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## Chapter 1

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### **Women and professional ambitions in Northern Europe, c. 1650–1850**

Europe of the 1650s was very different from Europe of the 1850s. In the mid-seventeenth century, Western Europe east of the Channel, only just recovering from the Thirty Years' War, witnessed the rise of the aristocracy and the Absolutist State. In the mid-nineteenth century, Western Europe witnessed the end of the revolutionary era, the expansion of educated middle classes and the triumph of moneyed bourgeoisie, while in Eastern Europe the old order counterchecked the new one.

After half a century of substantial scholarly work focusing on women's history, we now know a great deal about what all this political, social and economic change indicated for women in different social conditions and settings. Recent scholarship has significantly enhanced our understanding of women's daily life, work and occupations in the early modern and modern eras.<sup>1</sup> Women's work was fundamental on all levels of the society: for women as individuals, for their families and communities and from the micro economy to the macro economy. Intensive research activity concerning economically active women has convincingly shown that despite all statutes, laws and established privileges that restricted or prohibited women's access to several trades, women found numerous ways to circumvent them. No doubt there were men in whose interests it was to facilitate this in order to make business run more smoothly.

Moreover, the very concepts of work and occupation have been thoroughly re-read, and scholars have questioned work as solely a source of income, discussing instead different conceptualizations of work and labour held by both contemporaries and scholars. Research on various verbal and

cultural meanings of work has revealed new dimensions of female activity and work life. Women from all social strata described themselves as working or their activities were described by others as work, even though the number and variety of sheer words varies in different sources from court records to letters and diaries to account books and advertisements.<sup>2</sup>

In this volume, we review women's work from which they earned money and any other remuneration, such as board and lodging and for which they had received informal education or training or, more seldom, formal education. These are two aspects that could be considered to form professional ambitions or attitudes amongst Northern European women, c. 1650–1850. The cases discussed in the chapters of this volume review Europe north of the Alps and are drawn from a large area covering present-day England and Scotland, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Russia. With its substantial geographical coverage, the volume contributes to increasing scholarship on women's work, occupations and professional activities; this research has recently flourished. Moreover, the chapters with their detailed case-studies stress that women's experiences, expectations and ambitions were shared across Europe.

We aim to explore those activities by which women aspired to advance professionally as we might understand it today: education, training and skills development even though the women we discuss in this volume might not have verbalized their work as professional endeavours, they had some ambition to succeed and it is worthwhile to apply such concepts as career, professional and professionalism as analytical tools in order to better understand and reveal women's agency in the past. In early modern and modern Europe, many women worked to make a living for themselves and their families. However, a substantial number of women also aspired to deeper fulfilment in their work, be it more physical as the work of milliners or deeply mental as the work of female authors and journal editors or both physical and mental as in the work of actresses. These women negotiated their professional careers in societies that did not acknowledge women as legally, politically or financially independent. It is these early professional women that are the focus of this volume.

## Professionals and professionalization

In the traditional narrative of modernization, the major processes constituting the transformation of *ancien régime* societies into modern Western societies took shape since the mid-seventeenth

century along with the emergence of modern sovereign states. The standard narrative included urbanization, industrialization, individualization, secularization, the emancipation of labour, vindication of the rights of women and, as a legacy of the Enlightenment, the institutionalization of sciences and education. After the Second World War, one more concept was added to the canon: professionalization, as it contributed to modernization especially after the mid-nineteenth century.

The discussion about professions, professionals and professionalization was long dominated by its origin in the discourse in Anglo-American scholarly communities. Even the word ‘profession’, despite its Latin origin, was and is closely connected to its meaning and usage in English, as established centuries ago.<sup>3</sup> In 1968, Talcott Parsons, the leading authority among post-war sociologists, methodologically contrasted university education associated with professionalization along ‘the English system’ with that of ‘the Continental system’.<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s the characteristics of professionals as presented by the British sociologist John A. Jackson served to justify academic intellectuals’ own professionalizing strategies: public rather than self-interest; a service ideal; a code of ethics and ideology and an occupational focus on problems of universal social concern.<sup>5</sup> Corresponding listings would become typical of the discussion about professions.<sup>6</sup>

Along with such an idealised image of the professional ran another in which professions were seen ‘in terms of their monopoly over certain resources (knowledge)’.<sup>7</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, who limited her analysis to England and the United States, saw professionalization ‘as the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute *and control* a market for their expertise’.<sup>8</sup> However, Sarfatti Larson and others<sup>9</sup> who criticized sociological authorities confined themselves to discussing male professions only.

Women were in focus only as teachers, nurses and social workers. In the 1930s, in their study about professions, A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson listed in the headings circa thirty occupations and only two of them were female: nurses and midwives. According to them, the professional status of midwives was at that time in England of very recent origin, while ‘[t]he vocation of nursing is becoming professionalized’.<sup>10</sup> In the 1960s, Amitai Etzioni, the other post-war North American authority, defined teachers, nurses and social workers as ‘semi-professionals’ whose claim to full-fledged professional status was ‘neither fully established nor fully desired’.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1990s, ‘the sociology of professions’ had become dated.<sup>12</sup> Sociologists envisaged the possibility of ‘a future wave of massive de-professionalization’, in the same way as monopolies in

the past had been followed by de-monopolization.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, noting the deteriorated status of some professions such as nursing in the UK, Graham Cheetham and Geoff Chivers resorted to the historical parallel of informal learning in their vision of education in the twenty-first century.<sup>14</sup>

From the Anglo-American perspective, only autonomous practitioners of liberal professions could be true professionals, whereas civil servants and office holders employed by the State or any public authority lacked autonomy and therefore could not by definition be true professionals. In the heat of debate, two Anglo-American sociologists even exclaimed: 'The moment that the state organizes, trains, and employs all the members of a profession, we can no longer speak of it as a profession'.<sup>15</sup> From the continental European perspective, this reflected profound differences between Anglo-American political culture, on the one hand, and continental European ones, on the other.

The controversy focused on the role of the State, seen quite differently in common law countries compared to Roman law countries. Hence, the French, German and Swedish historical perspectives were diametrically opposite to that of the United States and United Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> In the French model, the role of the nation-state and its centralized bureaucracy had been crucial in the formation of (male) professions since 1800.<sup>17</sup> Along the same lines, Linda L. Clark argues in her study on the rise of professional women in post-1830s France that from the early nineteenth century onwards, the centralized French State had a key role in forming professions and professionalization through certification requirements; furthermore, professions in the State bureaucracy were open also to women relatively early.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, in the German historical experience the role of the State had definitely been central. In his study of the beginnings of modern professions in Germany, the North American historian Charles McClelland used many pages explaining the difference between Anglo-American and German concepts.<sup>19</sup> The German historian Jürgen Kocka found the Anglo-American concept of 'professions' so incompatible with the German experience that he chose to discuss *Bürgertum* instead: 'Professionalization theory developed out of English and American discourses and experiences; the *Bürgertum* approach is continental in origin'.<sup>20</sup> In a more placatory tone, in his quest for definition for professions and professionalism in post-1800 Central Europe, the historian Konrad H. Jarausch argued: 'While their importance varies according to the dynamics of a particular career, training, certifying, economic reward, social status, working practice, collective self-images, and group organization tend to recur as crucial areas of concern among Central European professionals'.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Christine Ruane has strongly discouraged the use of Anglo-American model for studying professionalization in Imperial Russia. Nevertheless, in this discussion she is guilty of equating Western with Anglo-American.<sup>22</sup> She ignores the fact that Western Europe east of the Channel was different from the Anglo-American world in terms of formal and informal traditions and institutions, such as the State, legal systems, public administration and social structures.

Post-war sociological theories of professionals and professionalization that defined them in terms of formal higher education, market power and monopoly or closure strategies did not allow for any women professionals before the last decades of the nineteenth century, if even then. Although those studying the history of women's professionalization have problematized this sociological tradition, they have, nonetheless, respected its core message. To take one example: historians studying women's professionalization in Europe east of the Baltic Sea have refrained from decisively defining journalism as a new profession since it did not match the sociological criteria.<sup>23</sup> Instead of challenging sociological theories that give men the monopoly of professionalization in the past, historians studying women's professionalization tend to date it at the late nineteenth century, when education of girls in higher secondary schools expanded, women gained access to university education and certificates became a standard. In other words, in this research tradition women's professionalization commenced when the criteria, until then only relevant for men, became applicable to women too.

Sociologists and economists have conceptualized professions, professionals and professionalization far more than historians. Still, 'professionals' and 'professionalization' captured something that many historians have found useful, albeit only through a liberal interpretation of the concepts. By applying a pragmatic interpretation of the concept 'profession', James A. Brundage has argued that in the early thirteenth century certain lawyers in Canon law in actuality 'became full-fledged professionals'.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, professionalization has served as an explanation for various changes in medieval and early modern societies, from the loss of penitent women's options for catechising and other forms of active life,<sup>25</sup> to the disappearance of women camp followers from the armies.<sup>26</sup> It has also served as a catchword for fascinating cultural phenomena, such as 'the professionalization of "Femininity"' in Gothic novels.<sup>27</sup> In the same way as a number of other sociological concepts, 'professions' and 'professionalization' have drifted far from their Anglo-American origins and have been applied by historians as useful tools in analysing and conceptualizing the European past.

In this volume, we suggest some important new readings on women's professionalization, occupations, work and agency in Northern Europe from the 1650s to the 1850s. Women could and did find ways for learning, training and practising as professionals in a number of occupations, which normatively were not open to women. For pioneering women within professions, we should look beyond and before the mid-nineteenth century and see women, who 'displayed the traits of successful professionals: an ethic of service and pride in the mastery of knowledge and procedures required for positions of responsibility', as Linda L. Clark summarizes.<sup>28</sup> We suggest that there is reason enough to define for women professionals and, by extension, women's professionalization such criteria that were relevant for women before the 1860s and 1870s that so often feature in the historical writing about women's professions and professionalization. The contributions to this volume may be read as tentative explorations in this endeavour.

### Professionals in their own right

By discussing how economically active and professionally-oriented women were educated, how they gained essential skills for their work, how they themselves found ways to negotiate their occupations, social status, collective self-images and identities, we aim to offer a better understanding of women's daily lives across the early modern and modern urban economy and social tissue. The women discussed in this volume were professionals in their own right; they were women who aspired to improve their positions or to find better business opportunities. Furthermore, they invested in developing their qualifications and professional skills, took financial or other kinds of risks or moved to other countries in quest of better livelihood.

In order to gain deeper perception on women's professional ambitions in Northern Europe, c. 1650–1850, it is necessary to see women's agency and professional activities more broadly than as simply their participation in male-dominated professions that was enabled through higher education or formal training. Since women's education and training were mostly not institutionalized before the mid-nineteenth century, our focus is on women, who otherwise gained skills and qualifications for their professions. Nevertheless, and importantly, women were also trained into professions earlier: in eighteenth-century Europe women entered into professional careers as trained midwives. Elite women's career possibilities and professional ambitions were performed at royal courts, since aristocratic women had few or no other career possibilities before the late nineteenth century. Women's aspirations in arts and letters led them to seek education and training outside

institutionalized paths and opportunities within the performing arts opened careers that were both admired and questioned. Furthermore, in order to gain a broader picture of women's professional aspirations, women as entrepreneurs and educators will also be explored across Scotland, Eastern England, the Baltic World and Russia.

### The first scientifically trained professionals: midwives

Much research on the history of childbirth and midwifery has been done in England and the United States. However, in these countries, most attention has been focused on the struggle between midwives and male obstetricians. At the same time, this has partly simplified the understanding of the European past since that struggle has not played such a major historical role in Continental Europe. Even today in the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, childbirths are the responsibility of midwives and pregnant women do not have a designated obstetrician as they do in the US and the UK.

In the history of medicine, midwifery has mostly been discussed from the perspective of professionalization and medicalisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with special attention paid to 'modern' training reforms and improvements in the professional status of midwives. The Middle Ages and the early modern times have been seen as the opposite of these pursuits: ages of self-taught midwives.<sup>29</sup> In this context, it is rarely thought that the formal training, professional communities and professional identity of European midwives have medieval roots.

The oldest regulations related to midwifery originated in the medieval German cities. In France, the midwifery profession has been regulated since 1578. In Spain, England and Holland, midwives were licensed by the local administration, surgeons and the clergy. The city of Munich, in the German Duchy of Bayern, was the first to begin training midwives in a maternity clinic (1589), followed by the Hôtel Dieu hospital in Paris in 1630. Professional European midwives were licenced and had to take a professional oath. For example, the city authorities of the German city of Nuremberg administered the midwives' oath from 1417 and this had become common practice throughout Europe by the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

During the eighteenth century the trained and licensed midwives took part in the establishment of science in medicine. In continental Europe, there were several efforts to renew and develop the

profession, especially as a profession for women.<sup>31</sup> The studies in midwifery included practical training under a master midwife, the reading of textbooks, anatomy lessons by the professor of surgery, as well as following the dissections of female bodies in the anatomy theatre.<sup>32</sup> It was only in England that these challenges were responded to by training male surgeons to become professionals in obstetrics, at the same time weakening the status of English midwives, who had no formal training.<sup>33</sup>

Licensed midwives were expected to know how to read and write and professional literature in the vernacular language, not in Latin, has been written for them since the sixteenth-century. Midwives also wrote and published books on midwifery themselves, with several editions printed over the years in certain cases. Very recently, there has been a new interest in early European professional midwives, especially in their books and diaries.<sup>34</sup>

Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen's chapter 'Midwives' (Chapter 2) explores the first Swedish and Finnish professional midwives in the eighteenth century. It focuses on new information about the lives of these women and the sources used are more wide-ranging than before: they include Swedish official archives, population register documents, estate inventories and court minutes. The sources highlight aspects such as the characteristics and aptitudes of midwives, their studies in Stockholm, marriage, children, as well as their official duties as investigators of infanticides, rapes and sexual crimes. The object of the chapter is to suggest that licensed European midwives were uncommonly well-educated women compared to other women: they had pursued a training based on theoretical knowledge.

### Elite career makers

Until the mid-nineteenth century, women of nobility and gentility, in particular those of the highest levels of the aristocracy, had limited opportunities to enter occupational life, compared to women from other social groups. Nevertheless, the educated elite and aristocratic women played a key role in the intellectual life of seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe as *salonières* or political hostesses.<sup>35</sup> As patrons of the fine arts and sciences, elite women had opportunities to favour the work of female artists and scientists; thus, they promoted their work.<sup>36</sup> As for important European female scientists and philosophers, many of them came from well-connected, noble families.<sup>37</sup> These women developed their agency through careful education, constant development



of skills and the cultivation of social practices; they used their talents, aspirations, and ability to bring together different people in conversation. Their influence was highly exclusive. Moreover, aristocratic and elite women's scientific, political and cultural work required almost without an exception financial investments alongside investing social and cultural capital in their ambitions. However, in terms of financial remuneration, skilled elite women could pursue extra earnings by creating embroideries and other handicrafts for their kin or acquaintances, even though this type of activity was not considered as an occupation.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, many of elite women's interests and occupations were more amateur than professional in their nature. It is, however, important to stress that from the Renaissance to the beginning or mid-nineteenth century, the word amateur did not include the same dismissive notions as the opposite of a professional person as it conveys today.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, elite women had a significant career opportunity, including prospects for advance, salary and connections to networks of their peers at the courts. Aristocratic and elite women held offices at royal, imperial and princely courts throughout Europe. Female courtiers were mainly appointed amongst highest-ranking elite families, which made a career at court a distinctive and sought after position of high status.<sup>40</sup> At politically powerful and large royal courts such as the courts in Vienna, Versailles, Madrid and St Petersburg were more courtiers than in smaller courts such as those in Stockholm, Copenhagen and the German and Italian states.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, a politically weak court in England was smaller than its counterparts on the continent; thus, it offered career possibilities for a smaller number of aristocratic women than the courts of Versailles and Vienna.<sup>42</sup>

For aristocratic women, royal, imperial and princely courts were not only places of employment and marriage markets, but also vital spaces to cultivate family connections, patronage and cultural and political networks. Courts gave high-ranking elite women opportunities for a career of their own centuries before aristocratic women could enter the labour market and professional life more broadly. A career at royal or imperial court could last for decades and included for the most part monetary remuneration. Furthermore, an aristocratic woman had opportunities to move from one position to another; thus, she gained more prestige and responsibilities linked to her office.

In her chapter 'From mother to daughter' (Chapter 3) on female courtiers at the eighteenth-century Swedish court, Johanna Ilmakunnas explores how maids of honour and ladies-in-waiting were chosen and appointed and discusses the qualifications and skills required from them. She also untangles how aristocratic women established and outlined their careers as courtiers, describes the

tasks and duties of female courtiers were and shows how these women combined family life and career.

In her chapter 'Serving the prince as the first step of female careers' (Chapter 4), Britta Kägler explores to what extent working at the princely court of Munich could be seen as a starting point for a career for women from various social backgrounds. For aristocratic women the exclusive world of the court offered prospects of influence and power when unmarried, married and widowed. Furthermore, the offices at court supported women with a high salary. From the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the court also provided Catholic women with a platform for further economic and entrepreneurial activities, such as Countess of Fugger's extensive involvement in tobacco manufacturing.

### Women in the arts: Painters, writers and performers

In European history from the 1650s to the 1850s, women's impact on visual and fine arts, on the written and printed word, as well as on performing arts was monumental. Women's contribution in fine arts and the growing number of women artists, authors, musicians, singers, composers and actresses in early modern and modern Europe testifies to these women's ambitions, but also reflects changes in societies where the growing number of consumers of culture, who constituted the public for art exhibitions, theatres and music performances shaped also the careers of women. Arguably consumers, who could afford acquiring paintings, musical instruments or books and who also wished to attend theatre and musical performances created more possibilities for female artists, authors and performers to grow in their field as acknowledged professionals whose work was respected and valued.<sup>43</sup>

Many women who made careers as professional artists and performers were born to families of artists, musicians, composers or authors or they married artists and received education and developed skills for their profession at home. However, in order to make a career and become professional within the visual arts, letters or performing arts, women had to surmount many obstacles. Until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many institutions such as academies of art or conservatories did not accept women as students and members, which closed the path to institutional education and recognition to women.

However, it probably was more acceptable for women to become professional artists, authors or composers and make a career in these fields than within performing arts, because visual arts, literature and music composition could be accomplished without the maker stepping forward, under a pseudonym or anonymously, whereas engaging in performing arts required women to put themselves forward in public and perform with their own face and name. Indeed, much of the criticism of women's artistic pursuits was about the negative image of women performing their work publicly. To embark on a professional career in any field necessitated taking an active role, which was presumably difficult or impossible for women if they did not have important support to back their ambitions either from their father, husband or other male relative. The exclusion of women is also visible in current scholarship, which, especially in the visual arts and music has often concentrated on exceptional individuals and canons of art, music and literature rather than women's (and men's) activities in the field more broadly, despite important recent scholarship exploring women's agency within arts and literature not as exceptional individuals, but as examples of a wider phenomenon.<sup>44</sup>

The Royal Academies of Arts had only a handful of female members across Europe. Thus, many professional and active artists, both male and female, worked outside the institutionalized art world. Apart from making careers as painters, women worked as copyists and printmakers.<sup>45</sup> Even though the lack of institutional recognition impeded female visual artists' work, it did not prevent women painters from becoming extremely successful in their own time.

In 'Remarkable Women Artists' (Chapter 5), Anna Lena Lindberg discusses female flower painters' careers in Northern Europe c. 1690–1790 and stresses the importance of family connections, particularly the fathers' importance in women's education in the arts. She also argues that due to the founding of royal and imperial academies of art from the mid-seventeenth century and especially in the eighteenth century, arts education became institutionalized and moved away from workshops and homes. When this training occurred within families it was the core of artistic education and work for centuries; thus, after the founding of academies such as Royal Academy of Arts in Britain or Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in France, women and many men were marginalized from the art world and art market. Lindberg's analysis of painters Johanna Marie Fosie (1726–1764), Magdalene Margrethe Bärens (1737–1808) and Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) shows women's important role in the network of visual arts, sciences and art markets.

In addition to the visual arts, women participated in book production and written culture in many roles as writers and translators. The majority of female writers began their careers by publishing anonymously or under a male pseudonym. In Britain women gained more recognition as professional writers from the eighteenth century onwards, when authorship was professionalized and the author's status rose parallel with the economic success of writers accelerated by the demands of a growing market in literature.<sup>46</sup> Women were active in creating new and extremely popular literary genres, such as the periodical press from Britain to Sweden, France and Germany, in which they wrote numerous articles, poems, instructions and other texts.<sup>47</sup> Betty A. Schellenberg captures the essence of female professional writers when arguing that 'none of these women's careers could be unique, while collectively they represent something definably uniform: the female literary career'.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, women also worked in book production as editors and printers, stationers and booksellers, as well as patrons.<sup>49</sup>

In music, a distinction between professional musicians, composers and singers was as difficult as in other male-dominated fields that women aspired to enter. Even though music was a necessary part of an elite lifestyle and many women were highly accomplished, performing publicly was regarded **nearly** as a form of prostitution and female musicians had to fight against prejudices. In early modern and modern Europe, female musicians or composers were often daughters of composers, musicians or music professors, who supported their daughters' education and ambitions. For performing artists, such as musicians, singers and actresses, it was harsh to maintain a career until old age, even though the slow commercialization of female music-making from the eighteenth century onwards gave more opportunities to continue a professional career to middle age and beyond. However, the idealization of singers from the late eighteenth-century onwards changed public opinion on performing women and opened career prospects for female singers.<sup>50</sup>

From the 1660s onwards, women entered the performing arts and appeared on the stages of European theatres and operas, conquering a field that had previously been male where men performed both male and female roles. Acting rapidly became a possible, though often morally questionable, career opportunity for gifted women. Actresses attempted to control their public image, in which sexuality and questionable morals linked to female actresses challenged their ambitions as professionals. Nevertheless, with the emergence of a new bourgeois public sphere and respectable theatres for the growing numbers of bourgeoisie theatregoers helped also to establish respectable actresses.<sup>51</sup>

In her contribution 'Performing Women' (Chapter 6), Marie Steinrud analyses professional and successful actresses in Sweden from the 1780s to the 1850s. She argues that the actresses did not necessarily have a background in a family of performing artists or a theatre group, contrary to what often has been stressed by researchers. Instead actresses in Sweden worked hard to gain a position as a famous and esteemed performing artist in an era when actresses were gradually accepted as professionals in their own right.

## Entrepreneurs

There have been many successful female entrepreneurs in the European past, but only a few are recalled today. They include Madame Clicquot, the 'Veuve Clicquot' of the champagne business of the early nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> As exceptional as she was in building up a large export-oriented enterprise, her decision to carry on her late husband's business was not unusual as this was a typical way for women to enter the business world. It was also common to be introduced to a profession by a male relative. Moreover, north of the Alps the trade of selling alcoholic beverages was a common way for women to make a living, albeit rarely in an upmarket niche.

Most women who made their living by independent work were self-employed rather than entrepreneurs proper. Despite many restriction and prohibitions concerning women's rights to enter various trades and occupations, the changing social and economic circumstances and especially the emergence of consumer society, industrial capitalism and global trade constantly opened new opportunities for enterprising women.

In general, widows could act more independently than married and unmarried women. In late eighteenth-century Sweden, a number of wholesalers' widows managed businesses alone for years. In Stralsund in western Pomerania, merchants' and wholesalers' widows were engaged in numerous export and import transactions.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, it seems that in Austria women confined themselves to retailing, though there were exceptions, most remarkably a woman in Salzburg who acted as a putter-out (*Verlegerin*) in proto-industrial bobbin-lace production.<sup>54</sup>

In Scandinavia and the German States, unmarried women earning their livelihood in their own right were in legal terms an anomaly until about the mid-nineteenth century. Such self-employed 'masterless' women did not have the right to use hired labour as entrepreneurs proper did, yet in

towns and cities unmarried, economically active women were so numerous that for practical reasons, they were generally accepted as judicially competent in commercial transactions in the same way that widows were accepted.

Britain was different in terms of formal institutions. A married woman's right to trade independently was under certain circumstances possible as *feme sole*.<sup>55</sup> However, many women, married and single, made a living as shopkeepers in the drapery and fashion business, for example.<sup>56</sup> Women were also active as investors. Three unmarried sisters invested in a boarding school for girls where they worked as teachers but were at the same time engaged in other businesses.<sup>57</sup>

The expanding consumer market offered many new opportunities for urban women. In late eighteenth-century Nantes, in the words of Elisabeth Musgrave, 'women took up unrestricted areas of work and pushed against legal barriers to other activities'.<sup>58</sup> A parallel development in the wake of changing consumer preferences was felt even in the far north in Scandinavia.<sup>59</sup> In due course, guild model production of consumer goods, including clothing was profoundly transformed or entirely dismissed in all Europe.<sup>60</sup>

The dissemination of fashion among the population at large indicated opportunities for women. In her 'Sister to the tailor' (Chapter 7), Deborah Simonton shows that in eighteenth-century Europe milliners and mantua makers carved out a niche in the trades of sewing and dressmaking. She argues that these women could achieve a *métier*, a profession, as it was understood at that time.

In the Russian Empire many women, among them noble women, grasped the new opportunities offered by early industrialization and became successful entrepreneurs. In Russia women were the first in Europe to gain full property rights in the late eighteenth century, first noble women and eventually women of moneyed classes.<sup>61</sup> In 'Independent managers' (Chapter 8), Galina Ulianova describes how women manufactory owners managed their businesses in Petersburg province and in the northernmost provinces of European Russia in the decades around 1800. These women were married, so she also discusses in the Russian context the idea of separate spheres.

While increased commerce gave rise to new opportunities for women, the expanding leisure world of inns, taverns and coffee houses indicated for women many opportunities to make a living.<sup>62</sup> Marjatta Rahikainen presents in 'Urban opportunities' (Chapter 9) women as innkeepers and

restaurant keepers in early nineteenth-century urban Sweden and Finland. She suggests that respectable women in restaurant business were female parallels to bourgeois men engaged in service businesses, so these women vindicate the concept of women entrepreneurs.

## Educators

After the Reformation and well into the eighteenth century, Europeans were intensively occupied by questions of the true faith. In Western Europe it was manifested in conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. Still, this struggle for souls turned into job opportunities in education for women.

In France in the early seventeenth century, the religious order of Ursulines established boarding schools in which sisters (nuns) taught the girls; the first small private teacher training school for laywomen was established by 1672. Saint-Cyr, the grand French boarding school for daughters of noble families, established in 1686, did not begin as a religious school and the 40 women who taught the young girls were laywomen. It was only after Jansenists and Jesuits argued that the instruction was too worldly that Saint-Cyr was changed into an elite convent school with convent nuns as teachers.<sup>63</sup> A century later the French Revolution reduced the role of the Church in education, which would also open new positions for laywomen.<sup>64</sup>

In Anglican England in the seventeenth century, there were boarding schools for girls headed by women. In such schools some women qualified for the teacher occupation. In England Puritans criticized girls' schools for being too worldly. In the eighteenth century there were some highly respectable boarding schools, but better families in general preferred their daughters to be educated at home by governesses.<sup>65</sup> The boarding school mistresses were, as contemporaries well understood, as much entrepreneurs as teachers.<sup>66</sup> When the first public day schools for girls emerged in the 1870s, boarding school mistresses faced a declining market and reacted by defending education in a home-like milieu.<sup>67</sup>

In Austria and the German States that had both Catholic and Protestant families, there was a tacit competition between Catholic and Protestant women educators. On the Catholic side the women teachers in schools established by *Englischen Fräulein* enjoyed a good reputation. In the late eighteenth century, the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution diminished the role of

the Catholic Church and increased secular education, which also affected the training of women teachers. However, in Austria this proved temporal.<sup>68</sup>

In Protestant countries children were expected to learn to read God's word, so there was a wide market for modest private schools teaching boys and girls the basics. Any respectable literate woman might make a living as a teacher. In charity schools and pauper schools, being literate did not suffice, as good teachers should also have other qualifications. Åsa Karlsson Sjögren discusses in 'Desirable qualifications and undesirable behaviour' (Chapter 10), in the context of urban schools for poor children in Sweden around 1800, the teaching profession and the qualities and knowledge that were required of good teachers. She asks how these qualities were valued, not least on the basis of the teacher's gender.

Well into the nineteenth century, European societies were extremely hierarchical and educational positions for laywomen mirrored and reproduced the social hierarchy. Women's positions ranged from those as respected governesses of high-born young ladies to modest posts in pauper schools for instructing girls in needlework. Between the two extremes there was a large and heterogeneous group of women: some were employed as governesses, schoolmistresses and headmistresses; others made a living as self-employed running a little girls' school in their homes, while the successful ones were directresses of their own prestigious private girls' schools or boarding schools. The principal clientele of such educational facilities consisted of daughters of an expanding and vaguely defined social group that would later be known as the middle classes.<sup>69</sup>

The received image of nineteenth-century governesses is dominated by Victorian governesses in Britain.<sup>70</sup> However, it must not be generalized to the position of governesses in Russian, German and Baltic German families. In fact, in Russia a very special kind of market for non-Russian women educators was created. As Olga Solodyankina describes in 'Cross-cultural closeness' (Chapter 11), there were many efforts to control and improve the professional competences of governesses from the early eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century; by arranging tests for women who wished to be employed as governesses even the authorities were complicit.

German-style *Mädchenschulen* and *Töchterschulen*, day schools with a fixed curriculum for girls, anticipated the success story of secondary day schools for girls in twentieth-century Europe.<sup>71</sup> Day schools for daughters of good families were established in Protestant towns and cities around the Baltic World in the early nineteenth century. In 'Shaping middle-class and upper-class girls'



(Chapter 12), Marjatta Rahikainen connects this development to the professional competences of governesses and the emerging teacher training facilities for women. Taken together, they witnessed the development of professional attitudes among women educators.

### Women's professional ambitions in focus

Much of the research on women's work in the European past has for good reasons focused on poor women and women of popular classes who worked because they had to work. They have their counterparts in the present-day world among the women discussed by Martha Nussbaum in terms of a capabilities approach.<sup>72</sup> The women in focus in this volume are discussed in another kind of framework: they are seen as early examples of women who may be said to have anticipated, in one way or another, present-day professional and career-oriented women. As their counterparts today, the women discussed here knew the importance of having the right kind of habitus and mastering the right kinds of cultural and behavioural codes. Many of them had to cope with combining family life and professional ambitions. At the same time, many of them were able to grasp opportunities and have their ambitions realised; many were respected due to their professional skills and some were able to fulfil themselves as artists. Socially, they ranged from elite women to women of middle-class and lower middle-class origin.

As is now well known, after substantial work in family and household history, many European societies have for centuries been characterised by a considerable number of women of bourgeois or higher social origin who never married or for other reasons had no male provider. Thus, it is only to be expected that numerous middle-class and upper middle-class women without a male provider feature in this volume too. Moreover, the empirical cases discussed above attest that professional ambitions were present irrespective of women's marital status: having a husband and children did not stop women from pursuing their own professional endeavours.

We have characterized the women discussed here as early professional women, albeit at times by a fairly liberal interpretation of the concept 'professional'. They were professionally ambitious and many were career oriented or at least they strove for upward occupational mobility. What else characterized them? First, all of them were literate, able to read and write, which was far from common among women before the mid-nineteenth century. They all also probably knew basic arithmetic, though this is seldom evidenced in the sources available. Literacy was a key skill for

women who entered occupations and careers that can be described as professional in early modern and modern Europe. The requirement of full literacy meant that early professional women came from middle- and upper-class families, because before the mid-nineteenth century, lower class women were very seldom able to write, even though reading skills were more common.

Formal education over the level of lower-secondary school was not available to women before the mid-nineteenth century. The one and only exception was the training of midwives and this was largely due to the fact that the emerging nation states were concerned about insufficient population growth. To be accepted to midwifery training, women had to be literate.

In fact, elite women had been educated by competent persons at home and then perhaps in respectable boarding schools or convent schools. Upper middle-class families emulated the elite pattern in the education of their daughters, but ordinary middle-class families could seldom afford governesses and expensive boarding schools for their daughters, while good day schools for girls were not generally available, so many women had only been taught by their parents at home.

In many cases women who qualified as professionals in their field had acquired much of their knowledge by self-instruction by all methods and from all sources available to them. This was the case in particular as regards women who made their living as educators. Contemporaries did not judge female educators' professional competence by certificates but by results, performance and accomplishments. Governesses, teachers and headmistresses of girls' schools were compelled to market themselves again and again to potential employers or customers and therefore of necessity also maintained their professional qualifications and flexibly absorbed new ones.

Another line of acquiring professional competence consisted of practical skills, handicrafts and all such arts and abilities that could be learned only by years of training. Formal apprenticeship was, as a rule, available to boys and men only, so women gained their competence in various other ways. Typically, women who mastered handicrafts had been born to an artisan family in the same field. This is how female painters and graphic artists learned the trade: they had fathers, brothers or other male relatives who were artists and could teach them all that a professional artist had to master. All girls learned the basics of sewing in their childhood, but only in a few countries, among them England, France and Holland, could girls become skilled artisans through formal apprenticeship; elsewhere they learned to master the trade through informal arrangements.

The third line of acquiring professional competence consisted of what is today referred to as tacit knowledge and this was gained by work experience. Not only manufactory owners and restaurant keepers but also milliners, painters and other artists, self-employed teachers and headmistresses of private girls' schools needed entrepreneurial skills. They all had to learn how to run a business in a sustainable way, profitably enough to provide themselves, their dependants and any other household members with a decent living. For this they had to attract new customers and advertise and market their products and services in a way that did not appear obtrusive. Similarly, women employed as actresses, governesses and teachers had to learn how to market themselves to potential employers in a convincing and respectable way. Moreover, women in responsible positions in large organisations, such as ladies-in-waiting at royal and princely courts and headmistresses of large schools had to learn managerial skills. Finally, everyone, at whatever level of hierarchy, had to build up a network of trusted friends, associates, supporters and patrons.

Furthermore, many women worked under conditions in which they were supposed to appear as if not working. Only a sensitive observer understood that court dresses worn by women as required by absolutist monarchs from Louis XIV in France to Gustav III in Sweden and Nicholas I in Russia disclosed that women were on duty. Women in influential positions may have acted as if they had only an inoffensive role. Moreover, money was an issue that was not seemly for respectable young women to discuss openly with customers and employers.

During the period under study, from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the urban world proved to be more favourable for women's professional pursuits than the rural world. On the one hand, only towns and cities provided the infrastructure that rendered possible princely courts, new entertainment and cultural facilities and large enough client potential for the many services and products provided by women, from theatre performances and works of art to dressmaker's workshops, restaurants and private girls' schools. On the other hand, 'the fluidity of urban environment' may as such have created 'opportunities for women to make progressive changes', as Nazan Maksudyan suggests in the context of eastern Mediterranean cities.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, we suggest that professions, professionals and professionalization may serve as fruitful concepts for historians if understood as more complicated and context-bound phenomena than post-war sociological theories have presented. Sociological criteria did not allow for any female professionals in past centuries, but not many male professionals either. Medieval and early modern guilds may have had, *mutatis mutandis*, 'the visible characteristics of the professional

phenomenon’,<sup>74</sup> yet craftsmen did not qualify as professionals. No member of the late medieval and early modern merchant elite, however efficient in market closure and proficient in the trade but lacking (formal) higher education, qualified as a professional by the criteria defined by late twentieth-century sociologists.

The post-war sociological criteria for professionals and professionalization is no longer really valid in the present-day occupational life. This leaves the field open to historians to develop concepts of professions, professionals and professionalization in a way that does justice to the past, to paraphrase Paul Ricœur.<sup>75</sup> What would be relevant for such concepts in past centuries before higher education certificates became a standard?

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- 5 John A. Jackson, 'Professions and Professionalization – Editorial Introduction', in *Professions and Professionalization*, ed. J.A. Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3–15, quotation 4. For parallel approaches, see Hans Kairat, '*Professions*' oder '*Freie Berufe*'? *Professionales Handeln im sozialen Kontext* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1969).
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