

Preface

This book, *Gender in Transition*, grew out of discussions between the two editors during the summer of 1995, when we both were associated with the Arbeitsgruppe ostelbische Gutsherrschaft at the University of Potsdam. We were involved in separate projects dealing with rural women and rural gender norms in the late eighteenth century, and our discussions made it increasingly clear that we were part of a community of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic who were working in several disciplines to explore the major transformation of gender systems of German-speaking Europe during this era.

We reflected on the fact that this community was intellectually indebted to the pioneering work of Karin Hausen, former director of the Institut für interdisziplinäre Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Both of us were drawn to our topics in part because of Hausen's work. So had many other scholars, including some affiliated at that time with the institute she directed. Others, however, probably had only a vague sense of indebtedness to Hausen, but the paradigms she had articulated were evident almost without exception in the scholarship. The obvious fact was the existence of an ongoing drive to clarify the nature of the transitions in gender she had originally delineated.

Many of the same names came up again and again in our conversations, but the community we envisioned was more a construct in our minds than something its members perceived. There were intellectual connections and some personal contacts, but on the whole, minimal direct interaction occurred and no organizational ties existed. We thought that it would be positive to bring together, physically and intellectually, a group of such researchers, thereby providing an opportunity to take stock of the nature of scholarly inquiry into our subject. We believed such an encounter would produce a collaborative result that was more than the sum of its parts, an update on the state of research regarding gender at the turn of the eighteenth century in Ger-

man cultural areas. Hence, we set about contacting scholars whose work we knew to be relevant to our themes.

With the support of the Werner Reimer Stiftung, we held a workshop in Bad Homburg, Germany, in 1998 where sixteen scholars could directly engage each other. All participants had previously shared working drafts of essays, and we met to discuss them in detail. Out of this intense encounter grew the present volume. Every participant was challenged to rethink parts of his or her contribution in light of others' interpretations and of the ensuing discussions. We drew up a set of conclusions and circulated them in written form, and we remained in communication with one another via an electronic discussion list while the authors revised the essays, turning research drafts into the chapters of this book.

We do not in any way consider the contributors to this volume to be *the* community that possesses *the* definitive answers to questions about gender in the transition period. These essays are at best a small sample. Logistics and financial considerations necessitated that we keep the group relatively small from the beginning. We could not include some whose work is excellent but did not directly speak to our chosen themes. Several outstanding scholars had to decline participation for personal or professional reasons. We believe, however, that the participants in the Gender in Transition Project are representative of the interdisciplinary work being conducted around the theme of gender transitions in the period of change. We would be pleased if other projects develop to carry forward, augment, or challenge the work of this volume.