



Commerce and Culture: Nineteenth-Century Business Elites (Modern Economic and Social History)

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Considerable attention has recently been focused on the importance of social networks and business culture in reducing transaction costs, both in the pre-industrial period and during the nineteenth century. This book brings together twelve original contributions by scholars in the United Kingdom, continental Europe, and North America which represent important and innovative research on this topic. They cover two broad themes. First, the role of business culture in determining commercial success, in particular the importance of familial, religious, ethnic and associational connections in the working lives of merchants and the impact of business practices on family life. Second, the wider institutional and political framework for business operations, in particular the relationship between the political economy of trade and the cultural world of merchants in an era of transition from personal to corporate structures. These key themes are developed in three separate sections, each with four contributions. They focus, in turn, on the role of culture in building and preserving businesses; the interplay between institutions, networks and power in determining commercial success or failure; and the significance of faith and the family in influencing business strategies and the direction of merchant enterprise. The wider historiographical context of the individual contributions is discussed in an extended introductory chapter which sets out the overall agenda of the book and provides a broader comparative framework for analysing the specific issues covered in each of the three sections. Taken together the collection offers an important addition to the available literature in this field and will attract a wide readership amongst business, cultural, maritime, economic, social and urban historians, as well as historical anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists whose research embraces a longer-term perspective.

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