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Autore	Almasi Gabor
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"This book is an excellent and highly welcome contribution to the history of the work ethic, as it reveals both surprising continuities and profound historical variations in the long-term assessment of work." — Josef Ehmer, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Vienna, Austria

"These masterful essays recover a multi-faceted discourse of work in European thought cutting across genres, confessions, geo-political borders, and occupational groups. Among this volume's many points of interest, the early forms of workaholism traced here have profound contemporary relevance." — Sarah Gwyneth Ross, Professor of History, Boston College, USA

This book investigates how work ethics in Europe were conceptualised from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Through analysis of a range of discourses, it focuses on the roles played by intellectuals in formulating, communicating, and contesting ideas about work and its ethical value. The book moves away from the idea of a singular Weberian work ethic as fundamental to modern notions of work and instead emphasises how different languages of work were harnessed for a variety of social, intellectual, religious, economic, political, and ideological objectives. Rather than a singular work ethic that left a decisive mark on the development of Western culture and economy, the volume stresses plurality. The essays draw on approaches from intellectual, social, and cultural history. They explore how, why, and in what contexts labour became an important and openly promoted value; who promoted or opposed hard work and for what reasons; and whether there was an early modern break with ancient and medieval discourses on work. These historicized visions of work ethics help enrich our understanding of present-day changing attitudes to work. Gábor Almási is Senior Researcher of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Neo Latin Studies, Innsbruck, Austria. Giorgio Lizzul is Post-doctoral Junior Fellow at the Fondazione 1563, Turin, and Visiting Scholar at the Università di Torino, Italy.

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