

Gender Regimes

Articles

Gender Regimes in Western Societies from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*

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The concept of gender has become such an important subject in international historiography over the last two decades that it might appear odd to devote an entire dossier of the *Annales* to the topic. However, the relative success of this field of research may also conceal ambiguities in both the intellectual project underlying the term as well as its reception in the social sciences. For certain authors, undertaking a history of gender has meant writing a history of women. Though this form of history now enjoys proper recognition, it is still depreciated in two ways: on the one hand, it is qualified as a militant—and therefore unscholarly—history; and, on the other, it is criticized according to some vague argument claiming that no matter how it is labeled—“gender” or “women”—the inquiry is already dated. Without a doubt, the now canonical expression “history of women and gender” has generated real confusion among those scholars who are not particularly engaged with the field.¹

This article was translated from the French by Oliver Feltham and edited by Angela Krieger and Stephen Sawyer.

* I would like to thank Violaine Sebillote Cuchet, who helped me prepare this dossier. 1. In France, the essential reference book is Françoise Thébaud's *Écrire l'histoire des femmes* (Fontenay-aux-Roses: ENS éd., 1998). It was reedited in 2007 with the title *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre* (Lyon: ENS éd., 2007). Laura Lee Downs's book *Writing Gender History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2004) perfectly complements Thébaud's work, offering a useful comparison between French and Anglophone historiography. This movement has only recently been acknowledged in French historiography textbooks. As recently as 1999, Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, and Patrick Garcia's textbook *Les courants historiques en France, 19^e-20^e siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1999) devoted only

For some, it implies following intellectual trends, subscribing to postmodernism, French theory or, in a wider sense, the entire movement inspired by the “linguistic turn.”² Both attitudes result in extreme and opposing judgments. Nevertheless, they do challenge researchers who use the term to devise a clear definition, especially given that gender has now become the object of national research policies. The term is used in so many ways that no single coherent theoretical position can generate agreement among all of its users. Thus, an effort at clarification seems necessary given that the concept has been employed, at the extremes, in a paradoxically essentialist or even downright lazy manner, turning gender into a monolithic category. By sacrificing the rich questions it poses for the social sciences to predictable gestures of denunciation, gender runs the risk of becoming yet another orthodoxy. While, historically speaking, gender studies have been undertaken by militant movements specifically with regard to contemporary history, today that heritage must be examined along with the broader position of gender studies within the practice of history and the social sciences at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

It is worth remembering that the term “gender” emerged at the beginning of the 1960s in the United States. It was employed first in the fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis (Robert Stoller)³ and then in the field of sociology (Ann Oakley)⁴ before reaching France in 1988 via an article by the historian Joan Scott, for whom it provided “a useful category of historical analysis.”⁵ In non-Anglophone European spheres, the English term has been used for some time. In France, just as in many other countries, it was not until the 2000s that the term was gradually translated and accepted: *genre*, *Geschlecht*, *genere*, *genero*, etc.⁶ Like so many other

two of its 332 pages to gender (pp. 282-283). However, there is an entire chapter entitled “History of Women, History of Gender,” by Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (1:208-19), in the latest study of historiography in France: see Christian Delacroix et al., eds., *Historiographies. Concepts et débats* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 2 vols. The “and” has been dropped here. Even though both fields of research are grouped together in the same chapter—highlighting an obvious kinship—it is nonetheless understood that they are not necessarily fused in a permanent conjunction.

2. These expressions are employed in an informal and derogatory manner by many French academics, often without reference to precise methodologies. See Andrew Lear and Meryl Altman, “The Unspeakable Vice of the Americans,” *Iris, the Newsletter of the Lambda Classical Caucus* (Fall 2010): <http://eugesta.recherche.univ-lille3.fr/spip.php?article61>.

3. Robert J. Stoller, *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968).

4. Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd., 1972).

5. Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91-5 (1986): 1053-75, and also included in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

6. It took a long time for the term to be used in French. Sociologists and philosophers, followed by a few historians, have more willingly spoken of the “social difference between the sexes” (“différence sociale des sexes”) or of the “social relations of sex” (“rapports sociaux de sexe”), expressions that insist gender is the result of a social construction and which invite one to assimilate relations between the sexes to other

concepts, gender has in many ways been imported, fabricated, and modified with regard to specific historical, geographical, scholarly, and disciplinary contexts. As it is extremely important to avoid using the term in a loose manner, it is necessary not only to investigate the conditions of its advent, but to be equally aware of its contemporary use in different contexts.⁷

Like microhistory, critical anthropology or the sociology of interaction, gender has led scholars to understand society as a complex combination of interactive processes in which individuals enjoy a multiplicity of identities and relations. Use of this notion can thus contribute to renewing social history from a pragmatic perspective. It is not simply a tool for deconstructing the supposed coherence of society. Embracing such a perspective, this dossier for the *Annales* is designed to demonstrate how gender can be an effective heuristic tool for describing society. It therefore proposes the investigation of diverse “gender regimes.” A “gender regime” can be defined as a particular and unique assemblage of relations of sex within a specific documentary, relational, and historical context.⁸ Several regimes

social relations (such as relations of production). These expressions reveal the persistence of Marxist models in the social sciences. In the field of history, it was not until the very end of the 1980s that the word “*genre*” (meaning “gender”) timidly made its appearance in the titles of journals or anthologies. It was first used in two journal issues—“Le Genre de l’histoire,” *Les Cahiers du Grif* 37/38 (1988) and “Femmes, genre, histoire,” *Genèses* 6 (1991)—as well as in an interdisciplinary conference held in 1989 from which the papers were published two years later: see Marie-Claude Hurtig, Michèle Kail, and Hélène Rouch, eds., *Sexe et genre. De la hiérarchie entre les sexes* (Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 1991). It began to be more frequently employed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Association Mnemosyne (Association pour le Développement de l’Histoire des Femmes et du Genre) adopted it in 2000, and, in September 2002, it figured in the title of a conference organized at the University of Rennes 2: see Luc Capdevila et al., eds., *Le genre face aux mutations. Masculin et féminin du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Rennes: PUR, 2003). In 2003, the journal *Vingtième siècle* published a special issue entitled *Histoire des femmes, histoire des genres*, edited by Raphaëlle Branche and Danièle Voldman. Since then the term has been increasingly employed. Nonetheless, it is rarely used in medieval history: <http://shmesp.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/biblio>. In March 2011, only eight titles employing the term “*genre*” (in the sense of “social sex”) could be found in the titles of publications indexed by the SHMESP site (Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l’Enseignement Supérieur Public). With regard to ancient history, the sample extracted from the online database produced by *L’Année philologique. Bibliographie critique et analytique de l’Antiquité gréco-latine* includes only thirteen article or book titles bearing the term “*genre*” (meaning “gender”). This encompasses works published between 1991 and 2008 (posterior publications are not indexed). Apart from one 1991 publication, the other twelve date between 2003 and 2008.

7. See: Olivier Christin, ed., *Dictionnaire des concepts nomades en sciences humaines* (Paris: Métailié, 2010); Joseph Morsel, “De l’usage des concepts en Histoire médiévale,” *De l’usage de* (Paris: Collections Méneestrel, 2011), <http://www.menestrel.fr/spip.php?rubrique1551&lang=fr>.

8. In French, this expression is used in the social sciences, particularly in sociology. It seems to have several meanings. Referring to Robert W. Connell’s work, Lorena Parini uses this expression to designate “particular assemblages according to the political space being analyzed (States, regions, communities, etc.)” within the “gender system” (“that

may coexist in the same historical period. Depending on the chosen contextual framework, these regimes are unstable and subject to variations: for example, when the historian shifts focus from one set of subjects to another, chooses to look at different documentation or when relationships among the observed group change.

The first context to be considered is documentary. The historian disposes of documents and written traces in order to reconstruct the past. As such, it is only by engaging in a complete deconstruction of the documentation, from its production to its publication by way of its modes of conservation and transmission, that one can reconstitute the logic of past actions, since social practices are tied to documentary practices for the historian. This process prevents the confusion of both discursive and social relationships of sex, and it also stops one from considering society as a static reality that pre-exists the historian and which he or she must describe. After all, society and social groups are not fixed and delimited things; society is not a state but a process. Any given gender regime is never anything more than the final written result of oral exchanges, tensions, and conflicts between a group of protagonists. Besides this documentary context, the distinction between the sexes should not be studied apart from social relations. It is certainly time to move away from the identitarian approach to gender that has dominated from the very beginning and which still strongly influences historical studies, since this approach tends to essentialize relationships between the sexes.⁹ For this reason, the notion of “sexual distinction” is preferable to that of “difference between the

is, how the social relations of sex are organized around certain crucial issues: reproductive control, the sexual division of knowledge and labor, access to the sphere of politics”). See Lorena Parini, *Le système de genre. Introduction aux concepts et théories* (Zurich: Seismo, 2006), 35. For Robert W. Connell’s use of this term, see *Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 53-54. Lorena Parini insists on the micro-social and relational aspect of the notion of “gender regime” in contrast to that of “gender system.” Despite having originated in an American feminist sociological tradition (in which one can find the notion “gender regime,” sometimes also translated into French as “equality regime”), this expression is also used by French scholars to alert public authorities to the importance of social relations between the sexes when formulating the social policies of welfare states. For instance, Olivier Giraud and Barbara Lucas write: “In its widest sense, the notion ‘gender regime’ is supposed to encompass the entire set of social structures that influence the sexual division of social roles” (see Sylvia Walby, 2001). This notion complements the prolific amount of writing produced in the 1980s and 90s analyzing the interactions between gender relations and the various forms and modes of operation of welfare states. See Olivier Giraud and Barbara Lucas, “Le renouveau des régimes de genre en Allemagne et en Suisse: bonjour ‘néo maternalisme’?” in special issue “État, Travail, Famille. ‘Conciliation’ ou conflit?” eds. Jacqueline Heinen, Helena Hirata, and Roland Pfefferkorn, *Cahiers du Genre* 46 (2009): 19. Irène Théry uses the term in quotation marks in a sense close to the one I propose: in her view, these regimes vary according to the kinds of relations activated by various participants in a situation. See Irène Théry, “Pour une anthropologie comparative de la distinction de sexe,” in *Ce que le genre fait aux personnes*, eds. Irène Théry and Pascale Bonnmère (Paris: Éd. de l’EHESS, 2008), 32. 9. The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Robert Stoller, who was the first scholar to employ the term “gender” in English, immediately linked the word “gender” with the word “identity” in his expression “gender identity.” See Stoller, *Sex and Gender*.

sexes.”¹⁰ The notion of “difference” emphasizes a relationship to the opposite sex, whereas that of “distinction” is more flexible, allowing for a better account of the relationship, bond, and articulation between gender and other categories: “A relational conception of the difference between the sexes has no chance of being understood unless it finds its specific terminology: ‘sexual distinction.’”¹¹ The latter “*is the gender not of persons, but of social relations*. Thus, it is not a matter of studying ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ as attributes of individuals, but rather the manner in which meaning is attributed within society to diverse forms of action, which are given modalities by the masculine/feminine distinction and which determine expectations concerning how social partners, of either sex, will act.”¹² In each relational context a participant invokes, stages, and activates a dimension of his or her identity, which at that precise moment are possible, useful or indispensable when faced with other individuals. In this view, more attention is paid to ways of acting, actions, and situations than to identities. Sexual identity can intervene to a greater or lesser degree in any interaction. Sometimes it plays a decisive role. At other times it is insignificant. One cannot isolate entities from the social relations that constitute them and of which they are both the authors and the receivers. Thus, the question of the sexes cannot be treated separately. Gender is one criterion of distinction amongst other kinds of socio-cultural relations that should not be forgotten (age, life stage, generation, order, class, social condition, rural or urban residence, marital status, kinship role, etc.).¹³

10. See the foundational article by Cécile Barraud, “De la distinction de sexe dans les sociétés: une présentation,” in *Sexe relatif ou sexe absolu? De la distinction de sexe dans les sociétés*, eds. Catherine Alès and Cécile Barraud (Paris: Éd. de la MSH, 2001), 23-99. It demonstrates that kinship terms express gender relations in a different manner depending on the bonds that unite two persons: absolute, relative, and undifferentiated sex. See Irène Théry’s commentaries and perspective in *La distinction de sexe. Une nouvelle approche de l’égalité* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007), 511-19. The relational dimension at the heart of kinship has been particularly well studied by Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives Are Always a Surprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

11. Théry, *La distinction de sexe*, 246.

12. *Ibid.*, 228.

13. During the 1980s, Anglophone historians were the first to draw attention to the necessity of articulating sex within other categories like class or race. See: Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, eds., *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). This approach already aimed at not enclosing individuals within fixed identities, instead inviting reflection on the entire set of social relations. In the first issue of the journal *Gender and History* in 1989, Gisela Bock emphasized the necessity of considering gender as one category amongst others and refused an “imperialism of gender.” See Gisela Bock, “Women’s History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate,” *Gender and History* 1-1 (1989): 7-30. During a 1992 conference held in Paris following the French publication of *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, Claude Mossé highlighted the trap of easy recourse to the category “women”: “Should one grasp the experience of the female slaves of antiquity by describing them first as women and then

The dossier proposed in this issue of the *Annales* is composed of five contributions focused on pre-eighteenth-century societies. Ironically, this choice could have been justified by borrowing the excuse so often made in introductions to anthologies on the history of gender that concentrate solely on the contemporary period “for reasons of space.”¹⁴ But there are also more serious institutional and scholarly reasons for this choice. Today, the majority of scholarly work on gender concerns the contemporary world. Joan Scott—to whom is owed not only the diffusion of the notion of gender, but also many debates over whether it is useful, should be abandoned or is worth defending as an analytical category—specializes in contemporary history. In France, the two recent overviews available to historians, which also serve as textbooks on the history of gender, were produced by specialists in the contemporary period.¹⁵ Young scholars have also—quite logically—chosen to focus on contemporary history. Of the 175 students who submitted their Masters theses between 2003 and 2011 in the hope of receiving the Mnemosyne Prize, 108 (62%) were students in contemporary history or sociology.¹⁶ Gender studies covering the periods from antiquity to the seventeenth century are thus often neglected or simplified.¹⁷ Moreover, the burden of sociological problematics has tended to distort ancient periods as anachronistic categories are imposed on

as slaves?” See Claude Mossé, “L’Antiquité. Lecture critique du tome I de l’*Histoire des femmes*,” in *Femmes et Histoire*, eds. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Paris: Plon, 1993), 19–24, and particularly pp. 23–24. In 1997, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber posed the same question with regard to women in the milieu of the Florentine magnates of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: “In the eyes of contemporaries and within social practices, is there a sexual identity that can escape the differentiations introduced by belonging to a particular social group? For example, were there specifically feminine characteristics that justified a certain treatment of women in the city? Or, inversely, were class attributes more important than sexual attributes, and did they contribute to constituting social profiles that encompassed and effaced sexual differences?” See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “Identité de sexe, identité de classe: femmes nobles et populaires en Italie (XIV^e-XV^e siècles),” in *L’histoire grande ouverte. Hommages à Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie*, eds. André Burguière, Joseph Goy, and Marie-Jeanne Tits-Dieuaide (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 395.

14. This is but one example amongst many. The authors of the preface state: “For reasons of space, we have not been able to include articles on periods previous to 1500.” See Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent, eds., *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London: Arnold, 1998), vii.

15. Thébaud, *Écrire l’histoire des femmes*; Downs, *Writing Gender History*.

16. The Mnemosyne Prize is awarded by the Association Mnemosyne annually for a Masters thesis in the history of women and gender. Amongst the sixty-six remaining theses, there were thirty-three in modern history (19%), twenty in ancient history (11.5%), and fourteen in medieval history (8%).

17. A textbook addressed to high-school teachers edited by the Association Mnemosyne now includes all academic periods of history. See Geneviève Dermenjian et al., eds., *La place des femmes dans l’histoire: une histoire mixte* (Paris: Belin, 2010). A textbook for antiquity also exists: see Sandra Boehringer and Violaine Sebillotte Cuchet, *Hommes et femmes dans l’Antiquité grecque et romaine. Le genre, méthode et documents* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011). A textbook on the end of the Middle Ages (twelfth-fifteenth centuries) is forthcoming.

rather heterogeneous past realities: private/public, equality/parity, homosexuality/heterosexuality, etc. As a result, contemporary conceptions of gender and their application to all periods of history are frequently generalized. At best, the gender regime of the “present” (end of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries) is linearly opposed to that of the nineteenth century, a period during which there was a strong polarity between the two sexes, conceived as radically opposite. For many modern historians and the wider public, this nineteenth-century gender regime has become the sole model of gender for past societies. For the period covering Greek antiquity to the seventeenth century, however, it is rarely appropriate to employ an analytical framework in which the two sexes are complementary terms within a clearly defined antinomy; an antinomy presumed to play a structural role throughout the whole of society in addition to each individual’s entire somatic and psychic experience.¹⁸ In Western societies prior to the eighteenth century, the opposition of the sexes presented only one, often minor, manner of classifying persons. The time has come to abandon a conception that has, for Westerners, come to be considered “natural.” The opposition between men and women is not universally and eternally based on biological characteristics that pre-exist an individual’s inscription in society. For Thomas Laqueur, the masculine/feminine opposition did not become biologized, with genders inscribed in sexed bodies, until the eighteenth century.¹⁹ He evokes a “one-sex” model, inherited from Galen, in which women are the opposite of men within the same corporeal structure. This model was marked by a series of analogies between testicles and ovaries, scrotum and uterus, penis and vagina. The fluids circulating inside men’s and women’s bodies were the same. According to Laqueur, this schema of representation and explanation was only challenged between the end of the seventeenth and the end of the eighteenth centuries and eventually replaced by the “model of the two sexes” in which woman was radically distinguished from man by specificities that concerned the quality of her bodily tissues and fluids as much as her anatomical form.²⁰ This shift in paradigm leads Laqueur to state that “Historically, differentiations

18. For the medieval period, especially from the Gregorian reform onwards, ecclesiastical discourse emphasized the clergy/layman division more than that of men/women. The clergy, who could only be men, were considered members of a superior order of society because they did not have any fleshly ties, having taken the vow of chastity when they became priests. The second category encompassed men and women as inferiors to the clergy.

19. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

20. For critiques and debates provoked by Laqueur’s work, see: Sylvie Steinberg, “Sexe et genre au XVIII^e siècle. Quelques remarques sur l’hypothèse d’une fabrique du sexe,” in *Ce que le genre fait aux personnes*, eds. Irène Théry and Pascale Bonnmère (Paris: Éd. de l’EHESS, 2008), 197-212; Annick Jaulin, “La fabrique du sexe, Thomas Laqueur et Aristote,” *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* 14 (2001): 195-205; and Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Scholars working on pre-modern periods can easily demonstrate that the “novelties” identified by Laqueur were in the early stage of development, if

of gender preceded differentiations of sex.”²¹ If one accepts his conclusions, it now becomes necessary, in Sylvie Steinberg’s words, “to reverse the most spontaneous certitude,” that which leads to the declaration that “sex is always, and everywhere, a substratum on the basis of which an existential experience is elaborated and upon which affects, private and public behaviors, representations, symbols, and relations of power are constructed, those that outline the (social and cultural) form of gender.”²²

At the end of the Old Regime, there was certainly an increasingly discursive biologization of bodies, which evidently brought about important changes in the perception and practices of gender. Nevertheless, Laqueur’s model tends to construct an excessively rigid barrier of gender between the two periods preceding and following the eighteenth century, which makes it difficult to locate and identify a plurality of gender regimes. It is not the case, for instance, that one new and unique gender regime became ubiquitous to the detriment of all others starting at the end of the eighteenth century. Nor is it the case that more ancient societies enjoyed single gender regimes. If the exploration of diverse gender regimes is proposed as heuristic, this perspective could also be extended to the contemporary period. Through a pragmatic analysis of relations between the sexes as one social variable amongst others and as a specific type of relation, it is equally possible to uncover a wide range of contemporary gender regimes.

The five articles composing this dossier are situated within this broader project. Within five different discursive, historical, and thematic contexts, each author situates and analyzes one or several gender regimes, taking care not to isolate “sex” from other modes of belonging. In an extension of this brief foreword, Violaine Sebillote Cuchet illustrates the diverse forms of gender relations in ancient Greek societies. While categories of representation were indeed organized into dichotomies, they always remained multiple and were never limited to oppositions between man/woman or masculine/feminine. Within a specific documentary context (Martial’s epigrams in the first century AD), Elke Hartmann examines the staging of relationships between testatrices and *captatores* of inheritance.

not already in place, much earlier. Prior to the eighteenth century, there were many ways of describing the body, and writers already had recourse to biological explanations in the observation of anatomical and functional differences in the matter of procreation. In the Preface to the 1992 French edition of his work, Thomas Laqueur himself, aware of these critiques, agreed that there were early indications of the model of the two sexes before the eighteenth century and that traces of the unisexual model can be found afterward: “Two models have always been available, and one has never been completely abandoned in favor of the other.” Thomas Laqueur, *La Fabrique du sexe*, trans. Michel Gautier (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), vi. Nonetheless, these nuances do not destabilize the system and evolution proposed by Laqueur.

21. Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 62.

22. Steinberg, “Sexe et genre,” 201. Philippe Descola has shown that in the West, the weight of the opposition between nature and culture only became central beginning in the eighteenth century. In his eyes, naturalism was a characteristic of the Enlightenment. See Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

She therein locates a “specific gender regime,” resulting from the combination of a precise social and cultural context, interactions (amongst the elite) between legacy-hunting men and older, rich (and sometimes widowed) women, and the comic effect such stories needed to produce in order for them to be included within a literary genre with distinct rules. In the third article, I examine a pact concerning intermarriages in a peace treaty signed between communes in the Marches at the beginning of the fourteenth century, a promise that, along with the rest of the treaty, was never fulfilled. By placing this *concordia* in its historical and documentary context, I seek to demonstrate how the text stages a distinction between the sexes and identify the role women were supposed to play in the transmission of peace, joy, fraternity, and citizenship. Next, Gabrielle Signori analyzes matrimonial practices in free imperial cities at the end of the Middle Ages, which she relates to intellectual traditions favoring equality between the sexes. By exploring marriage contracts from Basel and Strasbourg, she posits marriage less as a site of masculine domination than an “egalitarian gender configuration” permeating all social classes. This article offers a useful reminder that relations between men and women are not simply a matter of domination. Finally, Sylvie Steinberg looks at feudal succession in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She emphasizes the tensions between the tradition that recognized the role of women within succession, and the conviction that noble lineage could solely be perpetuated through men. According to her, a new conception of gender emerged in the seventeenth century that referred each individual back to his or her sex, signifying the start of a new gender regime that, while later playing a major role in Western modernity, should not be generalized across the entire contemporary period.

As an ensemble, this dossier reveals the complexity of gender regimes in pre-eighteenth century periods, varying according to their relational and documentary contexts. It also attests to the dynamism of gender studies in ancient, medieval, and early modern history within historiographies in German, Italian, and French. As such, gender helps renew the history of social distinctions without containing it in a narrow specialization. It has proven a precious tool in the social history of men and women, urging scholars to rethink the plurality and historicity of regimes of action and thereby forming part of the epistemological reconfiguration at work today in history and across all the social sciences.

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