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Peer reviewed

Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. 4th Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Paperback: 9781108739351. \$29.99.

Anyone who has used a textbook has known that writing a good one is a significant intellectual challenge. Since the publication of the first edition in 1993, Merry Wiesner-Hanks' *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* has been the most authoritative survey of the history of women and gender in the period. The fourth edition demonstrates why that continues to be the case, as well as showcasing the growing quantity and range of research in the field. It is clearly written, and Wiesner-Hanks presents both the substance of women's experience and directs readers to historiographical debates. This edition has the same structure as the third edition: an initial chapter on "Ideas and Laws", followed by thematic sections on "Body", "Mind" and "Spirit", each with two chapters; two final chapters cover "Gender and Power" and "Gender in the Colonial World". This edition highlights the expansion of research on eastern and southern Europe as well as Scandinavia and the Ottoman empire. The history of women and gender Europe is ever more firmly anchored in a global world.

An introduction explicates the title, providing a brief history of the study of women and the emergence of gender history, which highlights historiographical debates. It also discusses the challenges of periodization in framing the concept of early modern Europe. The chapter on law and ideology frames the experiences of women and gender, providing an intellectual and conceptual framework for the whole book. In doing so, Wiesner-Hanks, as she does throughout, demonstrates both broad commonalities and regional and temporal variation. Part I, "Body", includes chapters on "The Female Life Cycle" and "Women's Economic Role". Each of these is wide ranging, demonstrating the range of women's experiences, and the

ways they changed over time. Part II, "Mind", again offers two chapters, "Learning and Letters", and the "Creation of Culture". Part III, "Spirit", has chapters on religion and witchcraft. "Gender and Power" discusses obvious topics - Queens, political protest, power within the family - as well as masculinity more generally. "Gender in the Colonial World" discusses both the ways European women engaged with empire as investors and migrants, but also the experiences of enslaved and indigenous women and the emergence of racial ideology. Each chapter is supported by extensive "For Further Reading" (primarily books), and these lengthy bibliographies are supplemented by longer ones on the [book's website](#), which includes more of the vital articles that shape the field.

Each chapter offers a discussion of evidence from across Europe, and explores issues of change over time. Thus, for instance, the chapter on "Women's Economic Role" first discusses concepts of work, drawing on the "verb-oriented method" developed by Maria Ågren and her colleagues in Sweden. This is followed by subsections on work in the countryside, servants and laborers in towns and cities, "selling goods and selling sex", craft guilds, the cloth industry and proto-industrialization, investment, and consumption. The discussion of women in retail moves seamlessly into discussions of sex work. The change from late medieval practices to those shaped by the Reformation - and the greater variation across Europe - are explained clearly. The concept of proto-industrialization is introduced, and changes in how historians understand it explained briefly before the trajectory of women's engagement in industrial development is presented. The discussion of Investment and Management includes evidence from Italy, Danzig, Warsaw, Russia, England, France and the Netherlands; the experience of Glickl bas Judah Lieb is opens a discussion of how legal constraints shaped Jewish women's experience.

The whole chapter is supported by three pages of “Further reading”. Throughout explanations are clear, anchored in excellent examples. Wiesner-Hanks’ moves gracefully between changes in historiography and historical developments.

Some discussions are particularly noteworthy for the way they address inevitable student questions. The discussion of sexuality not only explores the challenge of finding evidence of sexual practices that do not lead to the birth of a child, but also the questions around labels. That not only same-sex practice and trans identities existed in the early modern period is shown, but so too are the questions about how we understand sexuality in the past. As in other cases where there is debate among historians, she does not take a stand on whether we use the term “lesbian”, but outlines the debate so students understand what is at stake. But she also demonstrates that whatever terms are used, women in the past loved each other and expressed that love in physical ways. The discussion of the colonial world includes an excellent discussion of the differences in the experiences of enslaved women across empires, as well as of the changing meanings of race and the interactions of race and gender. Both these discussions will help students place current political discussions in a historical context.

The book is well designed, with more than 20 black and white illustrations. However, the spine of my edition (paperback) cracked while I was reading it: since this is a book one is unlikely to read in one sitting, that is worrisome. While at times I wished for a comprehensive bibliography, but given the extensive reading lists, especially on the book’s website, I realize that is an unreasonable wish!

The three chapters that sit outside the structure of Body-Mind-Spirit emphasize the overarching themes that shaped all women’s lives. None of these

subjects are entirely absent from the three central sections of the book. But structure does matter: are laws and ideas the superstructure within which women lived their lives, as placing that chapter first suggests? Is the colonial world an afterthought? I ask these questions not because I have a better answer or structure than the one that Wiesner-Hanks has used, but they are ones that each of us confronts as we design our own courses. I can ask these questions because Merry Wiesner-Hanks has written a thorough, clear and nuanced history of women and gender in early modern Europe. It will continue to be the text for a course on early modern European women. This fourth edition will serve not just undergraduates, but with its lucid summaries of historiography across the subject, graduate students and even scholars of the field.

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Contributor Note: Susan Amussen is a historian of early modern England, gender and race, and Professor of History at the University of California, Merced. Her books include *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (1988); *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society* (2007); and *Gender, Culture and Politics in England, 1560-1640: Turning the World Upside Down* (2017).