

## Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830

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### **Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830** From Routledge

This innovative new book is overtly and explicitly about female agency in eighteenth-century European towns. However, it positions female activity and decisions unequivocally in an urban world of institutions, laws, regulations, customs and ideologies. Gender politics complicated and shaped the day-to-day experiences of working women. Town rules and customs, as well as police and guilds' regulations, affected women's participation in the urban economy: most of the time, the formally recognized and legally accepted power of women – which is an essential component of female agency – was very limited. Yet these chapters draw attention to how women navigated these gendered terrains. As the book demonstrates, "exclusion" is too strong a word for the realities and pragmatism of women's everyday lives. Frequently guild and corporate regulations were more about situating women and regulating their activities, rather than preventing them from operating in the urban economy. Similarly corporate structures, which were under stress, found flexible strategies to incorporate women who through their own initiative and activities put pressure on the systems. Women could benefit from the contradictions between moral and social unwritten norms and economic regulations, and could take advantage of the tolerance or complicity of urban authorities towards illicit practices. Women with a grasp of their rights and privileges could defend themselves and exploit legal systems with its loopholes and contradictions to achieve economic independence and power.

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Review

**'This collection broadens our knowledge about women in 18<sup>th</sup>-century towns by extending the geographic focus to Scandinavia and central Europe. The contributors examine women's experiences and contributions to a variety of urban settings and provide insight into women's roles as financial brokers, peddlers, migrants, medical consumers, and landholders. The essays put gender squarely at the center of the development of European towns.'** – *Amy Froide, University of Maryland Baltimore County, USA*

**'This book demands that we rethink our tendency to categorise, demonstrating dextrously that to do so limits our ability to read the experiences and agency of oft overlooked individuals engaged in the urban economy...In its emphasis on diversity of experience and insistence that agency is a fluid and multifaceted construct, this collection successfully establishes the need for gender to be both a more prominent and better integrated dynamic in our interpretation of the past.'** - *Nathan Booth, University of Manchester, UK*

About the Author

Deborah Simonton is Associate Professor in History, University of Southern Denmark and leads the Gender in the European Town Network.

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