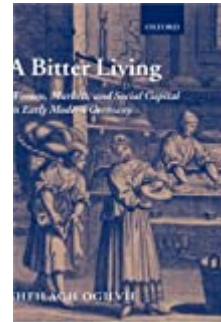


Sheilagh Ogilvie. *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. xviii + 394 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-820554-8.



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The focus of this study is on the economic and social development and gender equality during proto-industrialization in early modern Europe. What did proto-industrialization mean for women's and men's work patterns, and what were its wider implications for society, especially in the realm of female work? A number of competing theories attempt to explain women's work patterns: the technological approach emphasizes that physical ability determined women's work and that this explains the sexual division of labor that resulted. The cultural model focuses on factors like custom and mentality, and points out that issues like patriarchy determined female work patterns. The institutional model makes organizational changes responsible: as modern market organization developed, guilds and the state replaced the traditional family in directing production, thereby keeping women at home and preventing them from earning wages. Ogilvie explains the problems with each of these theories, and the fact that they have never been assessed against each other. Then she proposes a different methodological approach. In this study she regards gender-specific work patterns as "arising from individual decisions about how to use one's time" (p. 13), and then places this into its entire social and economic context. Combining these results with the previous theories allows a comparison of all factors.

This may sound like a reasonable approach, but finding evidence on individual choice in the seventeenth and eighteenth century is extremely difficult. Ogilvie turns to an unlikely source as the main empirical basis of her study: church-court minutes of two communities in the Black Forest region of southwest Germany. Proto-industry developed significantly in this rural area, especially worsted wool production. Using these sources the author extracted almost 300 "observations" of men and women working during a 150-year period.

Ogilvie explains the empirical basis of her study at length. She also checked her database against other statistical information available and discarded data which she felt distorted the picture, and she added qualitative sources as they were available. This makes her calculations transparent to the reader and provides a solid basis for convincing conclusions. However, the study is small scaled with a handful of villages and, as with every micro-history, there is the question of how much one can generalize from the findings, as the author points out herself. Here, Ogilvie was able to rely on the vast historical research already done in early modern southwest Germany, as she compared her findings to those of David Sabean, Hans Medick, and others. Additionally, she made comparisons to other geographical areas in Europe. Further, studying gender-specific work patterns and in-

dividual decision-making processes within a specific social, demographic and economic environment, along with their impact on the wider economy can only be done on the micro level. In what Ogilvie calls a “time allocation approach,” she divides the decision how to spend time into three areas: household production, market production, and leisure. In the fact-filled, quantitative-oriented second chapter, the author introduces the reader to the social and demographic framework of the two southwest German communities. Ogilvie drew important conclusions after comparing her demographic statistics to traditional theories on female work patterns. Technological factors, e.g. women’s reproductive roles, could not have significantly determined working choices since at any given time many more women than men were not married, did not have children, and were not forced to work in household as opposed to market production. Further, cultural factors did not have a large impact either. The author concludes that although technological and cultural factors did play a role, what really influenced gender-specific work patterns the most were social institutions like guilds and corporate communities. These networks imposed norms, distributed information, and sanctioned important choices like the permission to marry or to occupy household positions.

The main part of the study consists of four chapters in which the author analyzes male and female choices concerning how to spend time. These chapters are divided according to women’s marital status: unmarried daughters and maidservants, married women, widows, and independent unmarried women. In each chapter Ogilvie employs her set of questions: what are the facts regarding unmarried daughter’s and maidservant’s (married women’s, widow’s, independent unmarried women’s) working patterns? Why are these patterns the way they are? What are the wider consequences of these women’s economic position (see p. 2)? Are traditional technological, cultural and structural explanatory models able to sufficiently explain gender-specific work patterns? This rigid structure, filled with tables and statistical data, is balanced against examples of female work-related behavior from qualitative sources. In this way real-life female experiences put a face on the data. The micro-history in each of the chapters provides a glimpse into early modern everyday life in the rural communities of southwestern Germany in which proto-industry developed, which will interest historians of gender and economic history as much as demographers and cultural historians.

Let me give just one example from the chapter on married women, in which Ogilvie analyzes the connec-

tion between wives’ work and child care (pp. 194-200). A number of other studies have linked the unusually high infant mortality rate of the eighteenth century to the demands of agricultural and proto-industrial labor on mothers, but one question not addressed has been why these mothers were employed to fulfill the demand and not the large numbers of unmarried females who were constantly fighting for earning opportunities (see chapters 3 and 6). With her microhistorical approach, Ogilvie is able to show that social institutions were likely responsible: “Guild regulations, wage ordinances, and information asymmetries in labour markets inflated wives’ productivity in income-earning activities (even heavy labour) despite their high productivity in household production, particularly child care” (p. 200). According to guild rules, the wife of a master was the only female allowed to engage in crafts and proto-industry, so many worked during their pregnancy and with very young children. At the same time, the problem of monitoring the work of servants and laborers, as well as other distortions in the labor market created incentives for small farmers to rely on family labor. Further, wage ordinances set women’s wages much lower than men’s, which meant that the husband of a family frequently hired out his labor, while the wife farmed the family’s land. Thus institutional rules created pressure on mothers to continue agricultural and industrial work, and their time-allocation decisions came at the expense of their children’s health and education, which contributed to the high infant mortality rate and damaged the wider economy as well.

After her analysis of unmarried, married, widowed and independent women’s choices on how to spend their time, the author concludes that the most important factor influencing male and female work patterns was the institutional structure of a society, including the market structure, which consisted of social networks that excluded women. Technological factors played only a minor role. Cultural factors, often cited to explain women’s oppression, were also far less influential compared to the social structure, according to Ogilvie. Social networks worked institutional regulations in their favor: “they denied women training, excluded them from many jobs, and capped their wages ... to limit competition in their own line of business, so as to secure monopoly profits for themselves” (p. 342). Local communities and guilds were able to distort the market to their advantage, and their interdependence with growing early modern state institutions cemented this mechanism. Like other studies, Ogilvie also refutes the theory that women were more active in undeveloped economies and later forced out

by the development of a market economy. Instead, female work patterns underwent more long-term changes, responding to demographic, economic and institutional constraints that altered the value of women's work in the household and market place. As for the impact of the sexual division of labor on the wider economy, Ogilvie concludes that "an economy which prevented women from allocating their time to the most productive ends was less efficient, producing less output from a given stock of land, labour, and capital, than an economy which let women work as they themselves decided" (p. 346). Looking ahead toward the nineteenth century, the author also emphasizes that restricting women's production in turn restricted women's consumption. This had far-reaching effects, especially for the economic development of pre-industrial into industrialized societies, because these societies required enthusiastic consumers.

Sheilagh Ogilvie has written a highly informative study that utilizes quantitative as well as qualitative sources in order to analyze the sexual division of labor and its impact in two communities. The conclusions drawn from this meticulous analysis allow her to

test the accuracy of several important theories on female work patterns. Utilizing the rich historical literature on early modern southwest Germany as well as comparing her results to other European regions, allow her to integrate her micro-study into the broader context of proto-industrialization, gender equality, and the overall social and economic developments of the period. The result is a convincingly argued study that contributes significantly to our knowledge of how early modern women and men decided to spend their time, why they did it in a specific way, and what implications this had for the overall structure and development of society. Additionally, the reader is provided with a helpful glossary of early modern German terms and a detailed index.

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