

Carol Gold. 2018. *Women in Business in Early Modern Copenhagen, 1740-1835*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press. 181 pages. ISBN: 978-87-635-4597-6.

Women have always worked—inside the home and outside the home, paid and unpaid, together with husbands or independently, legally and not. That this was also true of women in early modern Copenhagen is, in a nutshell, the point of University of Alaska-Fairbanks professor emerita Carol Gold’s recent short book, *Women and Business in Early Modern Copenhagen, 1740-1835*, illustrated by several fascinating case studies of individual entrepreneurial Danish women, such as Elisabeth Christine Berling, who ran *Berlingske Tidende*, the *Godisheske Bogtrykkeri*, and a brewery, and Elise Engelsen, who ran a school at the same address as—but independently from—her husband. Gold states her premise in the first line of the compact book and repeats it several times throughout, to make sure the reader has grasped it, arguing that the very ubiquity of working women in early modern Copenhagen explains their near-invisibility in the historical narrative (though she does not explain why men, who were also very present in the workforce of the time, are not equally invisible).

Through meticulous archival research, Gold has been able to recuperate details of the lives of a great many early modern Danish women who worked for themselves, albeit only in the visible, legal economy, in Copenhagen between approximately 1740 and 1835. As Gold explains, her goal is not to offer a comprehensive survey of women’s occupations in this period, but rather to provide a “study of those women who were legal and independent, whose work was registered in their own names. In other words, it is a study of the extent of the possible, of legal options that were available to women” (13). Gold has compiled a database of more than three thousand women who met these criteria, from which she draws her statistics, charts, and conclusions. In the book, she discusses several of the professions such women pursued, from lowly street vendors to market sellers, food service workers, producers, service industry workers (including midwives, barbers, schoolteachers, civil servants, and auctioneers), and business managers in many fields (e.g. printing, brewing, trade, manufacturing) who were prosperous enough to have substantial self-employment taxes required of them. She concludes that women were represented in nearly every professional arena of the day, except for the clergy, military, municipal government, and at sea. She also explores the ways in which these women’s stories support and challenge the expectation that women primarily worked in family businesses.

As befits a good historian, Gold spends a lot of time explaining her methodology and demonstrates comfortable mastery of the place and era she describes in such detail, making the book a pleasure to read for those interested

in documentary history. The book is engagingly written, with cheerful interjections and a fair amount of first-person narration that makes the reader feel invested in Gold's quest to solve the mystery of the missing women. It also includes several full-colour illustrations of some of the archival materials that Gold drew on, which is an unusual pleasure in a paperback academic book. Unfortunately, although Gold invokes historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's famous dictum about "well-behaved women" not making history, she does not succeed in weaving these facts about well-behaved early modern Danish women into a compelling historical narrative. Gold fails to offer any sort of theoretical scaffolding for interpreting the significance of her material, beyond the straightforward assertion that it proves women's engagement in the labour market and demonstrates their agency as "authors of their own stories" (35) who "took active charge of their own lives" (39). This omission may disappoint those readers hoping for a more complex sociohistorical picture of women's lives in early modern Denmark, which the book's wealth of documentary evidence would seem well-suited to illustrating.

Gold frequently addresses an implied audience of scholars and historians who may presumably undertake a similar task or build on her work. Accordingly, she includes the Danish original for most of the specialized terms that appear in the text, which is helpful to scholars who work with Danish source material, but a few rather odd exceptions would benefit from clarification. First, Gold uses the term "The 32 Men" frequently in the book to describe the Copenhagen city council, but never gives the official Danish term, *Stadens 32 Mænd*, nor any explanation for why "The" is consistently capitalized in all references to the group, even though "de" (in the unofficial version of the council's name, *de 32 Mænd*, is not consistently capitalized in Danish). Second, Gold uses the French terms *femme couvertes* and *femme sole* to describe the legal status of women in early modern Denmark, but does not explain whether there were equivalent Danish terms or, if so, why the French terms are used here.

In the last few pages of the book, Gold takes a step back from the profusion of mundane minutia that flesh out her case studies to offer some brief but helpful thoughts on how a move toward promoting domesticity as a desired outcome for women's lives and talents in the nineteenth century contributed to erasing the memory of these many enterprising, hardworking early modern Danish women. She warns readers to question their expectations about what women did and did not do in the past, to become aware of the Victorian filter promoting a revisionist view of women's lives, and to recognize that while economic necessity rather than gender liberation ideology motivated women in every era to provide for

themselves and their families, that doesn't mean they weren't also very good at it.

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