



Consumption and the World of Goods

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The study of past society in terms of what it *consumes* rather than what it *produces* is - relatively speaking - a new development. The focus on consumption changes the whole emphasis and structure of historical enquiry. While human beings usually work within a single trade or industry as *producers*, as, say, farmers or industrial workers, as *consumers* they are active in many different markets or networks. And while history written from a production viewpoint has, by chance or design, largely been centred on the work of men, consumption history helps to restore women to the mainstream.

The history of consumption demands a wide range of skills. It calls upon the methods and techniques of many other disciplines, including archaeology, sociology, social and economic history, anthropology and art criticism. But it is not simply a melting-pot of techniques and skills, brought to bear on a past epoch. Its objectives amount to a new description of a past culture in its totality, as perceived through its patterns of consumption in goods and services.

Consumption and the World of Goods is the first of three volumes to examine history from this perspective, and is a unique collaboration between twenty-six leading subject specialists from Europe and North America. The outcome is a new interpretation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one that shapes a new historical landscape based on the consumption of goods and services.

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