both men and women an all-life condition and not a transitory one destined to be abandoned at marriage.

Data concerning 18th century Turin also reflects this specific urban servanthood pattern. Since the end of the 16th century, Turin had been the capital of the Dukedom of Savoy and later of the Kingdom of Sardinia. The royal court, the aristocracy, the officials and the wealthy merchant families were established there; thus, the demand for servants, domestics, waiters and waitresses, *femmes de chambre* and governesses remained high throughout the century. According to the population census, carried out in 1802²⁶, servants and domestics of different levels and ranks made up about 9 per cent of the total number of inhabitants (rising to 10.2 if we consider only the active population over 10 years old). This percentage probably underestimates the real importance of the phenomenon; indeed, the population census was carried out after the invasion of the Napoleonic army and the annexation of the Kingdom of Sardinia to France, at the end of a period of war. These dramatic events compelled people to leave the city, and moreover local elites, with whom domestic service was closely connected, were threatened by the arrival of French soldiers and the establishment of a new political regime. Instead, according to another source in the middle decades

25 With some exceptions such as in the sharecropping system of the Toscana (*mezzadria*) (Viazzo 2003, p. 116). On the other hand, recent research demonstrates that Laslett's statements about the diffusion of life-cycle servanthood in north-western Europe should be seriously called into question and considered in conjunction with other factors (Mayhew 1991). For a comparison of the rate of servanthood in rural north-western and southern Europe see: (Reher 2004, pp. 48-49). Data reported by Reher is not concerned specifically with urban servanthood, with the exception of four suburban parishes of Pisa.

26 The population census of Turin was transcribed by a team of students from the Department of Economic History at the University of Turin, coordinated by Prof. Maria Carla Lamberti. I thank Prof. Lamberti for allowing me to use and search the complete database.

of the 18th century servants of both sexes were between 10 and 11 per cent of the population (Castiglioni 1862). Incidentally, these percentages are closer to those registered in other cities: in some 18th century Roman parishes, for example, servants were 10 per cent of the inhabitants (Arru 1997, p. 110), in four suburban parishes of Pisa between 1656 and 1740 they accounted for 9.5 per cent (Reher 2004, p. 49), and in Florence in 1810 for 14 per cent (Gozzini 1989, p. 163). Data are similar in a wider European context: in 1695 servants were 8.10 per cent of the population of Aix-en-Provence and 10.33 per cent of that of Toulouse while in 1784 they accounted for 13.27 per cent of Dijon dwellers (Gutton 1981, p. 73).

Women were more numerous than men: of the 5,154 servants registered in the census, about 60 per cent (equal to 3,081) were women. These covered a wide range of age groups: those between 15 and 30 accounted for 35 per cent, while more than 54 per cent was concentrated in the 31 to 60 year cohort²⁷; in addition, 63.7 per cent were unmarried²⁸ and more than 80 per cent were co-resident servants, living in the same house as the master²⁹. This means that, as in other Italian cities, female service was a life-long condition, as witness the remarkable presence of unmarried women over 30 years old (table no. 4). Since the average age of women at marriage at the beginning of the 19th century was 28.7³⁰, those aged above that were probably on their way to permanent celibacy and destined to be servants all their lives.

Tab. 4. Age of unmarried female servants		
		%
up to 10	9	0,5
11 to 20	218	13,3
21 to 30	485	29,6
31 to 40	408	24,9
41 to 50	216	13,2
51 to 60	125	7,6
over 60	79	4,8
total	1638	100

27 This is a feature of the urban Italian model, such as is also observed in other research. In Reggio Emilia, for example, in 1708 female servants aged over 30 accounted for 56 per cent of servants; in Rome, in the parish of San Damaso, in 1765 they made up 48 per cent. (Arru 1992, p. 276).

28 Percentages are calculated on the whole population of female servants registered in the 1802 census – excluding those of unknown age and unknown marital status.

29 Equal to 2,490 female servants out of a total of 3,081.

30 According to the marriage acts of the Napoleonic age (1803-1814).

Nevertheless, are these features sufficient to conclude that in Turin girls did not work for their dowry? According to what has been explained in previous chapters, it is clear that long delay in payment and uncertainty concerning the moment at which couples would actually obtain the dowry were sufficient reasons to encourage young girls of the middle and lower classes to enter the labour market. In 18th century Turin life-cycle servanthood was not totally absent but rather a phenomenon that should be understood in the light of the events which affected the working life of women. Firstly, we should take into account the powerful attraction exercised by a capital city on the labour force from the countryside and the mountains for whom domestic service was one of the most attractive niches. Immigrant female servants were far more numerous than their Torinese counterparts: more than 75 per cent as against about 24 per cent³¹. We cannot exclude the possibility that for many of them their arrival in Turin coincided with the beginning of life-cycle servanthood. After a certain period, of course, many of them went back to their communities and got married there. For those who settled in Turin, on the other hand, the goal of getting married was not always attained, for two reasons. Firstly, too old to easily find a husband and too unskilled to find another job, they were obliged to stay in servanthood for their whole lives. Another possibility was that servants found good working conditions and the possibility of improving their rank and income in the home of their master and that this encouraged them to forgo marriage. In other words, it is quite probable that many servants started their career as a temporary job – and maybe with the idea of saving for a dowry - but that unfavourable or negative circumstances did not lead to marriage. On the other hand, when the servant got married, she declared the nature of her work without shame in their endowment act. Thus, for example, Francesca Varetta states that 60 *lire* of her dowry of 250 *lire* came from the salary she earned as a servant in the *Opera del Deposito delle Convertite* (a hospital for female Catholic novices)³²; while Maria Margherita Mussa explains that all her dowry (225 *lire*) is the result of her work as a servant in Turin where she has lived without the help of her father³³. These dynamics were strongly reinforced in the 19th century, when in numerous Italian cities the presence of women in domestic service increased and the image of the young girl arriving in the city to save for a dowry and find a husband became really common place

31 Source: 1802 population census. See also: (Zucca Micheletto 2008, pp. 169-172).

32 AST, Sez. Riun., *Insinuazione di Torino*, a. 1753, l. 11, ff. 705r-v.

33 AST, Sez. Riun., *Insinuazione di Torino*, a. 1763, l. 12, ff. 393r-394r.

– although there were of course numerous examples of failure (Arru 1992; Pelaja 1988; Sarti 1997, 2005, pp. 427-428).

Secondly, we should maybe take into account the possibility of looking for other working patterns in the lives of unmarried girls, since *Ancien Régime* Turin had a strong artisanal and manufacturing tradition. The Kingdom was one of the most important producers and exporters of raw silk – called *organzino* – while silk production was directly sponsored by government policy (Chicco 1995, 2002). In addition, since the royal court, the religious hierarchy and the wealthy families were all established in Turin, there was a great demand for luxury textile goods destined to decorate bodies, houses and churches. Women were numerous in artisanal activities and, as shown in the following table (tab. 5), the majority of unmarried girls up to 30 years old were employed in domestic service as well as in artisanal activities (each group accounting for more than 40 per cent). In the latter group seamstresses (242 of 762 artisans), silk weavers and other silk workers (138) and bonnet-makers (97) were included.

Tab. 5 Labour force rate of unmarried girls (<= 30 years old) in the sectors of the economy (1802)		
	n.	%
agriculture, farming	18	1,0
artisanal activities	762	41,9
trade, retail	78	4,3
domestic service	779	42,8
clerical works, liberal professions	37	2,0
housekeepers	79	4,3
generic day labourers	56	3,1
religious	9	0,5
total	1818	100,0

Thus, the possibility that young, unmarried girls worked and accumulated resources before their marriage in these artisanal sectors is not negligible or unfounded, because all these artisanal activities required skills that could be learned from a young age.

4. 1. Married women: a hidden labour force

The second point that should be discussed is the link between the separate property regimes, the absence of a conjugal fund, and the presence of married women on the labour market. In the following pages I suggest that in dowry-system countries, such as 18th century Turin, married women's participation was crucial and that dowry was not a sufficient reason to keep women out of the labour market.

As is well known from the literature on the topic, working married women, in southern as well as in northern Europe, are usually “invisible” in the documentation, and this makes it difficult to detect and evaluate their real presence in the labour market³⁴. Indeed, in pre-industrial societies, cultural and educational models were based on the idea that work was not central to the female life-cycle and that it should be limited to specific life-phases, especially before marriage. Work was regarded as less important than domestic activities and housekeeping; taking care of the children and of the house was considered the “natural” duty. In addition, civil officers charged with establishing population censuses – such as the one set up in Turin in 1802 – were not interested in married women's work because they considered wives to be under the protection and care of their husbands. Instead, they paid special attention to spinsters' and widows' work, to how these women could “honestly” earn their living. Thus, archival sources rarely registered the work of married women and for a long time most scholars neglected it³⁵. The results of this are evident. Out of a total of 8,088 couples recorded in the census, more than 81 per cent of wives did not declare a job as against 35 per cent of unmarried women aged 25 or over and 33 per cent of widows. Despite the difficulty in finding European evidence, quite high rates of wives not declaring a job have also been pointed out in Antwerp. According to the population census of 1796, 61.4 per cent of married women did not state a job compared to 8 per cent of unmarried women and 23.3 per cent of widows³⁶.

In order to find evidence about married women's work, I studied people recorded in the registers of the most important charitable institution in Turin during the 18th century, the *Ospedale di Carità* (Cavallo 1990, 1995). This gave relief to a great range of people in situations of economic difficulty: paupers, orphans, abandoned children, lonely and isolated people, couples and families

34 On the topic see: (Zemon Davis 1986); (Groppi 1996); (Cavallo 2007); (Bellavitis, & Piccone Stella 2008); (Erickson 2008).

35 Nevertheless, in recent years, research focusing on married women's work has begun. See: (Groppi 1996); (Hunt 1996); (Simonton 2005); (Van Den Heuvel, & Van Nederveen Meerkerk 2008); (Erickson 2008). About Turin see: (Cavallo 2007); (Zucca Micheletto 2008).

36 My expansion from Table 51, p.118 of the Appendices to the PhD. of Anne Winter (Winter 2006-2007). I thank A. Winter for letting me consult her dissertation.

with numerous small children, widows and widowers. Poor or elderly people who could not work, ill and lonely people and orphans were housed in the institution itself; while families received external relief (rations of bread), and their babies were cared for by wet nurses paid by the hospital. As shown in the following table, in the second half of the century, 38 per cent of applicants were couples (5,690); while widows accounted for 20 per cent (2,979) and married women “without husband/abandoned”, 7 per cent (1,030).

Tab. 6. People asking for relief at the <i>Ospedale di Carità</i> (1766-1792)		
		%
couples	5690	38,1
widows	2979	20,0
widowers	1179	7,9
married women without husband	1030	6,9
married men without wife	89	0,6
unmarried women	1031	6,9
unmarried men	890	6,0
abandoned children, foundlings and orphans	1185	7,9
without indication	858	5,7
total	14931	100

It is important to underline that most of the families concerned were not beggars or vagrants; they were in a temporary situation of imbalance between resources and consumption due to having many small children who were not yet able to participate to the household economy, or because of a long illness or the unemployment of the partners. The goal was to help families to get through the critical situation; aid was temporary and was, moreover, aimed at encouraging individuals to get back to work or to find another job. The need to demonstrate a real contribution by all the members of the family towards the survival and well-being of the family compelled married women to state their job more frequently than in the population census. Out of a total of 5,690 couples, more than 77 per cent of wives declared an employment, exactly the opposite of what emerges from the population census. As such, married women appear to be a *hidden labour force*, rather than being

absent from the labour market. This rate of female labour force – specifically married women - occurs also in other Italian cities, for example in four parishes of 18th century Bologna, where, according to a research of Maura Palazzi, 63 per cent of wives declared a job (Palazzi 1990, p. 364, tab. 2). Palazzi's source is a partial census of Bologna inhabitants in 1796 and like the Turin *Ospedale di Carità*, the aim of the census was to organize charity relief for families. As a consequence, men's and women's work were carefully registered in order to evaluate their contribution to the domestic economy.

In addition, there is another difficulty involved in correctly evaluating the importance of women's work: its informality and, in some respects, its ambiguity. Indeed, as has been explained in several studies³⁷, women's work has always been a mix of domestic and non-domestic work, formal and informal, paid and unpaid work. There is a great deal of other evidence strongly underpinning the important role of married women's work in the household economy, not only in Turin and not only in the 18th century. Renata Ago for example, studying patrimonial trials in 17th century Rome, showed the importance of married women's contribution to the domestic economy compared to that of the husband (Ago 1996) while Anna Bellavitis reminds us that in 17th century Venice, artisans and merchants were careful in their wills to thank the wife for her work in the family shop or business and to leave bequests and gifts as a mark of gratitude (Bellavitis 2008).

A second factor suggests that the role and impact of married women's work in Old Regime households should not be underestimated. As explained by scholars, uncertainty was a structural feature of the labour market of pre-industrial societies. Work was irregular and unstable; rhythms of work changed throughout year; production and consumption followed off-seasons and growing seasons (Grenier 1996; Zucca Micheletto 2009). The Turin economy was mostly based on silk and on luxury production and for this reason changes in fashion and tastes could appreciably lower consumption, as could as the introduction and diffusion of new exotic materials (e.g. cotton) (Chicco 1995). Changes in economic circumstances and crises could modify employment opportunities and promote a high level of labour force mobility. Thus, labour was not stable and periods of unemployment or mobility were frequent experiences for men and women. In this situation the earnings of both partners were necessary and strategically significant in assuring the survival of the family (Zucca Micheletto 2008, 2011).

37 Evidence of this is provided for example by the research of Natalie Zemon Davis (Zemon Davis 1986), Angela Groppi (Groppi 1996), Sandra Cavallo (Cavallo 2007) and in a special issue of the revue *Genesis. Rivista italiana delle Storie. Flessibili/precarie* (Bellavitis, & Piccone Stella 2008).

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyse and discuss the relationship between the dowry system, marriage and family patterns and the labour market. As explained throughout the chapters, in 18th century Turin the endowment system did not encourage girls into early marriage; on the contrary, the comparatively high age of spouses characterizes this urban marriage pattern, particularly in specific economic and social groups, such as people involved in domestic service and immigrants. By law, dowry was often the girl's portion of the family heritage but, in practice, as testified by conditions and timing of endowments as well as by the *alienazioni dotali*, its availability was the result of the spouses' negotiation skills. As a consequence, since it could be manipulated by different actors, the dowry did not affect once and for all the women's destiny and the household formation. At the same time, of course, hesitations and delays in payment were serious reasons to encourage women – young unmarried girls as well as wives – to enter into and stay in the labour market. Firstly, work was crucial in order to save up a dowry and a *trousseau* which were essential to assure access to the marriage market. In this respect, the dowry was not only a girl's right; it was also a constraint due to which women could be strongly encouraged – and even compelled - to work. Secondly, in 18th century Turin several factors suggest that the paternalistic nature of the marriage relationship did not discourage married women from working. Although difficult to detect, this specific female labour force was crucial in ensuring the survival and the well-being of the household economy throughout several critical phases of the family life-cycle or during instability in the husband's employment.

From a historiographical and methodological point of view, all this discussion allows us to analyse a wider question, namely the reliability of a northern/southern European pattern across the centuries and its geographical variability. The analysis of the relationship between marriage patterns, property regimes and the labour market presented here demonstrates the non-applicability and the non-pertinence of this model for 18th century Turin. On the contrary, it suggests the importance of a situational analysis in order to highlight the most appropriate and the most significant factors capable of explaining the socio-economic dynamics and phenomena in a specific context without in the process overlooking the complexity and the variety of European societies.

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