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## Home and Work

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CHAPTER FIVE

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# Work and the Home

TANYA STABLER MILLER

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between work and the home is a rich perspective from which to examine gender, socio-economic status and historical change. While twenty-first-century information and communication technology has increasingly brought certain types of work into the home, effectively blurring the line between 'working time' and 'leisure time', the association of work and home, specifically the home as a site of work, was a marker of the pre-industrial age. The rise of industrial capitalism, historians have argued, effectively separated waged labour from the home, thus redefining the meaning of work in ways that still shape modern assumptions about productive labour. Yet, the image of the medieval home workshop governed by a master artisan or craftsman, an image informed by nineteenth-century discourses, has obscured the diversity of medieval work and the varied ways in which women and men contributed to the household economy. In the early twentieth century, feminist historians interested in the history of women's work identified industrialization and capitalism as the chief culprits in the denigration of women's work (Clark 1982). Before the industrial revolution, the argument goes, work took place in the home, with both husband and wife performing complementary tasks in the interest of the family-based economy. By separating work from the home, industrialization introduced individual wages, factory hours and specific labour requirements. Expected to remain in the domestic sphere, most women could not compete in this new system (Clark 1982: 290–338). Although recent work by medieval and modern feminist historians has done much to challenge and correct these arguments, examining the relationship between work and the

home still provides historians with fruitful ways to approach the history of women's work and complicate what we mean by complementary tasks (Hanawalt 1999). Clearly, moreover, understandings of this relationship frequently reflect modern priorities and assumptions about work and gender.

An analysis of work and the home also brings to light the ways in which the rise of medieval cities, with their guilds, work regulations and wages, shaped and reshaped the meaning of work by privileging waged labour and profit-oriented ventures over domestic work. Although all members of the household – parents, children, and household servants or apprentices – contributed to its sustenance, medieval officials tended to identify only the names and official occupations of the head of the household – usually male – thereby occluding the productive labour of wives, apprentices and dependent children (Beattie 2000). Tax and guild records, moreover, fail to account for the diversity of household labour, identifying only certain types of labour and ignoring work that fell outside the guild structure. Although family members, particularly women, laboured in the home – cooking, cleaning, spinning wool, brewing ale and caring for family members – unwaged work, then as today, frequently escaped the attention of observers. Documentary sources also tend to record the work identities of people at the higher end of the socio-economic scale, further privileging certain occupations over others. The relationship between work and home was far different for a poor-wage worker, a woman doing piecework for little pay, or a merchant managing the work of others while selling finished goods from his home or in the marketplace.

The relationship between work and the home also varied across regions, between urban and rural settings, and over the course of the development cycle. As Tovah Bender in this volume discusses, scholars have generally characterized north-western European households as composed of partners who married late (about the mid- to late-twenties), were of similar age, and had few children. By contrast, the 'Mediterranean' or 'southern European' family was typically composed of older men married to younger women (Hajnal 1965). Although recent research has complicated this picture, these models point to differing household composition and labour relations. In north-western European families, for instance, women from propertied families tended to have access to training opportunities and capital, allowing them to participate in the urban economies of northern cities (De Moor and Van Zanden 2010). Scholars working on Italian cities, by contrast, have generally found that few women participated in the labour market. However, these studies have tended to focus on elite Italian families, thereby overlooking the preponderance of non-elite women performing low-paid, semi-skilled work (Chojnacka 2001).

Life cycle, too, shaped the sort of labour that was done within and in support of the home. The work experiences of young, unmarried people differed significantly from older, married people. Families with young children organized

household labour differently from elderly couples, single mothers and widows. For women in particular, life cycle determined access to certain types of labour, with singlewomen generally having fewer opportunities to engage in high-status labour than the widows of propertied artisans and merchants (Howell 1986; Bennett 1996).

Clearly, the relationship between work and the home varied significantly across time and space, making broad generalizations impossible. Yet, how work within the home was characterized, valued and documented reflects assumptions about gender and socio-economic status as well as the realities of occupational structure and the economy.

## WORK AND THE RURAL HOME

In the pre-modern world, the family was generally the basic unit of production, although as we will see, cities attracted a large number of single people, leading in some cases, as Bender explains in this volume, to households composed of non-relatives. In the early medieval period, however, the cities of Latin Europe, particularly in the north, had shrunk or disappeared. 'Those who work' were the serfs or free peasants who laboured on rural estates and monastic lands. Some estates had women's workshops, or *gynaecae*, in which women engaged in cloth production (Herlihy 1990: 77–90).

Agriculture supported most medieval households. All family members, male and female, young and old, contributed to the household's survival by participating in agricultural labour outside and around the home, as well as domestic tasks within, particularly in the realms of food and clothing production. Peasant families provided for their own needs by brewing ale, spinning wool and weaving textiles for home use. Such labour could supplement the family income, too. In thousands of peasant homes, for example, women brewed ale for domestic consumption as well as for sale. In medieval England, almost half of rural households brewed ale for profit, with many women selling ale to their neighbours for a profit on a regular basis (Bennett 1996: 14–36). Some rural households had the opportunity to specialize in crafts that could be accommodated in the home, particularly spinning, fulling, dyeing and weaving textiles. Thus, peasant households did not necessarily bake their own bread or make their own clothes, but rather bought them from locals who specialized in these crafts (Hanawalt 1986: 113). Rural villagers could also practise crafts such as smithing or carpentry in addition to working their lands, or seek waged labour on others' estates to supplement the family income. This bucolic image of peasant families working in and around their own homes, however, ignores the fact that for many families, the home was mainly a place to eat and sleep. Members of poor rural families – both male and female – by necessity found work wherever they could as wage labourers outside their home (Goldberg 2001: 215).

The relationship between work and the rural home reveals ways in which space was gendered. While historians have debated the extent to which medieval people organized space into public and private sectors, with its concomitant assumptions about male and female domains, such divisions have guided thinking about work and spaces within the home, as Eva Svensson shows us in this volume. In rural contexts, while women tended to work at tasks associated with the household, such as cleaning, cooking, brewing, spinning and carding wool, they also worked in the fields, weeding, reaping and threshing. Male family members tended to work primarily outdoors, suggesting that some types of labour – particularly ploughing – were gendered. Women might work as retailers in the home but they could also be found in the marketplaces. Women could also supplement the family economy in a quintessentially domestic manner by taking in lodgers (McIntosh 2005; Whittle 2013) (Figure 5.1).

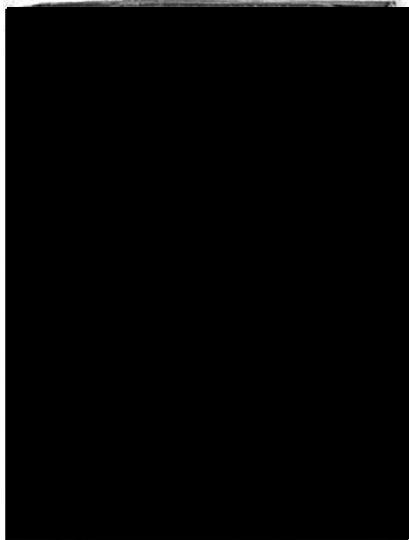


FIGURE 5.1: Winter Work from *The Golf Book* (Bruges, c. 1540). London, British Library, Add. Ms. 24098, fol. 18v. © The British Library Board

The medieval English 'Ballad of the Tyrannical Husband', a fifteenth-century text about peasant life, portrays the gendered division of labour thought to be typical of rural households. In the ballad, the husband, exhausted from working the fields all day, comes home to find that his wife has yet to prepare dinner.

Then he began to chide and said, 'You're an evil shit!  
 You should go all day to plough with me,  
 To walk in the clods that are wet and muddy,  
 Then you will know what it is to be a ploughman.'  
 The goodwife then swore, and thus did she say,  
 'I have more to do than I may do;  
 And if you were to follow me for one day,  
 By my head, you would be weary of your work.'

The wife goes on to describe her daily duties, which she executes while sleep-deprived from caring for the children throughout the night.

After I lie awake all night with our child,  
 I get up in the morning and find our house a mess.  
 Then I milk our cows and turn them out in the field,  
 While you are still sound asleep, Christ protect me!  
 Then I make the butter later in the day;  
 After that I make cheese – which is not as easy as you think.  
 Then while our children are crying and must be got up,  
 Yet you will blame me if any of our goods are missing.  
 When I have done all this, yet there is even more still to do:  
 I feed our chickens otherwise or else they will be scrawny;  
 Our hens, our capons and our ducks are all together,  
 Yet I tend to our goslings that go to the green.  
 I bake, I brew, or else it will not be well;  
 I beat and swingle the flax, as I have always done,  
 As I trample it, I warm up and cool down,  
 I tease wool and card it and spin it on the wheel.

—Wright and Haliwell 1841–3<sup>1</sup>

As the 'ballad' suggests, gender influenced the division of labour, with women taking responsibility for most domestic tasks. Nevertheless, in reality the survival of the household unit was paramount, making a strict separation of spheres impossible to maintain. Women sheared sheep, herded cattle, took grain to the mill, and sold produce in the marketplaces (Figure 5.2). Men in peasant households, for their part, engaged in domestic tasks during the winter months alongside their wives. Childcare responsibilities, likewise, did not



FIGURE 5.2: Pig Slaughtering from *The Golf Book* (Bruges, c. 1540). London, British Library, Add. Ms. 24098, fol. 29. © Art Media / Print Collector / Getty Images.

necessarily keep women exclusively in and around the home. Older children took care of younger siblings, freeing their mothers for all sorts of labour, including waged labour on other people's lands.

Children also worked in and around the rural home, taking part in weeding, gathering and herding. Children learned agricultural and domestic work from their parents, identifying with their father's or mother's labour. Teenagers tended to live at home with their parents but may have occasionally helped out on the lands of their neighbours if their own household had more help than it needed (Hanawalt 1986: 167). Following the urban revival of the eleventh century, labourers from the countryside frequently migrated to the cities in search of work and opportunity, helping to offset the high mortality rates associated with urban life. In the years of labour shortages after the Black

Death, teenagers and young people worked as servants and labourers in and around the homes of others, engaging in what scholars have termed 'life-cycle service' (Goldberg 1992).

## WORK AND THE URBAN HOME

The turn of the millennium brought significant changes to western Europe. A decline in warfare, increased agricultural production, a demographic boom, and the revival of trade and commerce fuelled an urban revival, particularly in northern Europe (Nicholas 2003). Urban growth was sustained largely by migration, as men and women migrated to towns in search of work opportunities. Well trained in various domestic skills, such as brewing, baking and weaving, migrants set up households in the developing towns and supported the growing markets and fairs as contributors and consumers for new industries in food production, textiles and, eventually, luxury commodities. The invention of the treadle-operated horizontal loom significantly expanded the production of heavy woollen cloth, transporting the textile industry from the countryside into the developing cities. Cities made it possible for spinners, warpers, weavers and dyers to work and reside in close proximity, while providing cloth merchants access to markets (Munro 1988; Hunt and Murray 1999) (Figure 5.3).

As in rural contexts, the family remained the basic unit of production in the cities of western Europe. Many urban households engaged in a range of formal and informal occupations, with family members of both sexes and all ages expected to contribute to the subsistence of the household. Much of the work that took place in urban homes was informal and unorganized, arising out the need to meet the household's basic needs (food and clothing). Urban families with enough real estate grew some of their own food and kept animals, much like their rural counterparts, selling whatever surpluses they had in the markets or out of the home. Thus, one of the most common areas of labour, but hard to identify and classify, was victualling. Urban households, particularly its female members, sold surplus food and drink on a casual, ad hoc basis. Clearly related to their domestic duties, women sold fish, produce and ale (Swanson 1989).

Urban growth expanded the work opportunities available to city dwellers; specialized tasks, moreover, reshaped the home physically. As cities became increasingly crowded and urban markets more consistently supplied, families relied on professional bakers and butchers, as well as produce imported into the city marketplaces. Food production on a more formal basis, for example baking and butchering, required modifications to the home, and therefore a degree of capital investment. Bakers needed special ovens, separate from living spaces. Butchers, too, ideally lived near water or areas accommodated with ways to remove or dispose of offal. Fulling and inn-keeping required additional rooms



FIGURE 5.3: Woman Weaving on a Horizontal Loom from *The Egerton Genesis Picture Book* (English, third quarter of the fifteenth cent.) London, British Library, Egerton Ms. 1894, fol. 2v. © The British Library Board

or outbuildings. Tanners, who had to endure noxious conditions, often had outbuildings in which to work. Urban craftspeople who sold cloth, shoes or luxury commodities out of the home needed to ensure proper lighting for work and retail purposes. These needs shaped the design of urban homes, which were often set at right angles to the street, with the shop on the ground floor and living quarters above. Most workshops opened onto the streets for retail purposes. The statutes for the Parisian makers of leather buckles required masters to maintain their shops on the street 'by an open window or open entry door' (Roux 2009: 121). Work needs dictated the size of the windows (large to afford plenty of light as well as room to display inventory) and architectural features such as shutters and awnings. The home workshops of well-to-do

craftspeople often featured shutters that hinged at the top and bottom. The lower shutter could serve as a counter, or sale window, by adding legs for support. The sale window was a convenient space from which to display goods and required additional features such as awnings to protect inventory and provide an inviting space for passers-by. The shutters could be closed at the end of the working day for security. Concerns over keeping inventory secure led to some home workshops being fitted with narrow doorways to control traffic in and out of the shop (Clarke 2000: 64). The confluence of work and domestic space is apparent in the fact that many urban residents used the workshop as a living space in the evenings (Figure 5.4).

The growth of cities and the expansion of trade led to increasing diversification of labour as well as efforts to organize and protect trades,

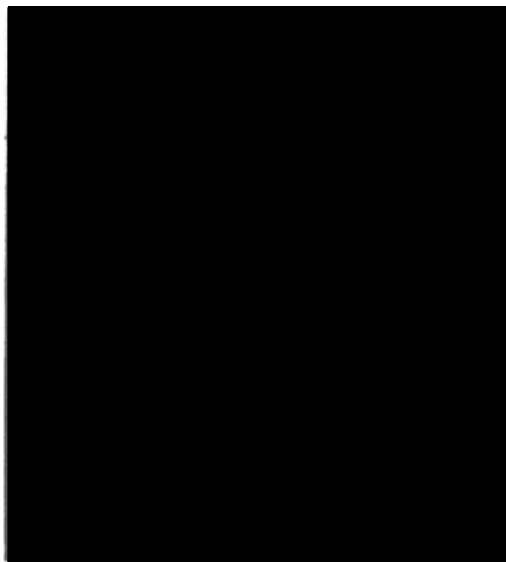


FIGURE 5.4: Silk Shop from *Tacuinum Sanitatis* (Italian, 1390–1400) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France Nouvelle acquisition latine 1673 fol. 95r. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

occupations and workers through associations called guilds. Guilds were self-regulating social, religious and economic associations of merchants, artisans, or other professionals. Guilds set quality standards, work conditions and training requirements for their members, in many cases stipulating specific requirements for entry, including periods of apprenticeship training (Figure 5.5). More importantly, perhaps, guilds provided crucial support networks for urban men and women, allowing newly arrived migrants to forge alliances, build reputations and create relationships of mutual trust. Such relationships were crucial for securing credit, raw materials, tools and hired labour in the pre-modern city (Rosser 2015). While there existed considerable variations among the guilds – some being more economically important and thereby more exclusive and

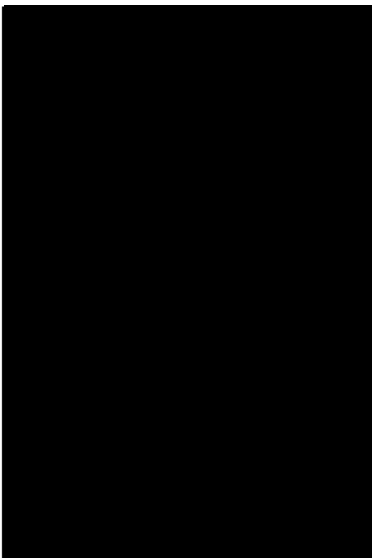


FIGURE 5.5: Market Scene from *Livre du gouvernement des princes* by Gilles Romain (Barcelona, 1480-1500). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arsenal 5062, fol. 149v. © World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

politically powerful than others – most developed hierarchies of apprentices, journeymen and masters. Apprentices were usually young boys (but sometimes girls) who learned the craft or trade in the home of a master (or mistress). Masters and mistresses taught their own children the family trade with the expectation of keeping the business in the family. Masters could also take in children from other families, who signed contracts and paid fees to place their children in another household to learn a trade. Guild regulations specified the number of apprentices a master could support in addition to their own children. Apprentices who completed their training often became journeymen – or labourers paid by the day (*journalée*) – working in the homes of masters. Journeymen could sometimes save enough to become masters; however this was less feasible in some of the more exclusive guilds, which privileged the sons of current masters. As full members of the guild, masters set the rules for their own profession and enjoyed political power. As masters, they owned their own home workshop and dominated its members (both kin and non-kin), exemplifying the relationship between home and work in the Middle Ages (Epstein 1991).<sup>2</sup> Still, there could be considerable fluidity among and interaction between these groups, muddying the traditional image of a rigid, hierarchical guild structure (Rosser 2015: 166–83).

Guilds gradually took increasingly greater control over the rhythms of work in the medieval urban home. Guild statutes and the liturgical calendar regulated the hours and days of work. Workers could not labour after dark, or on holy days. These rules ostensibly protected quality, respected the liturgical feast days, and avoided unfair competition among masters. Bells signalled the start and end of the working day, following the liturgical hours of the day (Le Goff 1980). Some guilds specified how much labour workers could perform in the winter as compared with the summer when days were longer (Stabel 2014: 9–12). Although guilds generally required members to stop work on feast days, the needs of the industry sometimes compelled urban authorities to make exceptions. Members of more powerful guilds, moreover, could afford to bend the rules, thus having more control over the timing of work in their own homes. Workers who commenced before the bell tolled to signal the start of the working day received heavy fines, while masters could dock their journeymen's pay for showing up at their work stations after the bells had tolled (Stabel 2014: 15). Bells also dictated when journeymen started and ended their work days in their masters' homes.

Many of the most powerful medieval guilds were those related to the textile industries. As we have seen, wool working had long been practised in peasant households and, in more formal settings, on rural estates in 'women's workshops' or *gymaecia*. Technological advancements, such as the adoption of the treadle-operated horizontal loom, mentioned above (and later the broadloom, which, being twice as broad as the horizontal loom, increased production significantly) and the concomitant organization of the industry led

to the rise of specialist weavers. The urban take-off of the twelfth century, in fact, was accelerated by the growth of the cloth industry, with Europe's most important urban centres in Italy and the Low Countries centred on the manufacture and trade of wool-based textiles. In many northern European cities, the wool industry employed over half of the population and weaving became, for many households, a full-time occupation in which all family members were engaged (Stabel 2015: 34) (Figure 5.6).

As the textile industry became increasingly lucrative and export-oriented, it came to be organized by weaver-draper entrepreneurs. The drapers (or *lanaivoli*,

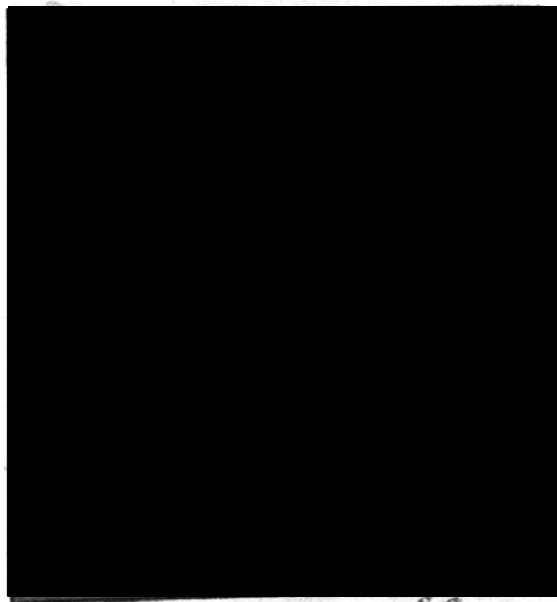


FIGURE 5.6: Cloth Dyeing from *De proprietatibus rerum* translated into French by Jean Corbechon (French, 1482). London, British Library, Royal Ms. 15 e iii, fol. 269. © Universal History Archive / Getty Images.

as they were called in Italy) organized domestic labour in what is known as the 'putting out' system. In this system, the draper purchased the wool and then 'put out' material in the various production stages, all of which took place in homes. The draper might have the wool sorted and beaten initially in his or her own home workshop before putting out the wool to other specialist workers, such as spinners and warpers, whom the draper paid by the piece. These pieceworkers might be urban or rural labourers seeking to diversify and supplement their household income. In most cases, pieceworkers were poorly paid and female (Munro 1988). Their work, moreover, fell outside the guild structure. Nevertheless, mutual interests and a common economic setting led to considerable fluidity and cooperation among related crafts that cut across formal distinctions of work status, as well as the walls of individual home workshops (Rosser 2015: 164–5).

Although wool spinners and warpers were essential to the wool industry, their work goes largely unmentioned in the extant sources. In medieval Paris, for example, the city's estimated 450 wool weavers would have required at least 1,700 wool spinners to supply them with spun wool. Tax records from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, however, list an average of only seven wool spinners per year, all of whom were women. The small number of taxed wool spinners indicates that the vast majority of Paris's wool spinners were either married, making them invisible to the tax assessors, or simply too poor to pay the minimum tax. Drapers also took advantage of cheap rural labour, putting out wool to workers in the countryside (Belhoste 2000).

The draper usually employed other weavers – journeymen or apprentices – to work the looms in his shop. Other members of the household, particularly wives, worked in related tasks or in the retail side of the home workshop. Women's position as wives and partners in the home, however, meant that some women, particularly those from elite families, were able to work as drapers alongside, or in place of, their husbands. These women likely broke into this industry through their position in the family (Farmer 2010). One striking example from thirteenth-century Paris is Ysabel of Trembley, who came from a prominent alderman family and had been married to a wealthy draper, Jean Brichard. Her husband's draper business was notably successful; Jean supplied fine wool cloth to the Count of Artois. After Jean's death, Ysabel took over the family business. Her success is evident in royal account books from the early fourteenth century, which reveal that Ysabel supplied the French royal household with almost all of its luxury woollens (Farmer 2010: 94).

Drapers also utilized the labour of fullers. Fulling – the beating of woven wool cloth to soften it – required investment in vats and access to water-powered fulling mills. The necessity of capital investment and proximity to water certainly affected the household. Tax records suggest that fulling was a male-dominated task. Female fullers are not found in the tax registers for



medieval Paris, although female family members were recognized as essential for the survival of the business. Guild regulations suggest that fullers could train their children and nephews in the craft and that widows could continue this training if necessary. One statute from the fullers' guild of Paris stated:

If a master dies, his wife may practice the craft and keep the apprentices, freely, in the manner described above; and with the two apprentices she may teach the children of her husband and her brothers born of a legal marriage.

If a widowed woman practicing the aforesaid craft of fullers marries a man who is not a member of the aforesaid crafts, she may not practice the craft; and if she marries a man who is a member of the craft, even if he is an apprentice or a worker, she may practice it freely.

—Amt 2013: 196

### WORK AND INHERITANCE

Clearly, the preservation of the family business was in the interest of all members of the household. While Italian families typically relied on training and working closely with members of the patrilineal line (brothers, sons and nephews), northwestern European families seem to have privileged the nuclear family centred on the conjugal pair. Guild regulations and property laws in northern European cities generally reflect this preference, allowing male and female children to inherit family property and providing widows with extensive rights over the family property, including the workshop. Among elite Italian families, however, women did not tend to manage family property after their husband's death (Herlihy and Klapisich-Zuber 1988).

Fiscal and guild records from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Paris show that women often maintained control over their husband's workshop after their death, suggesting that the relationship between home and work made widows important in the continuation of the family business. Indeed, their work in the home meant that widows were generally perceived as competent to manage workshops in their own right, not as placeholders for their children. Tracking households across the tax rolls compiled during the reign of Philip the Fair (r. 1285–1314) shows remarkable stability of family businesses, even upon the death of male householders. Although most of the households listed in the tax registers are represented by the male head, in dozens of cases widows are listed as head of a household composed of dependent children who, in subsequent years, leave the household to start their own workshops. The tax rolls clearly show that widows continued to manage the original workshop in their own right. In 1297, for example, a woman named Marie of Dreues took over management of the home workshop after the death of her husband. While her son Guillot was

listed alongside her between 1297 and 1300, by 1313 Marie was taxed alone, suggesting that her son had left the household to establish his own business elsewhere (Archer 1995: 167). Similarly, the tax rolls list Robert d'Anvers as the head of his family business in 1297; in 1298, his widow Richeut is listed along with a son. By 1300, Richeut is listed alone as the head of the family business. Guild regulations supported these transitions, demonstrating the ways in which the relationship between home and work privileged the conjugal pair.

Similar patterns of inheritance are evident in other northwestern European cities, such as Leiden and Cologne, where women frequently carried on the family business after their husband's death (Howell 1986). As in Paris, the desire to preserve the home workshop trumped gender. Widows maintained the masterships of their deceased husbands. Guild regulations implicitly encouraged widows to remain single or remarry within the guild. In theory, widows could maintain masterships in their own right if they remarried outside the guild, so long as they satisfied the guild requirements. Regulations for the linen weavers' guild in medieval Leiden, for example, state:

[S]hould a master of the aforesaid trade die, his widow may maintain the mastership as long as she likes without paying new fees; however, should she remarry with a man who is not a master (in this trade), she is obligated to satisfy the requirements of the brotherhood and all else required of those setting up masterships anew.

—Howell 1986: 74

### WOMEN, WORK AND THE HOME

In spite of the household's function as an economic unit, documentary sources, such as fiscal or legal records, tend to identify only the male household heads, while ignoring other members of the household and obscuring the fact that many urban households were multi-occupational. For these reasons, it is difficult to know precisely how female members contributed to the household economy. The tax rolls of Philip the Fair, for instance, only record the names of female taxpayers in the absence of a male head. Thus, married women, even if occupied in a profession, remain invisible. Inventories reveal that the medieval home was the site of many different types of work, not just the official occupation by which the (typically) male head was identified. Descriptions of brewing equipment and cloth-making tools in households headed by men in different trades suggest that someone in the household, likely wives, brewed or engaged in cloth making (Goldberg 2001: 63). Then as now, the domestic labour in which most women engaged, because unpaid, is not acknowledged in the extant records.

Fiscal and guild records sometimes reveal that women were members of craft guilds that were different, albeit related to those of their husbands. Cologne was one of three medieval cities with guilds that were exclusively female. The most important of these guilds was the silk makers. Membership in the guild, however, seems to have been restricted to women married to men in a related trade, typically men who were silk merchants. The silk mistresses' position in the home, which was often the site of a family business in silk merchandising, was what gave them access to lucrative work (Howell 1986: 124–60). The silkwomen of London, although never organized into a formal guild, were also usually the wives of members of the city's mercantile class (Dale 1933).

Indeed, women's ability to maintain control over workshops was the result of the confluence of home and work that characterized medieval labour. Women's position in the household and their responsibility for domestic labour, particularly household management, gave them recognition as their husbands' partners and the key to the preservation of the family business. Indeed, many historians have argued that women's access to what is termed 'high status labour' is contingent upon their place in the home, drawing influential conclusions about the effects of capitalism on the household, the family, and women's productive labour. In her pioneering book *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919), Alice Clark connected the decline of the family economy with the rise of capitalism, which, she contended, separated work from the home. Women's responsibilities in the home – particularly caring for children, cooking meals and cleaning – shut them out of the world of compensated labour, a shift that dramatically affected women's access to most types of work. Women, or course, continued to work in the home well beyond the rise of industrial capitalism, labouring at a range of domestic tasks within the domestic sphere. Domestic work, however, came to be regarded as 'not work', a perception that lingers into the modern age.

Other historians have argued that capitalism and industrialization had little effect on the status of women's work (Bennett 1996). At every stage in history, women working both within and outside the home laboured in tasks that were considered low skill and thus poorly compensated. Judith Bennett's classic study on female brewers in medieval England demonstrated that brewing had traditionally been the preserve of women, since it was easily accommodated in the home and carried out in the course of a woman's other daily domestic duties. As in the case of weaving, however, the introduction of new processes led to the commercialization of the industry. Ale soured quickly and thus was brewed in small batches (and thereby well suited to women's daily domestic routines). As brewers added hops, an import from Eastern Europe, they found the new brew, identified as beer, lasted longer. Over time, as brewing required capital investment and had profit potential, unattached women experienced greater difficult competing. Wives might still help their beer-brewing husbands

as retailers and shop aids, but brewing was no longer 'women's work' once it became profitable (Bennett 1996: 145–57).

Clearly, the relationship of home and work was what allowed women to participate in certain types of productive labour. Although women can be found in just about every profession practised in medieval Paris, most of the professions to which Parisian women had access were only open through the family (Frappier-Bigras 1989). Singlewomen or widows unable to draw on the wealth of the conjugal household or continue their deceased husband's profession found these crafts closed to them. The wool weavers' guild, for example, admitted no women save for the widows of masters. The tax rolls show that most female wool workers were concentrated in the lowest-paid crafts in this industry, such as wool spinning, a task that required minimal tools, little technical knowledge, and was easily accommodated to domestic responsibilities. Regulations for other Parisian guilds were hostile to unmarried women. The statutes for the strap makers' guild, for example, state that wives could not learn the craft unless they themselves were the daughters of strap makers. Daughters, moreover, were not permitted to enter the guild independently and could practise the craft only if they married within the guild.

### BEGUINE HOUSEHOLDS: THE WORK OF SINGLEWOMEN IN THE HOME

There were sectors of the medieval urban economy in which women could achieve high labour status apart from the family. As the seat of the French monarchy and part-time home to just about every important French noble and ecclesiastic, Paris had a robust luxury market. Thus, royal and aristocratic interests were best served by organizing and supervising the production of luxury goods. Consequently, the silk industry, which was just taking off in Paris in the latter half of the thirteenth century, came under guild organization as early as the 1260s. In fact, by the 1290s, there were seven guilds related to the production of luxury-silk commodities. Five of them were exclusively female in membership and the other two were dominated by women (Archer 1995: 111–17; Farmer 2002: 141–2).

Paris was also a city with a significant population of singlewomen. Historical demographers have argued that in northern cities where work opportunities were abundant, women tended to marry late or not at all, suggesting that in times and places where women had control over their own resources, they might *choose* to remain single (Schmidt, Devos and Blondé 2015; Stabel 2015). Indeed, the work opportunities, inheritance practices and cultural ideals of northern medieval cities allowed for at least the possibility of choice (Stabel 2015). These factors were important in supporting what is known as the beguine movement. Beguines were women who took personal, informal vows

of chastity and pursued a life of contemplative prayer and active service in the world. In organizing their days around prayers, beguines lived like nuns, although they were never officially recognized as an official, papally approved religious order. They did not follow an approved rule, they did not live in convents, and they did not give up their personal property. In fact, beguines were free to abandon their religious vocation at any time since it was not enforced by any binding monastic vow. In medieval Paris, many beguines congregated together in households, supporting themselves by their own labour. Tax registers attest to the ubiquity of the beguine household. These records also show that almost all of these women worked in the silk industry.

A particularly specialized and lucrative textile industry, silk was also carried out in home workshops. Spinners, reelers, dyers, warpers and weavers worked out of their homes rather than in a central workshop. As in the wool industry, pieceworkers laboured using materials supplied by merchant entrepreneurs called *merciers*. Considering the high cost of raw silk, the *merciers* dealt with their workers directly and closely supervised all stages of the process. *Merciers* dispatched shop boys to deliver skeins of silk to the dyers and weft thread to the weavers (De Roover 1950: 2915).

*Merciers* came to dominate the silk industry by the late thirteenth century, organizing silk workers and marketing finished silk cloth and accessories at Les Halles or other venues. One of the four most influential and politically powerful corporations in medieval Paris, the *merciers* nevertheless permitted women to attain the status of mistress of the craft (Bove 2004). Many *merciers* rose to prominence supplying high-value luxury cloth to aristocratic households. *Merciers* with more modest clients also dealt with silk, albeit less prestigious items such as narrow ware and mercy goods.

The overlap between work identity and religious identity suggests that the silk industry was particularly accommodating to women who wished to live lives of chastity, prayer and active service, while remaining in their homes rather than moving into an official beguine community (or *beguinage*). Well-remunerated, socially valued and culturally associated with women, silk work facilitated the creation of female-centred household production units, which provided women with resources, support systems and a work identity independent of the conjugal household. Guild regulations suggest that silk technology passed among women, specifically female masters and apprentices, while fiscal and property records offer glimpses into home workshops composed of women who trained and worked with one another (Miller 2014: 59–80).

These households and networks were important sources of support. Coming together for the purposes of prayer, work and mutual support, Parisian beguines could support themselves and their households through earnings from silk

work, an industry that facilitated the creation of strong ties among lay religious women of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and broadened their social networks. Indeed, silk work was such an important facilitator of beguine households that the vast majority (over 90%) of Parisian beguines for whom an occupation is known performed tasks related to the production and marketing of silk and luxury items made from silk (Miller 2014: 65–7).

The Parisian tax rolls reveal that several beguines worked as *merciers*, managing home silk workshops composed of other lay religious women. While much about these households is obscured by the nature of the sources, it is clear that silk served to bind these women together in supportive and stable households. The workshops of the beguine *merciers* Isabelle of Cambrai and Marguerite of Troyes, for example, located on the rue de Quicampoix, were at the centre of a cluster of beguine silk workers appearing in the tax assessments between 1296 and 1300. With the help of these beguine employees, Isabelle ran a modestly successful workshop that produced small silk goods, such as kerchiefs (Miller 2014: 172). The rolls indicate that she continued to run a home workshop with other beguines at least until 1300. Although it is impossible to know how these households were organized or even how many women came and went during the four years these households turn up in the records, it is clear that Isabelle and her companions trained and employed other beguines in their workshops, perhaps even helping to set up other women in the silk business (Figure 5.7). These workshops should change scholarly views on women, work, and the household production unit, which scholars – as we have seen – traditionally associate with the family. Rather than envision a household in which women contributed as wives, widows or daughters of masters, we might imagine a community organized and sustained by women who trained, worked and prayed together.

## HOME, WORK AND MASCULINITY

Still, in most medieval cities and for most professions, marriage and the establishment of an independent home workshop went hand in hand. Indeed, some guilds dictated that only masters of the craft were allowed to marry and set up a workshop (Goldberg 2001: 62). Masters defined themselves against other men, locating their authority in their ownership of a workshop, membership in a guild, and ability to control their subordinates. Many of the craft statutes for medieval Paris required masters to have hearth and home to take care of their family members and apprentices (Roux 2009: 180).

The formalization of crafts into guilds articulated a hierarchy of labour – apprentices, journeymen and masters – that not only marginalized certain types of domestic labour (work generally associated with women) but defined masculinity by the possession of a workshop, economic success and civic authority (Riddy



FIGURE 5.7: Gaia, Caecilia, or Tanaquil Spinning, Combing, and Weaving from anonymous French translation of *Des cleres et nobles* (French, first quarter of the fifteenth cent.) London, British Library, Royal 20 CV fol. 75. © The British Library Board

2003: 213). To be a master was to possess a home, independence and authority, but over the course of the Middle Ages it became more and more difficult for men to become masters. The ideal progression from apprentice to journeyman to master was increasingly divorced from reality as master status became hereditary and expensive. Thus, some men spent their entire working lives as journeymen working in the homes of their employers (Karras 2003: 129–37). To work in one's own home, then, distinguished masters from men of journeyman status. Indeed, by the later Middle Ages, managing one's own home workshop came to be regarded as a marker of status. Day labourers, for their part, increasingly lived in rented rooms, sometimes above or near their masters, conveying through their living spaces their subservient labour status (Goldberg 1999).

Work rules also contributed to the separation of the worker from the household, at least conceptually. The craft associations of medieval Leiden, for example, required workers to serve longer apprenticeships and to work as free journeymen before they could be designated as masters (Howell 1986: 91). As labourers came to be subject to regular schedules and strict deadlines, moreover, hierarchies within the family production unit became increasingly pronounced (Stabel 2014: 39–40). Some craft associations began to interfere with the traditional divisions of labour within the medieval home workshop, forbidding wives to manage their husbands' accounts or perform even the most menial tasks within the workshop (Howell 1986: 91).

As heads of their own households, masters supervised and controlled the behaviour of residents, including apprentices and servants, as well as day labourers or journeymen. Many urban and rural homes employed live-in servants. In exchange for their labour, servants received room and board, as well as a small wage. In rural households, servants performed whatever labour needed to be done, whether agricultural or domestic. Urban households typically employed servants to help out in the shop or to perform domestic tasks. Elites employed servants to manage the day-to-day tasks – cooking, cleaning and laundry – of the household. Cognisant of the prevalence of servants, guilds usually tried to distinguish between the work and training of apprentices and servants and journeymen. Apprentice contracts, for example, routinely forbade masters from using their apprentices as servants.

In northwestern Europe, where men and women tended to marry relatively later than their southern European counterparts, young people often worked as servants before marriage (Smith 1992; Goldberg 1992). While many women and men engaged in 'life-cycle servitude' that ended when they married and set up their own independent households, many women at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder laboured in the homes of others for their entire lives (Farmer 2002: 27–30). In southern Europe, typically only poor women worked as servants before marriage; women from more prosperous families tended to marry young, moving straight from their father's home to their new husband's home (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 202). Some of these women might later become domestic servants in their widowhood. Thus, while many people engaged in life-cycle servitude as young people, others worked in another's household as widows or older singlewomen. Despite the hierarchical and economic frame of these relationships, servants, as members of the household for long periods of time, sometimes developed close affective bonds with their employers (Farmer 1998: 362).

Domestic servants were expected to be under the control of the master and mistress of the household in which they laboured. Moralists warned elite householders that they were responsible for ensuring that their male and female servants avoided engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage (Farmer 2002:

48, 113). Although these same moralists viewed female servants as a greater threat to the household -- characterizing female servants as especially wanton and lustful -- in reality female servants were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by their masters (Hanawalt 1993: 187–8).

Some wealthy families owned slaves, bringing unfree labour into their homes. Although some historians have argued that slavery had declined, and in some regions died out, after the collapse of the Roman Empire, western Christian traders continued to supply enslaved peoples to eastern markets.<sup>3</sup> In Sweden, for example, slaveholding persisted into the fourteenth century (Karras 1998). Although expansion of long-distance trade, as well as Frankish and Venetian conquests in the Byzantine Empire in the thirteenth century, indeed led to a revival of the slave trade in Latin Europe, the enslavement of women was remarkably consistent throughout the Middle Ages, calling into question arguments for decline (Stuard 1995; McKee 1998). Because maintaining enslaved people was so expensive, typically only wealthy families engaged in slave owning. There is abundant evidence, for example, of a demand for enslaved women in the households of wealthy Italian families. These women performed mainly domestic tasks, such as weaving, cooking, cleaning and caring for children. Many may have been kept at least in part to satisfy the sexual desires of their masters (McKee 1998: 319–20). In late medieval Iberia, particularly Valencia, the population of enslaved peoples was particularly diverse, with a sizable number of Muslims and black Africans enslaved in the course of the *Reconquista* and Portuguese exploration. In contrast to the Italian scene, both urban and rural households utilized slave labour, both within and outside the home. Enslaved men worked in the fields and women worked in silk workshops, picked fruit and sold it in the marketplaces (Blumenthal 2009: 80–4). Some households endeavoured to integrate their enslaved occupants through baptism and education, maintaining a paternal hold over enslaved men and women. Concerns about miscegenation and distrust of Muslims, however, meant that these groups experienced more difficulty integrating into Christian households as enslaved persons and into Valencian society as freed persons (Blumenthal 2009: 3–4).

The master of the home was expected to be the master of all of its members and the work they performed. Inevitable tensions resulted as wives resented the enslaved women who bore their husband's children and as apprentices or journeymen defied their master's authority by running away or bringing scandal on the household. A court case from medieval York suggests some of the ways these hierarchies played out in the home. The court records reveal that an apprentice, John Warrington, seduced one of his master's female servants. After making him swear never to commit such an offence again, the master caught John with another servant, a woman named Margaret, at which point the master tried to force him to marry Margaret. John did not wish to go through with the marriage unless the master gave him enough money to set up his own

shop. Although John ultimately refused the marriage, the case illustrates some of the tensions that arose within the home workshop. Apprentices, even if they were fully grown men, could not take wives without possessing a workshop. The master, for his part, assumed responsibility for the household, including the sexual behaviour of those living within it (Goldberg 1999: 59–60).

### SPACE AND DOMESTICITY IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

By the late Middle Ages, the growth of competition and increased organization of working life had a profound effect on the home and its occupants' relationship to labour. As artisan-merchants began to acquire greater civic authority and social status in medieval cities, they used their wealth and power to control not only the organization of work and the market, but also to forge for themselves an image of mercantile honour. This image was based on successful management of the workshop and the home, financial independence and civic authority, all of which they viewed as mutually reinforcing. Merchants and artisans were good businessmen and householders, therefore they were 'fit to govern others' (Howell 2013: 565).

As several historians have recently argued, the social, economic and political ascendancy of the merchant capitalist brought with it a firmer demarcation between the domestic and commercial spaces, dramatically affecting ideas about home, work and 'domesticity'. New emphasis was placed on women's role in the domestic sphere, as women who necessarily ventured outside that sphere risked suspicion as 'common' women. Families at the upper reaches of the socio-economic scale conveyed their status by observing these distinctions. Virtuous women concerned themselves with household management, not with running a workshop or going to the markets. Thus, women who were obliged to labour outside the home, whether as laundresses or hucksters, might be regarded with distrust (Hanawalt 1998: 76, 84).

Advice literature emphasized the role women played in managing the household, suggesting a gendered division of labour and a clear distinction between domestic and common spaces. The Goodman of Paris's advice book for his young bride conveys this ideal, counselling his wife to rely on female domestic servants -- in this case a beguine named Jeanne -- to supervise household tasks:

*Item*, concerning chambermaids and house varlets, who are sometimes called domestics, understand, my dear, that I leave you the power and authority to have them chosen by Dame Agnes the Beguine (or another woman you choose to have in your service), to hire, pay, retain, or dismiss from service as you wish, in order that they may obey you better and fear to anger you.

Nevertheless, you should consult me privately about this and act according to my advice, because you are too young and could easily be deceived by even your own people.

—Greco and Rose 2009: 216

Male servants, on the other hand, had responsibilities outside the home and should be overseen by a male steward. While the young wife ought to hire labourers seasonally, she needed the help of a male superintendent when dealing with these 'rough men' (Greco and Rose 2009: 215–16).

As for the work that the wife must do in the home, the Goodman described rooms that needed to be tidied and cleaned and linens to be aired. He also included remedies, recipes and cleaning advice for his bride, whose sphere of activity was strictly limited to the home:

[Y]ou must be in charge of yourself, your children, and your belongings. But in each of these things you can certainly have assistance. You must see how best to apply yourself to the household tasks, what help and what people you will employ, and how you will occupy them. In these matters, you need take on only the command, the supervision, and the conscientiousness to have things done right, but have the work performed by others, at your husband's expense.

—Greco and Rose 2009: 181

Yet, the needs of most working families necessarily pushed working women outside domestic spaces. For some tasks, such as retailing, women would have occupied intermediary spaces. Indeed, shops were an important liminal zone, with work and commerce taking place in and near domestic spaces (Rees Jones 2003).

Demographic and economic recovery during the post-Black Death period led to changes in working life and household space. Prosperous merchant families were able to acquire more space in the less-crowded conditions of late medieval cities, building larger homes with clearly demarcated spaces for entertaining, eating and sleeping. The urban houses of the wealthy could now have separate spheres for work space, retail space and domestic space, with work space increasingly regarded as 'male' and domestic life as 'female' (Rees Jones 2003).

In contrast to their poorer neighbours who lived in single rooms of simple cottages, prosperous urban householders had the rooms and space to establish a 'domestic geography' (Riddy 2008: 15). The masters supervised the work of the apprentices and servants and were able to separate these work spaces from domestic spaces. This domestic geography conveyed orderliness, control and industriousness. As masters and owners of the workspace, moreover, they

controlled the timing and intensity of work. A well-furnished home was essential to merchants who wished to impress their peers, negotiate contracts with potential clients, and convey an air of prosperity, honesty and creditworthiness. Less prosperous craftspeople could hardly afford to compete. Some rented stalls to sell goods, or worked in the shops or out of the undercrofts of wealthier craftspeople.

In many ways, then, the question of labour in the home is one that relates to power, gender and status. Working in the home was to have some control over the process and intensity of one's own labour. Throughout the Middle Ages, work was inextricably tied to home life. It sustained it, reflecting its priorities, gender and social relations, as well as how these factors changed over time.