Book review:
Mansell, C. (2025) Review of: The whole economy: work and gender in Early Modern Europe. Labor, 22 (2). pp. 116-118. ISSN: 1547-6715

https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-11609909

The Whole Economy: Work and Gender in Early Modern Europe
Catriona Macleod, Alexandra Shepard, and Maria Ågren (eds.)
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023
x + 232 pp., $105.00 (cloth), $34.99 (paper)

The Whole Economy: Work and Gender in Early Modern Europe, a collection of essays edited by Catriona Macleod, Alexandra Shepard and Maria Ågren, is a much-needed corrective to male-centred histories of the early modern economy. The book makes no claim that this quest is entirely new. Since the early twentieth century, women's role in the early modern economy has been reiterated time and again. Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck pioneered studies of women's work in Britain, and the mantle was later taken up by second wave feminist scholars. As conversations around gender wage gaps, the value of unpaid work, and female labour opportunities have become regular features in contemporary public discourse, historians of gender and work have turned to parallel issues in the past.

But the book's distinctiveness lies in the word *whole* in its title. The authors systematically challenge assumptions made by early modern economic historians about women's contribution, placing the labour patterns of *all* members of early modern European society under the microscope. A recent history of Britain's economic development between 1270 and 1870 claims that women could only have undertaken about 30 per cent of paid work while men contributed 70 per cent. This proportion is not only based on the assumption that women must have done unpaid housework and childcare, but the equally unfounded belief that this proportion remained static over 600 years (20-1). The editors and contributors of this book are experts in the field and well-placed to thoroughly interrogate such assumptions. The book comprises seven thematic chapters (households, care, agriculture, rural manufactures, urban manufactures, migration and war). Underpinning these contributions is an expansive understanding of the word 'work' (long adopted by feminist economists) which captures various types of labour, and both paid and unpaid work. Each chapter reviews existing scholarship and demonstrates the merits of a gender-inclusive approach to studying work in the past.

The volume begins with Maria Ågren's chapter on households. Ågren masterfully unpicks the home as a site of domestic activity, consumption, and production for men *and* women, and convincingly advocates for the two-supporter model of early modern households – that is, the joint economic contribution of married couples to their household economy. Ågren demonstrates that while men are typically identified by a single occupational descriptor (implying the elevated importance of their work above women's, who were instead identified by marital status), household stability required mixed work repertoires or *pluriactivity* from both men and women.

In measuring 'progress', Alexandra Shepard argues in Chapter 2, we miss a huge subsistence service that allows progress to occur: care work. Economic activity cannot take place without somebody tending to the sick, the elderly, the young, and the vulnerable. Shepard argues that care should not be treated as something external to the economy; rather, it comprises 'part of 'capitalism's economic subsystem' (without which the market economy cannot function) and 'a vital service within the paid economy' (53). The chapter is pivotal in driving an agenda to integrate care work into the early modern economy: by encouraging historians firstly, to chart geographical and chronological variation in the care burden, and secondly, to trace care work's

distribution across the 'care diamond' (familial, commercial, state and voluntary services) and as paid and unpaid labour.

In early modern Europe, most of the population lived in rural areas (11). Farm work was the norm for both men *and* women, as Jane Whittle and Hilde Sandvik explain in Chapter 3, female participation in agricultural labour differed regionally and changed over time. The authors point out underlying gender stereotypes in scholarship on agricultural work and use two detailed case studies to showcase regional variation in female agricultural labour. In coastal Norway, commercial fishing pulled men from their farms for much of the year, leaving wives to undertake all farming tasks including managing livestock. In southwest England, by contrast, where male migration was less typical, agricultural labour was divided sharply along gendered lines. In pastoral farming, women were engaged in dairying, sheep shearing and hay harvesting. They were never shepherds. Arable farming required female labour in weeding, sewing seeds and some field work, but men more regularly ploughed and prepared land for growing crops.

Proto industry is one area in which women have received some scholarly attention. Growing demand for consumer goods is argued to have encouraged women's participation in production, thereby sparking Jan de Vries' 'industrious revolution'. The role of women in the production of goods for the market is tackled in two separate chapters – Carmen Sarasùa focuses on rural manufactures, while Anna Bellavitis tackles the urban setting – but both offer correctives to de Vries' thesis. Sarasùa argues that rural women's textile work was not driven by local consumption; rather, their work was export-oriented and comprised part of Europe's expanding trade with colonies overseas. Bellavitis focuses on the various types of work urban women carried out as well as competition between men and women in the urban environment. The author draws out the apparent contradiction between the exclusion of women from city guilds and legal restrictions placed upon their economic activity, and the evident need to carve out spaces for women's work within the urban economy to keep society functioning.

Chapter 6 focuses on migration. Amy Louise Erickson and Ariadne Schmidt argue that gender is frequently missing from studies of the economic consequences of mobility and migration. Taking a comparative lens across Europe, they challenge the idea that women tended to carry out chain migration and travelled shorter distances than men. They show that most female migration was not carried out in search of service. Rather, women migrating to urban centres found work in a range of other occupations including textile production and manufacturing. Erickson and Schmidt also destabilise the idea that women lacked agency in their migration decisions: they did not simply respond to the occupational needs of their husbands or families. Rather, economic opportunities of their own prompted female migration.

The collection's final chapter turns its attention to war, a field in which the economic activities of women are most routinely overlooked. Margaret Hunt outlines two key points of historiography: the military revolution (in which army sizes grew enormously over the period), and the development of the fiscal military state (which saw state taxation pay for this expansion). Women rarely feature in these strands of scholarship; their economic role is relegated to providing domestic and sexual services to military personnel. In this chapter, Hunt sets out an agenda for early modern historians of war to bring gender into the fray, pointing out that '[t]here is a tendency to write histories of work (both men's and women's work) as if our subjects lived lives relatively uninterrupted by natural or human-made disaster' (213). Crucially, Hunt asks: how did local economies manage resource depletion and how did war affect gendered patterns of labour? The chapter opens important avenues for future research in these areas.

It is beyond the scope of the book to consider how far gendered work practices mapped onto colonial economies, but many chapters nonetheless drew their studies outwards to think about growing European trade with and exploitation of colonies. The strength of this volume are the geographical and chronological tests of gendered assumptions about the functioning of the early modern economy. This volume persuasively demonstrates that male-dominated economic histories – despite their claims of being definitive – are partial at best. To really understand the 'whole' economy, is not simply a case of adding women in but of asking different questions. The volume showcases myriad sources and approaches for how researchers might recast traditional ways of approaching past economies.

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