

# Dishonest and Unruly Daughters

## The Combined Efforts of Families and Courts in Handling Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Bruges

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**1. Introduction.** This article addresses the attempts of families to control the sexual behaviour of their daughters and wives in eighteenth century Bruges by calling in the help of the aldermen, the administrators of justice in the town<sup>1</sup>. It focuses specifically on those women who earned some kind of income with their sexual activities, even if this was temporary or once-only. Today we would call these women sex workers or prostitutes. In the Bruges judicial records of the eighteenth century the verb 'prostitueren' (to prostitute) was already used, but the noun 'prostituee' (prostitute) was rare. More common were 'hoer' (whore), 'deugniet' or 'canaille' (shrew), 'meisje van plezier' (lady of pleasure) and 'ondeugende' or 'oneerlijke dochter' (naughty or dishonest daughter). Most of these terms did not necessarily refer to a commercial occupation, but were pejorative appellations for all women who had sex outside of legal matrimony<sup>2</sup>.

The expression 'dishonest daughter' needs some clarification. This term seems to indicate that prostitutes harmed their father and mother. Yet, it is not clear if it had this connotation in the eighteenth century. The expression referred to a sexually active single woman<sup>3</sup>. In this paper, the term 'dishonest daughter' is not only used because it was often used in the early modern period, but also because of its association. I will argue that the behaviour of prostitutes in eighteenth century Bruges was indeed judged as unfair towards their parents.

The relationship between the prostitutes and their family was disrupted by the behaviour of the prostitute, but also by the decision of the family to take legal action against this behaviour. It is the aim of this article to describe why families undertook such steps, how this was carried out and what the consequences were for the prostitutes as well as for themselves. In addition to this, this paper also examines the role of the juridical authorities. The main focus, however, is on the families and on how this party interacted with the aldermen. The geographical area of research is Bruges, a provincial city in the West of Flanders, in the second half of the eighteenth century (1750-1790).

Like in many other Western European cities, prostitution was a criminal offence in Bruges in the early modern period. In general, prostitution was criminalised during the Reformation and Counter Reformation, a policy which was only altered in the nineteenth century when governments all over Europe chose for a legalisation of prostitution<sup>4</sup>. Because of the criminalisation, court records are a key source in the study of early modern prostitution. The most important studies about eighteenth century prostitution (partly) based on this source are analyses of the situation in

metropolises: Erica Marie Benabou (1987) has studied Paris, Lotte Van de Pol (1996, 2003) discussed Amsterdam and Tony Henderson (1999) examined London<sup>5</sup>. The relationship between the parental and the governmental authority is not elaborately discussed in all of these works. Yet, Benabou mentioned the role of parents several times and Van de Pol (1996, 209-214) devoted a paragraph to this topic. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly (1996) have also studied this phenomenon in their work on compulsory admission. Studying the role of families in the prosecution of prostitution, therefore, is not entirely new. Yet, this article offers a more elaborate study of the subject. Moreover, it combines quantitative data with richly documented examples.

After a brief discussion of the context and data, the main body of this article consists of five paragraphs. The first section is about the connection between the family and the prostitutes. It questions why families considered the behaviour of their daughters dishonest. In the second section, the type of relationship between the prostitutes and their petitioners is analysed. After that, attention is paid to the connection between the families and the court: when did families submit a case to court and what were their intentions? The general reaction of the municipal government to prostitution is seen in the fourth paragraph. The reasons for the prosecution of dishonesty are covered as well as the main factors in establishing the punishment. Finally, the expectations of the court about the position of the families are discussed.

**2. The Bruges context.** Bruges forms a good case for the study of this subject because of two reasons: the limited size of the city and the available sources. With a population of 31 300 in 1796, Bruges was only the fourth largest city of the Southern Netherlands (Denolf 1981,10; De Vries 1984, 271). The small size of the city influenced the characteristics of the sector and the social reality around it. The profile of the prostitutes in Bruges differed from those in the well-studied metropolises because the town was less characterised by a constant influx of immigrants. In large cities, the portion of newcomers among prostitutes generally amounted 60 to 80% (Benabou 1987, 269; De Schaepdrijver 1984, 30; Henderson 1999, 18; Storey 2008, 125-127; Van de Pol 1996, 104). In Bruges, the immigrants represented only 55% of the prostitutes<sup>6</sup>. This observation is important because a high proportion of native women means that many prostitutes lived close to their families and were subject to their mechanisms of control. It also means that families could easily be affected by the behaviour of their deviant relatives. This is especially true in a relatively small community like Bruges.

The source material for this study comes from the judicial archive of the Bruges bench of aldermen. As the single most important institution in early modern Bruges, the bench combined the legislative, executive and judicial authority over the city. Although the entire criminal procedure was an interaction between the bench of aldermen and the bailiff, who was the local representative of the king, the juridical steps discussed in this paper belonged to the responsibilities of the aldermen. Therefore, the bailiff is not further mentioned in this text<sup>7</sup>. In the remainder

of this paper, the bench of aldermen will be referred to as ‘the aldermen’, ‘the bench’ or simply as ‘the court’ because this paper only discusses the juridical responsibilities of the bench<sup>8</sup>.

The Bruges court records are an extremely rich source. To begin with, they are voluminous compared to the archives of other Flemish cities such as Ghent<sup>9</sup>. Both the interrogations of suspects and the complaints and testimonies are well preserved and in general, they are very detailed. The first type of document in particular is vital for the study of the prostitution sector and the background of the interrogated women. This fact is all the more interesting because of the unique procedure of the Bruges aldermen when requests for confinement by a third party were submitted. In the early modern Southern Netherlands, young women and other people who offended their family or others could be locked up without retort. This was not the case in Bruges. In this city, such requests were followed by an interrogation of the suspect. The written versions of these interrogations are saved among the criminal records (Lis, Soly 1996, 11). These interrogations and the accompanying documents in each court case, such as the testimonies of family members and the requests by parents or others, form the basis of the analysis discussed in this paper. The judicial archive of the bench of aldermen was analysed for the period between 1750 and 1790. Six series of judicial records from the Bruges bench of aldermen covering the second half of the eighteenth century were analysed, namely the *informatieboeken*, *tychten*, *criminele vervolgen*, *criminele informatiën*, *verluydboeken* and *registers van instructies, verklaringen van getuigen*.

Despite the small size of Bruges, the court records demonstrate that the prostitution sector was a lively trade. Between 1750 and 1790 nearly 500 trials against prostitutes, brothel keepers and other organisers were initiated by the Bruges aldermen. Moreover, the sector had its place right at the centre. Although prostitutes could be found all over the city, they were present in larger numbers in some streets just beside the Grand Place. Since Bruges was characterised by an economic revival in the second half of the eighteenth century, the scale is not entirely surprising. Due to the mercantile measures of the Austrian government and its location on the canal between Ghent and Ostend, Bruges attracted shippers and traders again (Vanden Berghe 1972, 16-22). And because of its significance as a garrison town, soldiers were also well represented. An estimate of 100 prostitutes, full-time as well as part-time, is realistic. This would mean that one in 170 women was earning an income as a prostitute, a number comparable to estimates Guy Dupont (1996, 86-87) calculated for Bruges in the Burgundian period<sup>10</sup>. According to Dupont, Bruges counted about 112 prostitutes on a population of 35 000. Nevertheless, he recognises large differences throughout the period as he mentions 180 prostitutes in the beginning of the fifteenth century and only 70 at the end of it.

**3. Data.** Between 1750 and 1790, 366 cases against prostitutes were initiated by the Bruges aldermen. This number corresponds to 284 prostitutes as some women were prosecuted two, three or four times. Of these 284 prostitutes, 221 showed up only once and 63 were recidivists.

Tab. 1. *Causes for the arrest of prostitutes in Bruges (1750-1790)*

	N.	%
<i>Related causes</i>	83	23
Arrested in a brothel	56	15
Arrested in soldiers company	14	4
Arrested during streetwalking	6	2
Public debauchery	6	2
Arrested while getting drinks for the brothel	1	0
<i>Arrested by military</i>	22	6
<i>Criminal causes</i>	54	15
Ignored banishment	13	4
Public drunkenness	9	2
Theft	8	2
Begging	5	1
Illegitimate child / abandoning child	5	1
Vagrancy	3	1
Nuisance	3	1
Recidivism	2	1
Adultery	2	1
Agression and vandalism	1	0
Extortion	1	0
Alleged murder	1	0
Suicide attempt	1	0
<i>Criminal others</i>	32	9
Chain	20	5
Fight (in the inn)	8	2
Theft by other girl	1	0
Criminal information sb else	3	1
<i>Complaints</i>	115	31
Family	72	20
Neighbours	27	7
Snitched by others in the sector	4	1
Priest	3	1
Others	9	2
<i>Unknown</i>	60	16
<i>Total</i>	366	100

Source: RABR 1-5, SAB 1-2.

As table 1 shows, the causes for the arrest of these prostitutes were varied. Some were arrested because of their presence in a brothel (15%), others were because of additional criminal reasons (15%), such as neglected banishment (4%) or public drunkenness (2%). Most prostitutes, however, got arrested because of complaints (31%). One third of all prostitutes in custody might not have been charged if a third party had not requested this. Charges were most often pressed by relatives or by neighbours who complained about nuisance.

The number of petitioners fluctuated strongly. Neighbours mostly complained in group or collected signatures to accompany their request. Parents more often acted on one's own. Yet, they sometimes named other people who could confirm their statements. Such people were interrogated as witnesses. Their role was of vital importance since the testimony of two irreproachable witnesses was sufficient as justification for all juridical actions, including a conviction (Monballyu 2006, 350).

There are indications that the family was related to the arrest in 72 cases (20%). This article is based on these trials. Again, some of the prosecutions concern recidivists. For seven prostitutes, the family intervened twice and for one this happened three times. This means that the number of unique women brought to court because of their family amounts 63.

It is no surprise that the majority of these women was born in Bruges. Of the 63 women, 43 were from Bruges, ten were from the Liberty of Bruges or some other place in Flanders or the Southern Netherlands and for ten others the place of birth is not known<sup>11</sup>. This means that 38% of the Bruges born prostitutes was prosecuted because of their family where this was only 7% for the immigrant prostitutes. Of the prostitutes with unknown origin, 63% was arrested because of family, a proportion which suggests that a distinct part of this group was born in Bruges as well<sup>12</sup>. It is therefore right to say that four out of ten of the local prostitutes came in contact with the aldermen because of complaints of relatives.

The given numbers are minimum figures. Many women were arrested for reasons that are not entirely clear on the basis of their interrogation or the other available sources in their judicial file. It is not unlikely that a part of the group from which the cause of arrest could not be determined was in fact related to family as well. This is equally possible for the arrests in brothel houses as the visits of the authorities to dishonest bars were often the consequence of complaints. Marie Coene, for example, was arrested in such a house and when she was asked why she was arrested, she answered that she suspected her parents (RABR-2, 647, 2, 14-16).

The reason why there is no certainty about the proportion of family involvement is because not all requests are preserved. Unlike the interrogations of suspects, they were not standardly written down. Therefore it is not possible to recompose all processes completely. Sometimes it is clear that it concerned a requested committal on the basis of the inquiry of the suspect. Like Marie Coene, many more prostitutes were asked why they had been apprehended. The most typical answer of prostitutes was that they did not know. Yet, some replied that their parents or their family were responsible for it. In other cases, it is the context which reveals the circumstances of the judicial action. When Marianne Passet was captured, she was about to leave to Ostend after a quarrel with her mother (RABR-2, 657, 2, 1-3). Marie Van Daele also turns out to have run away from home after an argument. Marie testified that her mother had threatened to report her to the guards (RABR-2, 657, 9, 11-12). It is more than likely that the flight of Marianne and Marie was regarded at the last straw by their mothers. Instead of losing the last bit of control over their unruly daughters, these mothers fulfilled their threats and summoned their daughters to appear in court.

**4. Dishonesty and the family.** Sexual reputation was crucial for women in the early modern period. While sex outside of marriage was acceptable for men in specific circumstances, it was not for women. As Ruth Mazo Karras (1996, 134) wrote concerning the medieval period: ‘an unmarried man could visit a whore, but an unmarried woman who had sex became a whore’. Although such statements have been nuanced for what was judged as normal premarital contact (Vandenbroeke 1979), there is little doubt that a loose life was considered immoral. The vocabulary concerning sexual vice is as plain as day. As stated before, women who had sex outside of legal matrimony were called ‘dishonest’.

The importance of this label can be exemplified by the relief system, as dishonest poor did not have access to it. Both formal and informal relief was reserved for the ‘good poor’ (Mendelson, Crawford 1998, 292; Capp 2004, 38)<sup>13</sup>. In fact, Lotte Van de Pol (1996, 67-71) has called the distinction between ‘honest’ and ‘dishonest’ people one of the most important dividing lines in early modern society<sup>14</sup>. Sexual reputation was not the only factor classifying people in either of the two groups. Nevertheless, for women it was the most important one. As Laura Gowing (1998, 128-133) has stated: the honour of women was not only constructed by her sexual reputation, yet ‘sexual chastity was a measure of female virtue that could outdo every other way of defining a woman’.

Obviously, prostitutes were the most important victims of this sexual standard. Prostitution was judged much worse than other types of fornication (Capp 2004, 192). At the same time, however, prostitutes were seen as necessary because their existence protected honourable women from desirous men. Hence, prostitutes held an ambiguous place in the creation of the double standard. On the one hand, they were the protectors of honest women and on the other hand, they were seen as the ultimate evil. In a sense, it was their simple existence that allowed to distinguish between honourable and dishonourable women. They were a ‘necessary evil’.

By the loss of their virtue, prostitutes not only affected their own position in society. They also threatened the reputation of those related to them, especially their family (Gowing 1998, 106). According to Cissie Fairchilds (2007, 46), a girl who lost her virginity could ‘ruin’ the honour of the family. She argued that ‘a family’s reputation depended on the ability of the men of the house to guard the sexual virtue of their womenfolk’.

The Bruges court records indeed illustrate the impact prostitutes could have on their family. In 1786, for example, the aldermen of Bruges imprisoned a young Dutch orphan girl named Joanne Miel. When they requested her uncle who lived in Antwerp to contribute to the costs of her detention, he wrote to the aldermen that he was too poor to pay the sum they requested and added to this statement that he could not pick her up because he had to ‘save the honour and reputation of his family’ (RABR-2, 655, 6, 29-30).

The letter in which Pieter Cortenbos requested the imprisonment of his daughter Marianne is particularly interesting because he did not only worry about the reaction of neighbours and acquaintances, it was the response of his new wife that he feared most. Pieter, who lived in Enghien in Hainout, wrote to the aldermen that

he had found out the whereabouts of his daughter fourteen years after she had run away. He had also been informed about the professional activities of Marianne and asked the aldermen to imprison her at his expense. He literally asked the aldermen to be discrete as he had remarried some years before and he wanted to avoid that his new family would be informed about the activities of his daughter (SAB-1, 6, 29/02/1768).

Lis and Soly (1996, 79) have stated that it was not the event of prostitution that disturbed parents most, it was the public character of the trade and the lack of discretion. Indeed, what seems to upset the families most in the Bruges complaints and testimonies is the opinion of others. Joannes Cloppenburgh, for example, mentioned that the whole neighbourhood knew of his daughters' behaviour and, when Anna Marie Lecluse testified against her niece, she said that 'her reputation was going around' (RABR-3, 708, 184-186).

The prostitutes themselves were well aware of the consequences of their behaviour. Some moved away specifically because of this reason. The sisters Macqué, for example, started as prostitutes by walking the streets in Bruges, but when an Ostend brothel madam proposed them to come to her house in Ostend, they agreed. Rosa, the oldest of the three sisters, told the aldermen that she had fled Bruges because she did not want 'to harm her reputation in Bruges any further' (RABR-2, 655, 8, 6-7). One can easily imagine that the fear for prosecution also influenced her decision as it was the brother of the girls who eventually found them in Ostend and brought them to court in Bruges. Yet, the fact that Rosa mentions her reputation as a reason to leave the city, does illustrate that such motivations for migration existed.

These examples show that the gossips were interpreted as harmful. Dishonest daughters had a disruptive effect on their family. It is for this reason that it is right to state that the behaviour of prostitutes was unfair towards their family. It is not surprising, therefore, that families were eager to protect the honour of their daughters. The court records of Francisca Verstraete reveal the anxieties of parents. Francisca was arrested after complaints of the priest and a group of eight neighbours. One of the neighbours expressed that 'they feared the decay of everybody who came in contact with her'. The priest explained that the neighbours feared Francisca would have a bad influence on their own daughters (RABR-2, 658, 1, 11-12).

**5. The petitioners.** The relatives petitioning against prostitutes were those who were most affected by the dishonest behaviour. When it concerned married women, this was the husband. For others, it were the parents. This can be explained by the idea that women were naturally inclined for profligacy. Contemporaries believed that women needed the control of a father or a husband. Single women were seen as 'a threat to the patriarchal social order' (Karras 1999, 240; Froide 2005, 20). Because husbands and parents were responsible for the sexual virtue of their female relatives, they were also the ones to blame when things went wrong. They lost their honour specifically because they had failed to control their women (Fairchild 2007, 46).

Tab. 2. *The type of family ties of the petitioners of prostitutes (1750-1790)*

	Certain		Suspected		Total	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Both parents	8	14	7	47	15	21
Father	11	19	1	7	12	17
Mother	20	35	4	27	24	33
Stepfather	1	2	1	7	2	3
Stepmother	1	2			1	1
Grandmother	1	2	2	13	3	4
Uncle	1	2			1	1
Guardian	1	2			1	1
Brother	3	5			3	4
Sister	4	7			4	6
Husband	6	11			6	8
<i>Total</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: RABR 1-5, SAB 1-2.

The husbands represented 8% of the petitioners (Tab. 2). This number is considerable, given that only 15% of the total group of prostitutes was married and about half of the married prostitutes were grass widows, which means that they lived without their husband. One of the married prostitutes was Catharina Germonprez. Her husband Pieter Bolle complained about her bad behaviour and neighbours confirmed that Catharina had a drinking problem, slept outside the house and 'went with other men'. The last straw that pushed Pieter to act charges against his wife was an incident in a tavern. Catharina had paid a bill of five pennies and when Pieter asked her from where she got this money, she answered that she 'had earned it with her cunt'. Apparently, Catharina had slept with bargees on their ship the night before (RABR-3, 709, 12 and 15-16; RABR-1, 643, 4). Catharina's public confession was a flagrant assault of her husbands' authority. Such an event could not be left without response.

Beside the women who were prosecuted after a complaint of their husband, only three of the prostitutes in this study were married. All of them were grass widows. One husband was a sailor who had gone to the East Indies (RABR-1, 644, 202-203), one was confined in the madhouse (RABR-2, 652, 3, 20-28) and the third had left his wife (RABR-2, 646, 5, 11-15). According to her parents he had done so because of her behaviour (RABR-4, 712, 4, 23-24). Married women who were neither grass widows nor prosecuted because of their husband, were married to a man working in the prostitution sector himself or declared that their husband did not know of their undertaking.

Although the type of family relation between the prostitutes and their suitors could not always be determined with certainty, it is plausible that above 70% were the biological parents of the prostitutes (Tab. 2)<sup>15</sup>. Most of the petitioners who were no husbands or biological parents, can be classified as substitutes for the parents.



They fulfilled some parental duties because one or more parents had deceased or because the parents could not take care of their children. This is clearly the case in the examples of the stepparents, the grandparents and the guardian.

Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos (1994, 53-54) has stated that while stepparents are often seen as careless and unloving, there were also stepparents who 'were more cooperative and did their best to bring up their spouse's children properly'. The Bruges cases in which stepparents petitioned give proof of this. Although the court records in general contain many stories that demonstrate difficulties with stepparents, in the cases initiated by family no differences were found between the approach of biological parents and their substitutes. They all seem to have handled out of a concern for their daughters. Most remarkable is the trial against Marie Possonge, a girl who had lost both her father and mother. Presumably, she had lost her father at a young age and was raised by her mother and stepfather. Marie's examination shows that her stepfather accepted her to live in his house, even after she had lived in a brothel house (SAB-2, 13/8/1773).

Parental duties can also be attributed to all cases in which a brother was involved and to half of the trials initiated by sisters. The three requests by a brother refer to only one family: the already mentioned Macqué sisters. Apparently, Jan had taken over the parental duties of his father after he had deceased. Having three prostitute sisters must have weighed heavily on the honour of the family. Given the fact that Jan had taken over the printer's business of his father, it was all the more important to keep up his reputation. As a craftsman his livelihood depended on the number of clients he attracted (RABR-2, 655, 8, 1-7).

The uncle seems to have been an exception in the list of petitioners. There is no indication that the parents of Marie De Boeck had died. In fact, the father might have asked his brother to help him because of the high social status this man occupied as collector of the provincial taxes (SAB-2, 20/05/1775). Such a practice can be compared to the aid of priests in other cases, a method discussed later in this article. Yet, it remains an interpretation. There is no certainty about the course of events. The death of parents was not always reported in the court records.

Once daughters got married, parents lost control over them. The example of Josepha Fonteijne illustrates this. When she was arrested for the first time, her mother Rosa Logghe turned out to have been the petitioner. Josepha was sent to the Bruges spinning house for unspecified time. The imprisonment cannot have lasted long, however, as Josepha got married only two months after this event. Two years later, Josepha shows up again as a defendant in the court records. By now, she was a well known brothel madam as she was mentioned in numerous other trials. Josepha's mother did not show up again in the trials against Josepha. Yet, she did in a case against one of her other daughters, a young girl named Rosa. It was Isabelle, still another sister, who had pressed charges against Rosa, but in this record it is mentioned that the mother had requested the aldermen numerous times to admonish Rosa who spent her time in Josepha's house and other dishonest places. Rosa does not at all seem to have been expelled by her family. Her sister Isabelle, with whom the mother lived as well, had taken her in the house after she

had made her promise to live honest. At that time Rosa was already a known prostitute who had worked in brothels in both Bruges and Ghent. The confinement of Rosa was only requested when she had tried to seduce Isabelle's daughter. It appears that the family put a great effort in mending Rosa, just like the mother had done for Josepha a few years before. Although it is possible that the family feared their efforts would not be rewarded for Josepha, it is more likely that Josepha being a married woman was no longer their responsibility. Josepha's husband was in charge now and because he was dishonest as well, Josepha's mother could not undertake action anymore (SAB-1, 23/06/1766; RABR-1, 644, 197-198; SAB-1, 9a, 25/07/1773).

Apart from the preponderance of parents or their substitutes, the analysis of the petitioners shows that mothers were far more important than fathers in the initiation of legal proceedings. The biological mothers represented 33% of all petitions compared to 17% for the biological fathers. This finding might point to an increased vulnerability for prostitution in families without fathers as the mothers who pressed charges were more often widowed than the fathers who did<sup>16</sup>. The difference, however, is not large and the data on the death of parents are incomplete. The cause for the distinction probably is the role of mothers in the education of their daughters. Van de Pol (1996, 211) found a similar pattern for Amsterdam and explained it by the gendered parental tasks. At first sight, this fact seems to contradict the role of the fathers as patriarchal heads of the family described earlier. Fathers were 'the centre of authority' (Bailey 2007, 219). Yet, although they 'in theory bore the ultimate responsibility for the moral guidance of their children', it were the mothers who daily managed the education of the children. They were 'primarily responsible for childrearing, especially (for) the raising of daughters' (Fairchild 2007, 36).

**6. The family and the court.** Despite the disruptiveness of having a prostitute in the family, instituting legal proceedings against her was still another matter. Parents had often travelled a long way before they complained to the bench. When the aldermen interrogated Rosa Huwel, they confronted her with the fact that she had already received many warnings of her parents and of the priest. Rosa admitted this immediately (RABR-2, 646, 8, 1-4). The petition for the confinement of the eighteen year old Anna Pieternelle Metersijs illustrates what could have preceded the juridical demand of parents. Anna Pieternelle's mother asked the aldermen to imprison her daughter by word of mouth, but she had brought a letter of the priest to strengthen her request. In this letter J.B. Schellekens, priest of the parish of Our Lady, described the behaviour of the daughter and the actions the parents already had undertaken. He testified of the 'lewd and dissolute' life that Anna was leading, staying away from home for several days and nights to spend her time in 'dishonest places' and in the lodgings of soldiers. The priest explained, furthermore, that Anna had already given birth to an illegitimate child and, yet, she had not given up her 'improper way of living'. Pieternelle and her husband Guillaume had exhorted their daughter 'very often'. They had also expressed their grievances to him on numer-

ous occasions and he had admonished Anna several times as well. A few months before, he even had arranged a reconciliation between the parents and their daughter. Anna had asked forgiveness on her knees, he said. She had prayed and had promised to improve. Nevertheless, she disappeared again a few days before he wrote the letter. According to her parents, Anna had gone to the soldiers' barracks again (SAB-1, 8/10/1756).

Such stories are abundant. Families had generally admonished their dishonest daughters on numerous occasions and often had asked the help of the local priest or others with a certain moral authority. They only turned to court when their daughters proved unruly. Besides, not all attempts of families to get their dishonest daughters back on the right and narrow track were peaceable. The interrogation of Joanne Plissinck made clear that Joanne had been beaten by her brother 'because of her whoring'. This brother had also taken her on his ship to Leuven in an attempt 'to take her away from her acquaintances' (RABR-2, 659, 13, 11-14). Whatever methods families had used, legal proceedings might well have been the very last attempt of families to handle their unruly daughters. One father declared that 'he felt compelled to apply to the aldermen' because his 'paternal admonitions were ineffective' (RABR-3, 709, 53). Parents also stressed how difficult it was for them to take this step. The parents of the twenty year old Anna Van Vijve applied 'with their heart in pain and sorrow', yet 'after many fruitless admonitions, they felt forced to call in the help of the bench' (RABR-4, 717, 4, 6).

Legal proceedings were not only delayed, they often occurred after an immediate cause. Pieter Bolle, for instance, already knew about his wife's behaviour, but only pressed charges when his wife insulted him in public. As stated earlier: the public character of prostitution was the worst aspect of it. As long as certain incidents could be kept private, families preferred that this would remain so. Going to court was a public event and was, therefore, not the best solution for all problems. The tension between public and private of course does not explain all prosecutions by families. The example of Marianne Passet, which was also mentioned earlier, shows that a permanent escape of parental authority could be a reason as well. Marianne's mother went to court at the moment Marianne wanted to leave the city. It is most likely that Marianne's mother handled out of concern for her.

When calling in the help of the aldermen was postponed until no other type of chastisement was left, there were still several options within the juridical solution. Families could either ask the court to imprison their dishonest daughters or could ask for a warning. Examples of the first are easy to find. The parents of the already mentioned Marianne Cortenbos and Anna Pieternelle Metersijs, for example, had requested an imprisonment in the local spinning house. Similar is the demand of Judocus Outrive who urged the aldermen to place his daughter in 'a place where she would not have the freedom to go out' (SAB-1, 7/1/1766)<sup>17</sup>.

Finding examples of parents who requested an admonition is more difficult. Nevertheless, this does not mean that such events did not take place. A distinct part of the local prostitutes was sent home with a warning, often in the presence of their parents. As described earlier, not all requests of families were preserved. It is, more-

over, likely that requests for imprisonment were more often written down than requests for warnings. The practice of warning in general might have been more employed than the sources show. In the records of Marie Garset, it is mentioned that 'she had been admonished in the chamber two months before' (RABR-1, 644, 195). Yet, the archives of the aldermen do not contain an account of this event. Neither is it possible to retrieve sources documenting the pleas for admonitions by Rosa Fonteijne's mother.

When a warning by the aldermen did not have the intended effect, there was of course the threat of imprisonment. Marie Vogelaere was admonished in the court in the presence of her parents. She was warned by the aldermen with the announcement that she would be imprisoned if she did not 'mend her ways' (RABR-1, 642, 197). The cases of the prostitutes who were prosecuted several times show that such things indeed happened.

Imprisonment was the very last step in the methods of control families could apply for. When it did not help, one could either give up or request the court for another imprisonment. Both reactions occurred, a fact which can be derived from the cases of recidivists. Some women were prosecuted the first time because their family had asked for committal, but were in later cases imprisoned for other reasons. Other women were arrested several times because of their family. Anna Van Vijve, for example, was locked up for five years because her parents had requested her imprisonment. Two years after her release, her mother declared that 'she lived as before again' and stated that she was the scandal of the entire family. She requested the bench 'to provide for this'. The court, however, chose not to and released Anna with a warning (RABR-5, 725, 6, 1-7).

Although Anna was not imprisoned, it seems likely that the repeated juridical efforts of her parents, did not improve their relationship. Yet, they kept in touch. Anna got married one year after her second arrest and when Anna's mother died a few years later, it was her husband who reported her death at the registry (SAB-3). This example shows that juridical procedures did not always lead to alienation between family members. Yet, it is the only available example on the long-term effect of this issue of social regulation, and it might not be representative since Anna had conformed to the wishes of her parents. She got married, gave birth to four legitimate children and remained in Bruges until she died at the age of 73. Things might have been different for women who did not give up the life their parents reacted against.

**7. Dishonesty and the court.** Would the prostitutes who are researched here have been prosecuted if their family had not requested this? Some undoubtedly would. Others, however, would probably have escaped prosecution since not all prostitutes were brought to court in eighteenth century Bruges. If they did not cause problems, it is likely that they would not have been arrested. Table 1 shows that the majority of prostitutes was arrested for reasons that are not directly related to their occupation. More than half were taken into custody after complaints or because they or people from their surrounding had committed other criminal facts. Prostitution

was tolerated in eighteenth century Bruges because it was seen as a necessary evil. Although sex work has been formally prohibited at many places during history, a complete eradication has hardly ever been the objective (Van de Pol 2000). In 1751, a Brussels magistrate stated that the Brussels authorities tried to prevent 'the evil' from extending. Because they could not eradicate it completely, they mainly punished scandal (Deroisy 1965, 399). The approach of the Bruges government was similar. The defensive stand was given up when there was scandal or nuisance or occasionally when the sector grew too large. Some years were characterised by an exceptionally high prosecution rate, which makes it likely that the authorities did sporadically make a clean sweep.

The social norms of the Bruges authorities were broader than controlling the size of the sector and the order in the city. When the aldermen interrogated the brothel madam Catharine Cuypers, she defended her undertaking by stating that 'she had never kept daughters of the city, but only strangers from Ghent and elsewhere' (SAB-1, 5, 05/09/1768)<sup>18</sup>. Apparently, the origin of the prostitutes made a difference for the aldermen. Prostitution was tolerated in Bruges, but not (or less) with local women. Strangers could fulfil the needs of soldiers and other men living in Bruges or visiting the city. Native women instead should be saved from the sin of prostitution. This phenomenon is not unique to Bruges. The official city brothels of early modern Seville, for example, were staffed by immigrants. As Mary Elisabeth Perry stated, 'it is ironic that only those born outside of the city were permitted to become its deviant insiders, upholding its moral order by working in the public brothel' (Perry 1985, 145).

The difference in policy between local prostitutes and strangers is most obvious in the divergent punishment patterns of both groups (Tab. 3). In fact, the origin of the accused women was the most important factor in establishing the penalty of prostitutes. Banishment, the most typical early modern type of punishment, was the standard sentence for strangers. Since many prostitutes left the city through one gate and simply entered again through another, it was a very ineffective sort of repression. Yet, it must have been a cheap solution or at least a sort of warning, specifically meant for those prostitutes not originating from Bruges. In the second half of the eighteenth century, banishment was gradually losing its importance to prison sentences. Prostitutes, including the immigrated ones, were increasingly imprisoned, especially after the foundation of the provincial house of correction in Ghent in 1773.

Local prostitutes were either imprisoned or were sent home, with or without a warning. About one fourth of the prostitutes born in Bruges received an admonition of the aldermen. As mentioned earlier, this is an underestimation of the real number of warnings. In many of these instances, the parents of the girl were present during the reproaching ritual. Some women were also obliged to ask forgiveness to the priest. Almost 60% of the native prostitutes was imprisoned. The most common types of detention were the Bruges spinning house, which was the local penitentiary for women, and the house of correction in Ghent. The detentions of prostitutes in the spinning house had an average duration of four years, while those

Tab. 3. *The type of punishment of native Bruges prostitutes and strangers (1750-1790)*

	Natives		Strangers	
	N.	%	N.	%
<i>No/minor punishment</i>	37	24	22	10
Release	7	5	12	6
Warning	28	18	10	5
Warning and ask forgiveness to priest	2	1		
<i>Banishment</i>	3	2	111	52
Expelled from the city	2	1	76	36
Banned from the city	1	1	21	10
Banned from the county			5	2
Whipping and banishment			1	0
City prison and banishment			8	4
<i>Imprisonment</i>	90	59	41	19
City prison	6	4	5	2
City prison and warning/ forced move	4	3	3	1
Spinning house Bruges	56	37	17	8
Spinning house Bruges and whipping			1	0
House of correction Flandres	23	15	15	7
Convent	1	1		
<i>Others</i>			1	0
Forced move			1	0
<i>Unknown</i>	23	15	38	18
Extradition			4	2
Unknown	23	15	34	16
<i>Total</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: RABR 1-5, SAB 1-2.

in the house of correction lasted on average five years<sup>19</sup>. Convictions to the city prison were a fundamentally different type of punishment. With an average length of only seven days, these were imprisonments of short duration, which can be seen as a sort of warning<sup>20</sup>.

The most obvious reason for the authorities to imprison the local prostitutes and to ban the strangers are the requests by family members. As explained earlier, Bruges families applied to the aldermen more often than strangers did. This was the result of their proximity to the deviant person and also of the financial willingness of the aldermen. The costs for detention could easily run up and the aldermen were, in general, not willing to pay off for strangers. If the parents proposed to take care of the charges, like was the case in the described example of Marianne Cortenbos, the aldermen did not have any problem with locking up strangers in the spinning house (SAB-1, 6, 29/02/1768). For locals, they only passed of the costs if the family was affluent enough to take care of them. Nevertheless, the court made exceptions in both directions. It did not always follow the demands of parents as the case

against Anna Van Vijve has shown. And for young foreign girls like Joanne Miel, it wanted to do an effort as long as the family contributed partly. In general, the aldermen gave priority to the locals because of their fatherly responsibilities towards their citizens. Therefore, they also locked up locals who were not reported by family. If prostitution could be left to strangers, it was possible to save the local daughters from this necessary evil.

Does this mean that imprisonment was so much better than banishment? The idea of re-educating prostitutes, like in the religious institutions of penitence such as the famous English Magdalen hospital, certainly played a role (Nash 1984). Prison-workhouses such as the Bruges spinning house were supposed to impart discipline to the prisoners. It was hoped that imprisonment would 'correct' the prostitutes. In the records of Joanne Miel, for example, her detention is referred to as Joanne's 'cure' (RABR-2, 655, 6, 29-30). Yet, the spinning houses were infamous for their hard-hearted approach. According to Lis and Soly (1996, 179) 'no one was in any doubt about the unpleasantness of a stay in a house of correction'. In the second half of the eighteenth century, criticism on these institutions increased. Vilain XIII, a nobleman from Ghent, took a leading role in the shift towards more human penitentiaries and founded the provincial correction house of Flanders. The aim of this institution was to moralise the prisoners. Prostitutes were one of the main target groups of the project (Lis, Soly 1996, 184-188; Lenders 1990, 532). Although the official aim of the spinning and correction houses was to correct the prostitutes, it is not unlikely that some families were realistic on the prospects and mainly wanted to avoid further scandal. The aldermen might have preferred locking up the local prostitutes instead of banning them because the latter would just have meant that they got to work in another place. Pieter Spierenburg (1998, 355) has rightly called banishment 'an exchange of undesirable individuals'.

**8. Good parenthood.** It is clear by now that the court had an important role in the attempts of parents to control the behaviour of their dishonest daughters. Yet, the relationship between the families and the court was a reciprocal one. The government held the parents responsible for educating their daughters to honest women and for disciplining them when it went wrong. Although the relationship between delinquent children and their family was only institutionalised in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Levene 2006), the idea that parents were responsible for the behaviour of their children was not new in the modern era.

Despite the high number of compulsory admissions for disorderly conduct in this period, the court did not always execute the wishes of the families as the example of Anna Van Vijve made clear<sup>21</sup>. Anna was imprisoned after the first request by her parents, not after the second. The Bruges aldermen sometimes intervened, but in many cases they passed the responsibility for the girls on to their parents. They supported the parental authority, but did not replace it. Women who were released with a warning were left in the care of their family again. Marianne Passet, for example, was released with the obligation to go back to her parents (RABR-2, 657, 2, 1-3). To the parents of Marie Florentine Le Roi, a nineteen year old girl from

Calonne near Tournai, the Bruges aldermen wrote that they had to come to Bruges to pick up their daughter (RABR-2, 655, 9, 20-22).

When daughters went astray, parents were held accountable because they had failed as parents. The event of prostitution revealed that they had not raised their daughters to honest women. As mentioned earlier, it was exactly in this sense that families of prostitutes lost their reputation. The aldermen, therefore, verified if the parents had educated their daughters properly. In December 1751, the aldermen of Bruges performed an inquest on the behaviour of Isabelle Therese Van Halle and her mother Marie Minne. They interviewed several neighbours, but the stories they heard were diverse. When Isabelle Therese was interrogated herself, she was asked if it was her mother who had learned her to make contacts with men. She denied, saying that her mother had done the opposite (RABR-3, 706, 232 and 234-235; SAB-1, 1780-1789, 18/12/1751). After this, Marie was no longer prosecuted and the inquiry concentrated on the daughter. Nevertheless, the fact that she was suspect because her daughter was a prostitute is enlightening. Although prostitutes affected the honour of their entire household, the female household members were the largest victims since they were seen as accomplices (Gowing 1998, 106). In renaissance literature, the mothers of prostitutes were often portrayed as the perpetrators of their daughters. According to Tessa Storey (2008, 53/141-147), the image was based on reality. The evidence for Bruges does not support this, however. The reason for the accountability of the mother is once again her role in the education of her children (Van de Pol 1996, 211). It is the same reason as why mothers more often submitted a case to court.

In fact, if those held responsible for the honour of prostitutes, did not go to court, this raised questions. The cause for the inquest against Marie Minne can exactly be found in her silence. It were the neighbours who had complained about her daughters behaviour, while she as a mother should have been the one to interfere. The relationship between the family and the court is ambiguous. When parents appealed to the aldermen, they showed that they did not manage the control over their daughters. When they did not do this, however, they risked being accused of complicity or at least of tacit consent.

The responsibility of parents was more often interpreted in terms of 'parental neglect' than of 'active parental corruption'. Heather Shore (1999, 103), who studied juvenile crime in the early nineteenth century, argued this for young street delinquents, but it is applicable to the eighteenth century Bruges prostitutes as well. For this reason parents put great effort in proving 'good parenthood'. The example of Anna Pieternelle Metersijs described earlier shows this. The priest of Anna's parish emphasised what the parents previously had undertaken to discipline their debauched daughter. Their message to the aldermen was that they were not responsible for the moral downfall of their daughter. They had tried to help her, but unfortunately had failed. They did, however, not give up and asked assistance in order to mend Anna's ways in an appropriate place. A similar attempt to indemnification can be found in a letter in the record of Eugenia De Bleeckere. In this letter, written by a priest as well, it was stated that the mother of Eugenia was 'an honest com-



mensal and parishioner' and that 'she was tormented by the behaviour of her daughter' (RABR-3, 709, 53).

Marie Minne was fortunate because her daughter had told the aldermen that she did not agree with her professional activities. Some other prostitutes, however, tried to influence the aldermen in their advantage by insinuating that their parents did not teach them to live in an honest way. Indicating that their family did not care for them and 'did not look after them' like Anna Lointjes did, happened often (RABR-3, 647, 10, 1-6). For strangers in the city who could not be contradicted, such statements were practically standard. Other prostitutes went further in passing the responsibility of their debauchment to their parents. Marie De Swaerte told the aldermen that things went wrong when her stepfather opened an inn (RABR-3, 707, 82-83).

Marie Garset was particularly hard on her father. She denied being a prostitute, saying that she had a relationship only with one drum major. Bearing in mind the questions of the aldermen, this must have been a lie. Yet, it is possible that the man she was referring to was her first lover. She said that it was the 'fault of her father' that she had met this man. After all, he had given her the permission to go to the tavern *Het Cruyskapelleken* eighteen months before. Although this was not stated in this record, this tavern was known as a dishonest bar. Marie stated, furthermore, that she had left her parental household a month ago because her father was an alcoholic (RABR-1, 644, 192). In this case, it is not possible to determine what was the truth. Yet, it is clear that Marie was angry with her father, presumably for imprisoning her, and that she tried to damage his reputation. This example is a good example to end with. If Marie succeeded in discrediting her father, in revealing his dishonesty, she could influence her own position in the court. She would become a victim instead of a culprit. She would no longer be a 'dishonest daughter' because she did not have honest parents and so, she could not harm them in their honesty.

**9. Conclusion.** This article has discussed the efforts of the families of prostitutes to control the behaviour of their deviant relatives. It has been argued that 'dishonest daughters', an eighteenth century synonym for prostitutes, were indeed 'dishonest' towards their families. The very mere fact that the terminology about sexual reputation divided society into an honest and a dishonest world points to the importance of sexual vice for women. Having a prostitute in the family could damage the honour of the entire household for two reasons. It was a sign of mal education and it showed that the family was not able to control the behaviour of its wives, daughters or sisters. Therefore, it was important for families to intervene. Most affected were those who were kept responsible for the education and the conduct of the female household members: the husbands for married women and the parents for unmarried women. It were these parties who called in the help of the aldermen.

Although it is clear that the Bruges authorities were willing to help husbands and parents who had problems with unruly wives and daughters, the relationship between the court and the families was ambivalent. On the one hand, it was important for families to show that they did not agree with the dishonest behaviour by

going to the court. On the other hand, calling in the help of the aldermen affected the familial honour because it revealed once more the incapacity of the family to control the unwanted behaviour oneself. It was a public event. For these reasons, applying to the aldermen was usually postponed until no other type of chastisement was left.

Families enlisted their former attempts to control the deviant behaviour in great detail and often called in the help of persons with a certain moral authority such as priests to convince the court that they were not responsible. Because parents were expected to bring up their daughters to honest women and to discipline them when the girls became dishonest, parents put great effort in giving prove of good parenthood. They had to counterbalance the stigma of dishonesty which was affecting the household ever since the rumours about their dishonest daughter had started circulating.

What they stated was of course not only intended for the persuasion of the court, it revealed actual attempts of families to help their deviant daughters to return to the straight and narrow path. Requests of parents attested of a loving and caring attitude towards their daughters. Many dishonest daughters remained welcome in the house of their family or were only prosecuted when they escaped parental authority completely.

The aldermen were, in general, very willing to help honest parents to reform their daughter to a virtuous life or to prevent her from damaging her family any further. Restoring the reputation of honest families can be interpreted as a sort of social regulation at several levels in which the last resource was the court. Moreover, as the wardens of the city, the aldermen had some fatherly concerns and obligations towards their citizens. As a result, the detention house of the city was filled with the children of Bruges parents. The necessary evil of prostitution was preferably left to strangers.

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Isabelle Devos and Christa Matthys for their comments on this article.

This paper presents some preliminary findings of my doctoral research on the life-courses of eighteenth century prostitutes in Bruges. The aim of my Phd project is to clarify the agency of prostitutes in the making of their *own* histories by studying the reasons for, and consequences of, a life in prostitution.

<sup>2</sup> Distinguishing between women who earned an income with their sexual activities and women who did not, is not always easy. However, in most cases the context mentioned in the judicial records is sufficient enough to do this.

<sup>3</sup> Firstly, when the Bruges aldermen employed the term 'daughter', they usually referred to a single woman. This can be clarified by a transla-

tion to French. Like the word 'fille' in modern French, the word 'daughter' had two meanings: it could both stand for female child and for girl. Secondly, the social reality of the expression 'dishonest' was much broader than today. For women, it referred particularly to their sexual reputation. Having sex outside of legal matrimony was dishonest (see the paragraph 'Dishonesty and the family' later in this article).

<sup>4</sup> Prostitution was more often criminalised in Protestant areas. Yet, although prostitution as such was not always punishable in Catholic places, prostitutes could be prosecuted. In France, for example, prostitutes could be prosecuted because they violated public order, not because they performed their profession. Nevertheless, in Paris prosecution was hard and

stringent because the vice squad was well organised, whereas in London the opposite occurred (Lis, 1984, 559-565).

<sup>5</sup> In this very short overview of literature, only substantial social history approaches concerning prostitution in the eighteenth century are mentioned as it is impossible to give a complete overview of the available literature on prostitution. For analyses of the symbolic and discursive meanings of prostitution in the eighteenth century, see Sophie Carter (2004) concerning print images and Rosenthal concerning literature (2006). For a recent analysis of prostitution in Rome in the Counter-Reformation period, see Tessa Storey (2008).

<sup>6</sup> This number is calculated on a total of 284 prostitutes. Of these 284 prostitutes, 113 were born in Bruges (40%), 155 were born outside of Bruges (55%) and of 16 the place of birth is not known (5%).

<sup>7</sup> Persons accused of prostitution were arrested (on the initiative of the bailiff) and imprisoned in the city prison, after which they were interrogated by the aldermen. The interrogations of the aldermen consisted of questions prepared by the bailiff who functioned as clerk of the court or procureur. In general, the interrogation was shortly followed by the criminal proceeding formulated by the bailiff and by the determination of the punishment by the aldermen. The execution of the punishment finally was the responsibility of the bailiff (Monballyu 2006, 347-370).

<sup>8</sup> This is a simplified depiction which is used to avoid confusion. From 1765 onwards, the aldermen left the administering of justice to five juridically trained grand pensionaries. The aldermen continued, however, doing the interrogations themselves (Vanden Berghe 1972).

<sup>9</sup> In Bruges, between 1750 and 1790 an average of 9 prostitutes was prosecuted a year (RABR-1-5; SAB-1-2). In Ghent, the average was only 2 for the period between 1755 and 1764. The average of Ghent was calculated on the basis of two studies because the confinements on request in Ghent were not included in the criminal archives (Roets 1987, vol. 3, 1; Van Waeijenberge 1994, 124).

<sup>10</sup> The relative number of prostitutes is calculated on a population of 16.943 women. The female population of Bruges on its turn was calculated with a population of 31.300 and a sex ratio of 118 (Denolf 1981, 10; Wall 1983, 430).

<sup>11</sup> The Liberty of Bruges was one of the four most important castellanies (administrative districts) in the County of Flanders (next to the

cities Bruges, Ghent and Ypres). The Liberty enclosed the countryside surrounding Bruges and encompassed a large part of the present county of West-Flanders.

<sup>12</sup> Of the 113 native Bruges prostitutes, 43 were arrested because of their family. For the prostitutes born outside of Bruges, this was 10 of 155 and for the prostitutes with unknown origin this was 10 of 16.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on relief and the deserving and undeserving poor in general, see Hindle 2004, 99-104.

<sup>14</sup> According to other historians, however, the distinction was a vague one (Dabhoiwala 2000, 100).

<sup>15</sup> The reason for this uncertainty is because not all complaints were preserved. As described in the data overview, some of the causes for arrest could be diverted from the context.

<sup>16</sup> Eleven of the 24 mothers was widowed (46%) compared to four of twelve fathers (33%).

<sup>17</sup> Quote from the letter from the priest: «aldien sij ingevolge het versoeck van haeren vaeder judocus van houttrijve gestelt wierde op eene plaetse waer sij de liberteyt niet en soude hebben van buijten te gaen».

<sup>18</sup> Quote: «Seght dat sij noijdt gheene doghters van den stadt heeft gehouden ende dat het al vremde waeren van ghendt ende elders ende sonderlinghe uijt het huijs van godefroij op d'hijperstraat binnen het selve ghendt ende dat haeren man ofte sij comparante de doghters telckens naer de bargie gonghen afhaelen».

<sup>19</sup> All detentions had a minimum length of two year. The maximum length amounted six year in the spinning house and twelve year in the correction house.

<sup>20</sup> The length of custody between arrest and conviction might have played a role in pronouncing this type of punishment. In some cases, the defendant had already spent a week or more in prison before the conviction. In others, the arrest, interrogation and judgment followed shortly after each other.

<sup>21</sup> Confinement requests were common practice in the eighteenth century. This is one of the reasons why this is a crucial period in Foucault's *grand renfermement*. People could be imprisoned simply for disorderly conduct. Parents did not only react against the sexual escapades of their daughters, they also submitted requests for their sons. Girls even formed a minority among the reprimanded minors. In general, they were more obedient to their parents than boys were (Lis, Soly 1996, 75-76).

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## Summary

*Dishonest and Unruly Daughters. The Combined Efforts of Families and Courts in Handling Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Bruges*

One fifth of the Bruges prostitutes in the eighteenth century was prosecuted by the bench of aldermen because their family had requested this. Families called in the help of the court firstly because they were worried about their daughters, wives and sisters and secondly because the sexual reputation of their deviant relatives affected their own lives as well. Families lost their honour because sexual debauchery was a sign of mal education and because it revealed that the family was not able to control the behaviour of its womenfolk. Therefore, prostitutes were, as the eighteenth century synonym seems to indicate, 'dishonest' towards their parents. In general, families only went to court when their daughters proved unruly, which is when the families did not succeed in adjusting the dishonest behaviour themselves. When they did go to court, they put great effort in proving 'good parenthood' because they had to counterbalance the stigma of dishonesty already affecting them. The bench of aldermen was willing to help honest families with controlling their unruly daughters, partly because the city had a fatherly responsibility over its own citizens. Hence, the Bruges dishonest daughters were imprisoned in the spinning or correction house.

## Riassunto

*Figlie disoneste e disubbidienti. Gli sforzi congiunti di famiglie e corti nel contenimento della prostituzione a Bruges durante il XVIII secolo*

Nel XVIII secolo, un quinto delle prostitute di Bruges erano giudicate dal consiglio degli anziani perché le loro famiglie ne avevano fatto richiesta. Le famiglie chiedevano l'aiuto della corte in primo luogo perché erano preoccupate per le figlie, mogli e sorelle, e in secondo luogo perché la reputazione sessuale dei parenti devianti influenzava la vita degli altri membri della famiglia. Le famiglie perdevano il loro onore perché la sregolatezza sessuale era segno di cattiva educazione, e perché rivelava che la famiglia medesima non era in grado di controllare il comportamento delle donne. Pertanto, le prostitute erano, come il loro sinonimo ottocentesco sembra indicare, 'disoneste' nei confronti dei loro parenti. In generale, le famiglie si rivolgevano alla corte quando le figlie si dimostravano disubbidienti, vale a dire quando le famiglie non riuscivano a correggere direttamente il comportamento disonesto. Quando si appellavano alla corte, profondevano grandi sforzi nel dimostrare 'buona parentalità' poiché dovevano controbilanciare lo stigma di disonestà che le stava già affliggendo. Il consiglio degli anziani era disponibile ad aiutare le famiglie oneste a controllare le figlie disubbidienti, in parte perché la città aveva una responsabilità paterna nei confronti dei suoi cittadini. Pertanto, a Bruges le figlie disoneste venivano imprigionate in istituzioni correttive.

### *Keywords*

Prostitution; honour; parenthood; criminal justice; family.

### *Parole chiave*

Prostituzione; onore; parentalità; giustizia criminale; famiglia.