

Citation style

Ferron, Alice: review of: Allyson M. Poska / Jane Couchman / Katherine A. McIver (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Farnham [u.a.]: Ashgate, 2013, in: *Reviews in History*, 2014, August, downloaded from recensio.net

First published: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1645>

 **Reviews**
in History

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With essays detailing everything from the experiences of old women to an examination of convent music, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* promises 'a comprehensive and authoritative state-of-the art review' of historiography pertaining to the lives of women between 1400 and 1800 (p. ii). The work is certainly authoritative as it features chapters by experts, such as Carole Levin and her student, Alicia Meyer, on 'Women and political power in early modern Europe' and Sheryl E. Reiss on secular women patrons of art. Yet the book is arguably not as comprehensive as it sets out to be, as it is limited in its geographic and linguistic focus and does not make enough connections between gender historiography and other historiographical trends, particularly within the first section on religion and the third section on cultural production.

The collection's true strength is the breadth of topics covered and its inclusion of articles written by different types of scholars of early modern women. Historians composed almost half of the volume's 25 chapters, with literary scholars, art historians, and musicologists writing the rest. This means that the editors achieve a truly inter-disciplinary approach to the topic, allowing the reader to walk away with a grasp of the relevant literature in history, art history, the history of science and medicine, literary studies, and music theory. Linda Phyllis Austern tells us how music was linked to pre-modern 'womanhood and the female body' (p. 509) just as Andrea Pearson and Sheila ffolliott explain that early modern female artists needed to walk a tight line between using their talents and following societal expectations of modesty. As the three editors point out, this multi-disciplinary perspective is useful for 'students ... as well as for scholars seeking information about the field for which they do not yet have specialized experience' (p. 1). The companion is split into four sections, a short introduction by the editors and three body sections on 'Religion,' 'Embodied lives,' and 'Cultural production.'

In the introduction, Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine McIver note that the contributors were biased towards English language scholarship because Anglo-American scholars were some of the first in the field (p. 1). Nevertheless they lay out a comparative methodology and argue that they made a targeted decision not to organize the volume around national histories or literatures, as the experiences of early modern women were not arranged around national identities or borders (p. 2). The proceeding sections highlight some key trends and comparisons in Western Europe, particularly in Italy, Spain, France, England, The Netherlands, and Germany. Eastern Europe, however, is largely missing from the companion. Lyndan Warner briefly considers the lives of non-Christian women in the Ottoman Empire in her essay on women and the law, ffolliott notes that Russia's Catherine the Great commissioned both Vigée LeBrun and Marie-Anne Collot, and Janine M. Lanza close reads a Russian primary source to describe housewives' tasks in her exploration of women and work. Interestingly, Diane Robins points out that there have been recent English translations of early modern works by Russian, Scandinavian, and Ukrainian women in her consideration of female intellectuals. Yet, she does not work with any of

these examples, preferring to instead focus on Spain, Italy, England, France, Germany, and the Low Countries. Readers interested in Western Women will find the companion to be a helpful resource, but readers more interested in the East will need to look elsewhere.

The first body section on 'Religion' contains thoughtful reflections on the impact of the Reformation on women's lives by Merry Wiesner-Hanks and Couchman as well as five articles on women in Catholic Europe. The pieces focusing on Catholics effectively consider the experiences of women living both inside and outside of convents and nunneries. The articles all demonstrate that women were active religious participants in an era of turmoil and reform. They also show that convents were porous or 'permeable ... and that many women maintained contact with the outside world' (p. 3). Convents are shown to be sites of cultural production with Kimberlyn Montford, for instance, demonstrating that nuns in Venice 'often participated in a wildly diverse program of music making and, just as often, passionately defended their right to do so' (p. 79). The scholars also hone in on some topics for further research, pointing to gaps in our understanding of thematic similarities across borders, change over time, the relationship between male and female monasticism, and how women's religious texts were mediated. Overall, this is an informative section, but one that draws a dichotomy between the experiences of Catholic and Protestant women. Couchman argues that Protestant 'Women felt the need to explain why Paul's injunction to silence did not apply in their case' and Alison Weber also discusses how 'ecclesiastics often cited the Apostle Paul to chastise [Catholic] women who attempted to teach doctrine,' leading these women to engage in similar defenses. (p. 150, p. 34) Comparisons between Protestant and Catholic women are thus left up to the reader to decipher as the essays exclusively focus on one denomination. Recent historiography by historians, such as Benjamin Kaplan and Alexandra Walsham, has demonstrated that lines between Catholics and Protestants were sometimes blurred, especially in the first half of the period. The editors and contributors carefully try to avoid demarcating strictly between nation states, but their approach to religion is rigidly divided.

The second section on 'Embodied lives' ranges from a consideration of maternity by Lianne McTavish to a discussion of 'continuity and rupture in Early Modern sexuality studies' by Katherine Crawford (p. 257). These articles successfully demonstrate that women's identities were not fixed but were rather derived from a number of factors and rights of passage, such as virginity, marriage, motherhood, and widowhood. Poska and Jutta Gisela Sperling, for instance, show us that marriage was not necessarily an extension of patriarchal values as it provided women opportunities for negotiation and even agency. Wives could contribute economically to the family, participate in household management, arrange and negotiate marriages for their children, and use their knowledge, any special skills, or natal familial connections to help their new families (p. 200). The authors also rightly show that women could exercise forms of authority outside of marriage. Poska points out that one fifth of women in London and Geneva never married (p. 196). These single women lived outside of

the patriarchal structure and 'formed relationships that transcended the frameworks of traditional families' (p. 199). Levin and Meyer look at power more directly and argue that an array of female monarchs and aristocrats were able to exercise both direct and indirect forms of political control. They note that they set out to also include 'ways lower class women gained some access to power' but offer far more nuanced historiographical analysis on women, such as Marguerite of Navarre and Elizabeth I, than ordinary women who engaged in popular forms of protest and political dissent (p. 342). As Levin and Meyer's focus reveals, class is an issue that comes up frequently in each chapter. Poska claims, 'Our understanding of early modern Europe might be quite different if scholars viewed the elites as exceptions and the rest of society as the norm' (p. 203). The contributors thus suggest a focus on class to expand and enrich the field.

The third section on 'Cultural production' considers women's contributions to art, art patronage, material culture, intellectual writing, the *querelle des femmes*, and musical performance and composition. The piece by Austern is especially fascinating, as she reveals that the study of women and music 'began only in the years around 1990' (p. 509). We have much to uncover about the experiences of female musicians and composers in early modern Europe. The chapters on women artists, women patrons of art, artistic images of women, and women as consumers of material culture show that women played an important role in pre-modern visual culture. Artistic scholarship again has only just begun to consider the roles and patronage of women, yet ffolliott, Reiss, Katherine A. McIver, and Andrea Pearson all show that this is a field that warrants further attention. Two of the other articles draw our focus to writing by and about women. Diana Robin highlights intellectual women, such as the Dutch Anna Maria van Shurman, whose defense of higher education for women struck a major chord with 17th-century intellectuals, poets, and educators. The pieces on women and literature successfully survey trends in well known, upper class, and/or educated women, but do not consider the contributions of women to popular literature, such as execution pamphlets and monstrous birth narratives. Robin claims 'Outside the charmed circle of the courts, few sixteenth-century Englishwomen succeeded in publishing their work either in print or by circulating their manuscripts' (p. 392). Yet the works of Joad Raymond and Pamela Allen Brown have shown that English women impacted early modern pamphleteering and jest culture even if they are not always listed as authors.

Overall, *The Companion* provides a truly inter-disciplinary review of historiography pertaining to the study of early modern women in Western Europe, which will be of interest to both students and scholars. The book's weaknesses and suggestions for further study point to simplifications and gaps within the field itself. *The Companion* is certainly thought-provoking, as it challenges the reader to contemplate the history of women and gender in new ways and provides further directions for both established and aspiring scholars to widen our understanding of women's lives and experiences.

