

Making a living, making a difference: gender and work in early modern European society

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Abstrak

This book uses a substantively new research model and source base for studying the working lives of early modern men and women. With an innovative analytic method that is, in turn, yoked to a specially built database of source materials, the book revises many received opinions about the history of gender and work in Europe. The verb-oriented method finds the work verbs that appear incidentally in a wide variety of early modern sources and then analyzes the context in which they appear. By tying information technologies and computer-assisted analysis to the analytic powers, both quantitative and qualitative of professional historians, the method gets much closer to a participatory observation of the micro-patterns of early modern life than was once believed possible. The book confronts a number of broad problems often debated by historians of gender and early modern Europe. First, it discusses the problem of assessing more accurately the incidence, character, and division of work. Second, it analyzes the configurations of work and human difference. Third, it deals with the extent to which work practices created notions of difference, gender difference but also other forms of difference, and, conversely, to what extent work practices contributed to notions of sameness and gender convergence. Finally, it studies the impact of processes of change: state formation, growing commercialization, and social differentiation.