

ABSTRACTS

WIDOWS IN LATE MEDIEVAL CITIES

A social history analysis

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This study deals with the economic and social status of widows in Czech and Moravian cities during the Late Middle Ages. It investigates whether widowhood led to a significant decline in the living conditions of women within the urban environment. An analysis of tax-related sources from the Moravian city of Jihlava (Iglau) and the western Bohemian town of Stříbro (Mies) reveals how widows managed the assets they inherited after their husband's death, as well as whether they remained in their houses, sold them, or passed them on to adult sons or married daughters. Particular attention is paid to the issue of remarriage, which conflicted with the theological views of the time.

Using prosopographical source analysis, the author is able to show that while widowhood represented a socially complex phase in the life of a woman, it can be considered a relatively stable situation in legal and societal terms. Most widows did not experience a deterioration in their financial circumstances following the death of their spouse. Although there were numerous cases in the higher and mid-level social strata where women impoverished after becoming widows, this decline often began while the husband was still alive. With regard to remarriage, the analysis for both municipalities clearly shows that women entered into second marital unions much less often than existing research has led us to assume. Despite the various risks and regardless of their age, women more often opted for a life as an independent widow following their spouse's death. Some chose to cohabit with other women, while others lived in a separate household in their own house or a rented domicile.