

BOOK REVIEW

Carmen Sarasúa (ed.), *Salarios que la ciudad paga al campo. Las nodrizas de las inclusas en los siglos XVIII y XIX***(Alacant: Publicaciones de la Universitat d'Alacant, 2021). Pages 512. 22€ hardback.**

Mauro Rota

University of Rome La Sapienza

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The book deals with women's wages in pre-industrial Spain. Motivated by the high wage economy hypothesis and the critiques raised regarding its methodology and overlooked comparisons, Carmen Sarasúa has edited an amazing collection of papers on the nurses' wages across Spain, discussing women's contribution to family income. Yet, this book is more than a collection of wages. Its goal is to contribute either to the studies of living standards, occupation, and women's work or to suggest a new methodological perspective to study wages in the pre-industrial period. It is also worth noting that each contribution takes the perspective of the urban-rural relationship, shedding light on the dynamics of wages in the countryside, which are seldom analysed in specialised literature.

The book is organised into thirteen chapters, each covering a different area of Spain and considering the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. In the Appendix, the reader will find an unexpected delight: the nominal wage series of nurses in all the places touched upon in the book.

This book is a valuable contribution to the literature on real wages to the extent that it covers an entire country geographically and temporally. Moreover, it traces the same occupation in space and time, making cross-section and overtime comparisons consistent. I see insights stemming from the book that catch the eye of economic historians. First, the wages hospitals paid to nurses were monthly and not daily, thus capturing annual income much better than daily wages. This might serve in future research to make a better test of the high-wage economy hypothesis in the same vein as Humphries and Weisdorf (2019) and Rota and Weisdorf (2021).¹ Second, but related to the first, the wage series is consistent with the regional inequality discussed by Roses et al. (2010).² Nurses' real wages were higher in the more progressive areas in the late nineteenth century, i.e., Catalonia and the Basque Country. One relevant exception is Andalusia, whose nurses' real wages are higher than in more progressive areas. This might contrast

with the peculiar pattern of Andalusia, which was a frontrunner in Spanish living standards until 1860 because of its cheap labour.

Another key issue in the book is the contribution of nurses to the household income. In several chapters, whenever possible, nurses' income is compared to male members of the family. The results are very central. The hypothesis of the male breadwinner is, clearly to say, downplayed if not defused. In the middle of the nineteenth century, in Navarre, a nurse's annual income was 37.6% of her husband's, thus contributing to more than 25% of the family income. In Catalonia, women's wages relative to male wages were 40% to 50%; it was around 35% in Castilla. In Salamanca, nurses wages contributed to 26% of the household income; it tolled 40% in Salamanca.

I have only one point of concern, and that is how real wages have been produced. I would have discussed the consumption basket used throughout the chapters to make readers confident that both the cross-section comparisons and the cross-occupational comparisons make sense.

In summary, scholars interested in historical real wages will find valuable reading, either for the methodology or for new insights into the Spanish living standards debate or for the study of women's wages across Europe. Moreover, the book will be, for sure, of great inspiration for similar research about other European countries, and Mediterranean countries in particular.

Notes

1 J. Humphries and J. Weisdorf, 'Unreal wages? Real income and economic growth in England, 1260–1850', *The Economic Journal* **129**, 623 (2019), 2867–87; M. Rota and J. Weisdorf, 'Italy and the little divergence in wages and prices: evidence from stable employment in rural areas', *The Economic History Review* **74**, 2 (2021), 449–70.

2 J. R. Rosés, J. Martínez-Galarraga and D. A. Tirado, 'The upswing of regional income inequality in Spain (1860–1930)', *Explorations in Economic History* **47**, 2 (2010), 244–57.

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