



## Gender and Work in Early Modern Europe

Conference organized

in Stockholm 10-11 May 2012

at

The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities

### Abstracts

#### Introductory remarks

This conference is the sequel to the workshop Women's Work organized at Jesus College, Cambridge, in September 2010,<sup>1</sup> and the format will be more or less the same. This means that focus will be upon discussion of four broad themes all of which are pertinent to the history of gender and work: periodization; comparison; work identities; digital possibilities. The limitations in time and space preclude paper presentations by all participants. Instead, each theme will be introduced by two or three speakers who have been asked to prepare relatively brief papers that encourage debate. After each theme presentation, there will be a discussion in which everybody is invited to take active part, drawing on his/her expertise and experience. In order to get to know each other better, the first theme – periodization – will also be followed up by three parallel break-out sessions. Two participants have been asked to summarize their impressions at the end of the conference, based both on the introductory papers and, equally important, on the discussions. As in Cambridge, notes will be taken during the deliberations.

This document includes abstracts of the introductory papers.



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<sup>1</sup> See <http://gaw.hist.uu.se/Events/CambridgeSeptember2010/tabid/3724/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

10 May

*Perspectives on Periodization 1*

Speakers: Professor Judith Bennett, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, & Professor Merry Wiesner-Hanks, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

**Judith Bennett**

**Report from the Middle Ages**

It is easy to think of “medieval” as the opposite of “modern” and thus, easy to think of medieval Europe as a time when “gender and work” were utterly different from whatever they became after 1500. I’m happy to have the opportunity--at the very beginning of our discussions, no less--to lay out some medieval history and historiography that might help us to avoid such assumptions. I plan to discuss three issues in particular:

- **WOMEN’S WORK IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND.** Was there a “golden age” for working women during the labor shortages that followed the Black Death (c. 1350-1500), when they were able to negotiate better jobs and wages than ever before? This is a particularly well-documented and debated topic in English history. I have a place in these debates (my answer is, briefly, “no”), but I’ll endeavor to offer a reasonably non-partisan summary.
- **WOMEN’S WORK IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE.** For Europe more generally, medieval historians have focused on two main issues. (1) Change across the medieval millennium. Some historians tell a story of decline in women’s work from 500 to 1500; others argue that it was an expansion in women’s work that stimulated the remarkable growth of the European economy c. 1000-1300. (2) The fifteenth century and the transition from “medieval” to “early modern.” Medievalists continue to tussle over the direction of change--for better or for worse?--in women’s work across this critical divide.
- **WHAT WE KNOW.** Despite all our debates, medievalists have reached consensus on many fundamental aspects of women’s work before 1500. Since these can ground our thinking about what is new or not new after 1500, I’ll attempt to summarize these agreed-upon characteristics.

**Merry Wiesner-Hanks**

**Periodization in Women’s Work**

This paper addresses the issue of periodization in women’s work, with a focus on two major changes in early modern history. First, changes in military technology, organization, and tactics that have been characterized as the “military revolution.” Second, the increase in global interaction that resulted from the European voyages of discovery and the subsequent establishment of colonial empires and a global economy. On the latter topic I will pay particularly attention to the movement of people to create creolized cultures, and the trade in Indian cotton cloth. I will examine both the way in which women’s work *shaped* those changes, and the ways in which changes had an impact *on* women’s work.

## *Perspectives on Periodization 2*

Speakers: Professor Carmen Sarasúa, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, & Førsteamanuensis Hilde Sandvik, Universitetet i Oslo.

**Carmen Sarasúa**

### **Towards an Economic History that acknowledges women's work**

In her 1977 essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", Joan Kelly argued that "To take the emancipation of women as a vantage point is to discover that events that further the historical development of men, liberating them from natural, social, or ideological constraints, have quite different, even opposite, effects upon women." After proving that, in fact, European women did *not* have a Renaissance, Kelly concluded in this essay that "one of the tasks of women's history is to call into question accepted schemes of periodization".

Historical periods tell the History. They are the most powerful signs of historical change, order historical data, and frame the teaching of History. The idea of discussing how periodization takes place is thus pertinent and relevant.

My starting point is twofold: first, historical periods are social, ideological constructs, and as such should be revised and questioned; second, Gender and Feminist History have a tradition of questioning how History has been told, and an alternative idea of when and how the lives of people change, that we should use to frame our work.

Discussing historical periodization from the point of view of women is also important because women have traditionally been seen as a-historical. Unlike Men, who have changed through History, and have changed History, Women are seen as natural, biological entities, basically unchanged across centuries: girls became women, women married, got pregnant, gave birth, raise children, to finally become poor and lone widowers. In ancient Egypt as much as in medieval England, Modern France or Contemporary Japan, they have cooked, cleaned, provide sexual services to men, feed children, care the sick and the elderly. They were not in Parliaments, clubs, scientific laboratories, wars, unions' headquarters. They were not there when Things happened.

By focusing on the economic history of Spain in the 18th and 19th centuries, my paper discusses three events that had a huge impact on the working lives of women in Spain and in most of Europe: the mechanization of spinning, the abolition of guilds and the end of the dowry. The paper analyzes the (no) place granted by Economic History to these events, and what kind of Economic History would exist if events that were turning points for women's lives would be considered when defining historical periods. I conclude that by taking into consideration women's work, women's interests and women's wellbeing we are also changing the entire way of doing History and Economic History.

## Hilde Sandvik

### Perspectives on periodization in preindustrial Nordic countries. 1500 -1850

In the household based preindustrial economy in the Nordic countries under the Polar circle, families got their incomes from many sources and resources by gender division of work throughout the year. Historians have for many decades underlined the importance of both men and women's work, and discussed the consequences of unfavourable laws for women. I will discuss what impact war and peace, law and regulations, technologies and markets had on the family economy in a gender perspective. Different timing in the two Nordic realms and in the different economies regions will also be discussed. About 10% of the population lived in urban areas, and I shall also comment upon guilds and regulations

#### *Some moments:*

##### **War and peace**

*The absence of men during war* 1650-1720

Peace from 1720's

##### **Technology, capital, markets and seasons**

*The absence of men in agriculture*

1730 Commercial summer fishing I west coast Norway. More capital in fishing made preservation technique available for new regions.

##### **Decline in infant mortality, signs of mothers' health and better childrearing?**

Regional variation: Parish studies:

West Norway: from 280/1000 (1780s) – 240/1000 (1800) Dyrvik

East Norway: from 160/1000 (1770) – 50/1000(1870) Sogner

##### **Law:**

*Marriage and property –husbands' control over matrimonial property.*

1683/87- Denmark-Norway – until 1888/1927 Norway

1734 Sweden/Finland

*Forced labour and compulsory service for all youth*

1664-1885 Sweden/Finland compulsory service for all youth, men and women

1754- (1851-Norway) Denmark/Norway. Compulsory service for all youth Both men and women

1735-1788 Denmark: Boys and men bound by adscription (stavnsbånd) to work and stay on the estate they were born.

### *Comparing the Gendered Division of Work across Time and Place 1*

Speakers: Dr. Craig Muldrew, Cambridge University, &  
Ph.D. student Christopher Pihl, Uppsala University.

#### **Christopher Pihl**

#### **The value of work for men and women working for the Crown in sixteenth century Sweden**

The sixteenth century was an intensive era in the Swedish state-building process; the state was expanding both at a central and at a local level. Thousands of new job opportunities were created in management and administration but also in crafts and agriculture. This process of expansion is well documented in records, instructions and letters in the archives shaped by the central bureaucracy. To study the expanding crown organization gives an opportunity to gain an understanding of the principles that were active when these new jobs were filled and remunerated.

In my study of men and women working for the Crown in sixteenth century Sweden, one important question is the value of work for its practisers. In historical and especially in economic historical studies cash wages is quite often seen as the only remuneration, or at least the only interesting and measurable remuneration, for work. This focus is not an incorrect perspective, but it is in many ways a too narrow and reductive perspective. In a study like mine, which focuses on women's and men's job opportunities and the meanings and values of work for the individual person in a particular context, work cannot be reduced to a cash wage. Instead of looking at cash wages as the only remuneration for work it is important to broaden the perspective, and an alternative is to talk about the values of work in a wider perspective, which makes it possible to grasp the whole range of implications of work for the employee. The value of work for the individual person will in this paper be divided into two main categories. Firstly, material values such as wages in money and in kind, board, and lodging. Secondly, immaterial values such as status, career opportunities, skills, and security. Both of these two categories were of a paramount importance for the individual employee, and must be considered when comparisons across time and space are made.

This paper will provide some evidence that the two groups of values were both strongly connected to the gender of the employee, and that the two groups were responding differently to various kinds of economic and social changes. For example the opportunities to accumulate skills and make careers within the crown organization seem to have been strongly connected to gender. Another example is that the part of the wage which was in kind was larger for women serving as maids than for male labourers, e.g. farm-hands, at royal demesnes. A major part of the maids' wage in kind was in cloth and when the cloth import stopped because of war and financial crises, it was substituted with Swedish cloth, which was of much inferior quality and of less value. A wage which was in a greater proportion in cash was on the other hand more sensitive to inflation and constant shortage of money. Both inflation and shortage of money characterized the last decades of the sixteenth century.

### *Comparing the Gendered Division of Work across Time and Place 2*

Speakers: Professor Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, University of Winnipeg, & Professor Dag Lindström, Uppsala University.

**Darlene Abreu-Ferreira**

#### **Gender and work identities for Black-Africans in early modern Portugal**

This presentation deals with a long-term research programme that looks at the gendered economic roles of Black-African women in Portugal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While it is generally known that Portugal played a pivotal role in the early modern trans-Atlantic slave trade, less is known about the extent to which the Portuguese were engaged in supplying African slaves to the European markets, including Portugal itself. A substantial number of African slaves were brought into Lisbon for the domestic market, so much so that they made up nearly 10% of the population in the capital city by the early seventeenth century. A survey conducted in Lisbon in the 1550s shows that Black-African women were a visible presence in the market place, hawking their wares on the city streets, and as members of the household economy. By looking at a number of archival sources, including testaments and manumissions, this study examines the ways in which scribes differentiated between female and male slaves in relation to their particular occupational labels and identities.

**Dag Lindström**

#### **Gender and work in guild organized trades – some methodological and comparative issues**

Women's positions and possibilities within guild organized crafts have been described in different terms by different historians. This observation provokes a number of comparative issues. Have historians asked the same questions and looked for the same kind of evidence? Have they used similar methods? Is it a question of various modes of interpretations, where historians have reached different conclusions based on similar evidence? Or is this rather a matter of regional differences, different courses of change over time, or perhaps different conditions in specific trades? Is it possible to generalize about guilds?

This certainly is a field where comparative analyses would be beneficial. If we want to say something more systematic about variances in gender division of labour within guild organized trades, and about the causes and effects of this, the comparative approach is indeed necessary. But we also need more empirical evidence to rely on. We still have insufficient knowledge about women's work in the fields of handicraft. But we also need more information about men. In many cases, our knowledge about men's work in guild organized trades is even more fragile. This statement may appear a bit odd. But if we want to deepen our analysis of gender and work in guilds organized trades it is not enough to establish that a male shoemaker produced shoes. What did he actually do? Did the master always manufacture the products himself; did he perform other tasks; and who else was involved in the work process?

Based on my own case study within the Gender and Work project at the department of history at Uppsala University, I will here discuss three issues, all of them with important methodological and comparative dimensions: the verb-oriented method; analyses of household structures; and evidences of non-artisanal work.