

Michaela Antonín Malaníková

“The Golden Age” of female engagement in medieval urban economy? Lands of the Bohemian Crown in a comparative perspective

The second half of the 14th century is in the West European historiography traditionally labelled as the “Golden Age” of urban women’s work opportunities. In numerous case studies medievalists have attempted to prove that the quantitative and qualitative extensions of female labour opportunities should be seen as resulting from the plague epidemic. Due to the lack of manpower it in a certain way opened the labour market for townswomen. Their gradual extrusion of acquired positions in the 15th century has been, in this sense, ascribed to the socially based “recovery of normality”. The proposed paper will focus on the gender analysis of the labour market in Czech and Moravian medieval towns. We will make an attempt to demonstrate the following: although a similar scenario of previous extension and further restriction of women’s work opportunities can be observed in the local context, it could not be assigned to the plague epidemic that had only minor impacts in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Under these contexts, the explanation for the above depicted profound change in the urban economic structure, i.e. elimination of women’s work, has to be, therefore, searched somewhere else - primarily in the gradually increasing pressure exerted by urban guild structures. Using a comparative perspective, we will in broad strokes examine the nature of the above described processes, taking into account convergences as well divergences in the West and East Central European context.