

Call for Papers - Panel Proposal Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association
January 7-10, 2016, Atlanta Georgia

Dangerous cities? Crime, gender and survival strategies in European towns 1600-1900.

Questions related to changes in the proportion of female offenders are of central importance in the debates among historians of crime. There is a general agreement that the urban setting is a key factor in explaining “high” levels of female crime in the early modern period (Beattie 1978; Shoemaker 1991; Feeley 2010; Van der Heijden 2013). Women in the city are believed to have led a more independent and public life than women in the countryside. This was especially the case for the many migrant women that were working in domestic service and in the early industries. It is this same independence that is said to have made these women more vulnerable. They often lacked access to formal and informal social support networks and therefore suffered more in times of economic and social crises. By analysing crime as part of a broader makeshift economy, historians have argued that urban (migrant) women were therefore more susceptible to commit crime as a way to support themselves – thereby explaining the fluctuations of female crime rates through time (early modern vs modern period) and place (urban vs rural).

However, there is still a lack of systematic research to understand the relationship between gender, the lack of social support networks, and the effects of poverty on crime. Existing gender norms might for example have influenced the way that (migrant) men and women were incorporated in urban networks and the level of independence they were able to achieve. At the same time, offenders could use dominant perceptions of gender strategically in their criminal process (King 2000). There is a need for a structural comparison between the survival strategies of (migrant) men and women in the city as well as a more developed comparison between urban and rural crime patterns.

This panel invites papers dealing with (one of) the following questions:

- Were there differences in proportion of citizens and migrants among offenders and in the type of crimes committed by them? If so, how do we explain this?
- What were the differences in crime employed as a survival strategy by men and women? And how did gender roles influence these?
- How did the legal position of offenders (i.e. possessing citizenship or not) affect their trial and punishment?
- What were the different (in)formal control mechanisms that could affect recorded crime? (For example, the existence of guild courts, neighbourhood associations or household authority).
- Was there a difference in ‘open’ cities and ‘closed’ cities in relation to the support networks migrants were able to access?

Call for papers:

Researchers interested in participating to this panel are invited to send a short abstract (ca. 200-250 words) to j.m.kamp@hum.leidenuniv.nl by February 10th 2015.

Selected candidates will be notified the following day and the panel proposal will be submitted to the AHA by February 15th 2015.

Find more information on the AHA annual meeting here: <http://www.historians.org/annual-meeting/future-meetings>