

**Una donna con disabilità può amministrare un patrimonio? Disabilità femminile e
agency economica nell'Italia tardomedievale (sec. XIII–XV)**

***Could women with disability manage a patrimony? Women with Disability and Economic
Agency in Medieval Italy (13th–15th centuries)***

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According to recent data, women with disabilities are more at risk of poverty than men and have less access to the workplace (European Disability Forum <https://www.edf-feph.org/women-and-gender-equality/>). Could a similar pattern be observed in the Middle Ages? Did legal and social restrictions on property ownership, as well as fewer opportunities for economic independence, affect women with disabilities more severely than men with disabilities? Although research on medieval disability has increased in recent decades, many aspects of the experiences of disabled women have not yet been explored, particularly the relationship between disability, agency, and poverty. This paper aims to shed a glimpse of light on the condition of women with disabilities in the medieval period, focusing on their legal capacity, property management, and social roles. Adopting a theoretical framework that engages with Eliza Buhrer's reflections on the gender and disability — emphasising the need to complement a gendered perspective with a more specific attention to women's lived experiences — the first part of the analysis tackles the question of legal incapacity attributed to women deemed "insane" in testamentary proceedings. The cases of Alvica Gradenigo and Francesca Canton reveal how alleged madness was used to invalidate last wills and testaments, regardless of women's economic status. The second part of the paper examines the legal framework concerning dowries and extra-dowry property in both civil and religious spheres, with specific reference to evidence from Treviso and the Venetian territories. Sources indicate that the estates of women with disabilities and elderly women were often entrusted to guardians appointed by public authorities at the request of their relatives. Moreover, some abbesses were also unable to govern and manage their monasteries due to their disabilities. Considering to the role of women in medieval society, both as wives and as nuns, the paper investigates to what extent disability allowed or hindered the fulfilment of these roles. The analysis suggests that women with disabilities had fewer opportunities to marry, were frequently admitted to hospitals for the poor and placed in monasteries, sometimes only if their families could provide dowries and pay medical expenses. Finally, the paper examines the phenomenon of female mendicancy, drawing attention to the tensions it created between religious authorities, who sought to restrain it, and civic authorities, who attempted to regulate it. By providing new insights into the complex situation of women with disabilities in the Middle Ages, the paper positions them at the ambiguous intersection between marginalisation and the possibility of legal and social recognition.