

Gisela Bock, *Frauen in der europäischen Geschichte. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2000, Verlag C. H. Beck, 393 pp., bibliogr., index of persons, series: Europa Bauen.

The literature dealing with the history of women and gender relations is extremely rich, running into thousands of items, but it suffers from a lack of syntheses with a wide territorial, comparative and chronological range. Attempts have been made to remedy the situation, to mention the valuable collective work edited by George Duby and Michelle Perrot, *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, vols. I-V, Paris 1991, and the excellent work by two authors, Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsler, *Eine eigene Geschichte: Frauen in Europa*, vols. I-II, Frankfurt am Main 1995¹. But unfortunately both publications ignore East Central Europe. The American scholar Merry E. Wiesner has depicted a wider geographical scene (*Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Mass. 1993) but her book has a narrower chronological range, focusing on the 16th–18th centuries.

We have now been offered another interesting book dealing with gender relations, a one-volume work written by a single author, Gisela Bock, a well known German researcher into the history of women and an active participant in many international congresses and conferences.

Gisela Bock is remarkably well acquainted with the rich international literature dealing with the gender issue and she moves freely in this field. For many years she conducted her own research on several questions of women's history and this has allowed her to see deeply into the problem. The essay form which she uses in her book (see *Preface* p. 5) makes it easier to read and it also offers bigger opportunity for reflection. Moreover, an essay does not demand such great precision and such rigid rules of presentation as a strictly scholarly text. It allows the author even to break chronological and thematic order, which means that it makes it possible to present the material in a more freely way. Such attitude has its good points but it also has some weaknesses. It is a pity that the parts concerning the Middle Ages and the 16th–18th centuries have, despite the promise in the title of the book, been excessively shortened and marginalised. Some important themes, e.g. the question of witch hunting, the influence of the Reformation and of early capitalism's development on the situation of women, the most interesting forms of women's active participation in the English Revolution have been completely ignored. The author, however, has dealt with women's participation in the French Revolution and its results for the development of the females' situation in France and other countries; she has also devoted more space to the fascinating personalities of Olimpia de Gouges (Chapter II, pp. 53–118) and Mary Wollstonecraft. Bock's interesting reflections on the 19th century and the Victorian era are preceded by a presentation of the question of female rights in the Napoleonic Code which became the foundation of European laws for many decades. The social and political aspects of the situation of women in the late 19th and 20th centuries, especially questions connected with the policy of the welfare state, the development of views on maternity and the women's role in upbringing of children (pp. 231–247) have been presented at length and with great competence; these questions have attracted Gisela Bock's attention for years² and she has also paid notice to the struggle for women's suffrage (pp. 177–216) as well as for women's equality in the family (pp. 133–163, 315–317). She is slightly less interested in women's work and working conditions, in male–female competition on the labour market and the feminisation of certain professions. Nevertheless she raises these questions, especially focusing on the influence which the two World Wars had in these spheres of women's life. But wars exerted an influence

¹ Kaari Utrio's book *Eevan Tyttäret (The Daughters of Eve)* published in Finland in 1994 and translated into many languages unfortunately does not meet scientific requirements.

² Cf. Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, ed., *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s*, London 1991.

on women's lives also much earlier and the presentation of this problem could have been enlarged by data from the Middle Ages and the early modern era (Thirty Years' War!).

Important fragments of the book concern women's lives in interwar years under dictatorial regimes and in totalitarian states (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union). The analysis of the complex situation during the Holocaust and in the genocide period (in particular pp. 259–314) is very penetrating and manysided, presenting women in both sides, in the roles of victims as well as tormentors. Her presentation proves once again that women's history is closely linked to the history of the whole society, that it is impossible to isolate females' lot from the complicated totality of socio-political phenomena of an epoch, that history must be viewed as an integral entity.

A serious gap in the book is that the author almost completely ignores women's role in culture, their role as customers and patrons of culture as well as creators. What we miss is the fundamental question of women's limited access to education up to the time when they were allowed to enter universities (end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century) and their growing role in artistic, literary and scientific work, which broadened with time the area of their activity, the possibility of self-fulfilment, of satisfying the needs of a higher range. These issues are probably as important as socio-political problems, as increased rights at home, in the family and in married life, as well as in public life (the right to vote). Single fragmentary remarks cannot replace a deep, comprehensive presentation³.

Despite some gaps and blanks, Gisela Bock's book supplies rich material for reflection. It is a pity that (like the majority of books by West European historians) it ignores East Central Europe (Poland, Bohemia, Hungary), though Russia and the Soviet Union have been considered. Is this because of the scarcity of literature in congress languages? Let us hope that the notion of Europe will be broadened in the future, if only in the result of integration in the European Union.

Maria Bogucka

³ There are some unfortunate mistakes in the book, e.g. Maria Curie-Skłodowska is presented as a Russian woman (p. 347).