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Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner, eds. *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2015. Pp. xi+250. \$ 36.95. (pb: alk.paper). ISBN 978-0-8071-5831-9.

Review by Samia Spencer, Auburn University.

In recent decades, feminist scholarship has uncovered the publications of many eighteenth-century women that had fallen into oblivion. These have inspired a large amount of literary and historical research that continues to enhance our knowledge of eighteenth-century French society in general, especially its upper and privileged classes. Some may find disproportionate the attention this particular social group has received, in light of its limited size. They will be comforted to find in the present volume a much broader perspective that extends the research to the lives of the larger social spectrum. The numerous articles and full-length studies referenced in the chapters of this study are evidence that there has been an impressive amount of research on the subject; however, this book may be unique in including, under the same cover, the broadest and most comprehensive source of information available to date on the participation of French women in professional activities in the long eighteenth century, and their impact on the economy of their time.

The eleven historians who authored the ten essays, and the Introduction and Afterword, have meticulously studied various archival sources, police records, and legal and tax documents, in Paris and in different parts of the country. They are also well informed on the most recent scholarship in the field, which they reference and quote. Here, they concentrate on a variety of occupations, from the most menial tasks of cleaning the floors and tending the fires, to the more elaborate responsibilities of keeping the books and managing large estates. Studying the topic of “work” cannot be achieved in a vacuum; it is inseparable from most facets of life, and must take into consideration context and environment—a task the contributors accomplish proficiently. Thus, in the process of analyzing the announced topic, they touch upon law, commerce, industry, politics, lifestyle, education, and family structure, among others. A few examples discussed below provide a taste of the variety of styles and approaches that readers will encounter as they explore the daily lives of women, men, and families of that era.

In “The Phenomenon of Female Lordship: The Example of the Comtesse de Sade,” Rafe Blaufarb follows the details of a particular case, the Eyguières-Sade affair, and discusses its development and outcome within various legal practices regarding the property rights of women, especially in Provence, where the Sade family seigneurie was located. His conclusion may surprise some, as he notes that “the female experience of lordship was very similar to the male experience of lordship. If one were to focus only on those areas of lordship in which gender mattered, the resulting account would be extremely narrow, barren, and incomplete” (pp. 27-28).

Like Blaufarb, Jennifer L. Palmer concentrates on a specific and very interesting case in “Women and Contracts in the Age of Transatlantic Commerce.” She discusses the explosion of the Atlantic economy and its profound impact on family structure, given the fact that a large number of “men flocked to France’s Caribbean colonies in search of fortune” (p. 131). This situation meant that couples had to live on separate continents for longer periods of time; therefore, wives had the authority to run family

estates, routinely making important legal, financial, and fiscal decisions, such as signing contracts, making purchases, paying bills, corresponding with merchants, and arranging for shipments. In port cities like La Rochelle, marriage contracts, powers of attorney, and wills had to be carefully drafted, in order “to weave between and around the customary laws of La Rochelle and Paris” (p. 132). The example chosen by Palmer to illustrate these unusual arrangements is that of Jean-Severin Regnaud de Beaumont and Marie-Magdelaine Royer. Their story reads almost like an eighteenth-century novel: readers will follow their (mis)fortunes from the time they married, through the birth of their eight children, their transatlantic travels, and the death of Jean-Severin. In the later part of his life, Jean-Severin settled in Saint-Domingue, started a new family with a woman of color, and fathered two mixed-race daughters. All the while in France, his legal wife consolidated her own position, attempted to increase the family assets, then had to struggle with dishonest merchants and creditors. Despite the careful crafting of marriage contracts, the case of Regnaud de Beaumont shows that these were “limited tools” (p. 147), patriarchal authority remained a privilege of husbands, even beyond the grave.

For most people, prostitution is a matter of morality, not employment. As a historian, Nina Kushner studies “The Business of Being Kept. Elite Prostitution as Work” from a social and economic perspective, noting, rightly, that the demi-monde was “an open market ... a well-defined, very visible, elite sexual subculture” (p. 53). Kushner leaves no stone unturned: she examines the case of single and married mistresses, adult and minor, their earning potential depending on their social origin, the benefits they enjoyed, the sums they were paid, quoting specific amounts for some well-known practitioners, and comparing their income to that of other women wage-earners in Paris and beyond. Except for specialists of the subject, most eighteenth-century scholars will discover aspects of that “trade” with which they are unfamiliar. For example, the existence of an entire unit within the police named “le département des femmes galantes” (p. 53). Although prostitution was illegal, being kept was not illegal, and very few “dames entretenues” were arrested. Not well known either is the fact that there was a type of contract that outlined the conditions and amount of monthly allowance to be paid by the patron to this service provider for the duration of their relationship. It served to differentiate between a prostitute and a mistress, whose status was close to that of a wife. Although it had no legal standing, the contract “functioned as a framework that shaped expectations” (p. 68), and, in addition to being binding for those who signed it, it was honored by the “police and judicial officials who interacted with them [the contract holders]” (p. 68). In fact, the police could be called upon to mediate between the parties, and “adjudicate patron-mistress conflicts according to the logic of the contract” (pp. 68-69).

Reading this book, one realizes the extensive and crucial role of women in the economic life of that era, in small and large enterprises, the arts, and the rise of the consumer society, despite the legal hurdles and handicaps they faced, and the limitations that guilds imposed on their gender. In “The Power of Wives: Managing Money and Men in the Family Businesses of Old Regime Paris,” Jacob D. Melish provides a series of examples that support the title of his chapter; for wives were, indeed, the backbone of family business, “nearly always the ones who kept the accounts and dealt with issues of credit” (p. 81). In some cases, they were in charge of marketing the goods produced by their husbands; in others, they kept the books, collected the cash, and kept the money. They were definitely the holders of the purse strings, no matter the type of occupation: textile, blacksmith, construction, cabinet making, butcher, or woodturner. They enjoyed informal power in the family business not only because of their hard work, but also due to their valuable connections, and the money they brought in through their dowries. It is well known that widows ably ran family businesses; Melish remarks that they did so because they were already engaged in the enterprise prior to the husband’s demise.

Except for Blaufarb who found that application of legal procedures was almost gender-blind in Provence, other contributors emphasized the difficulties and obstructions encountered by working women, as discussed by Nancy Locklin in “Women and Work Identity,” Cynthia M. Turant in “Many Exceptional Women: Female Artists in Old Regime Paris,” and Jane McLeod’s “Printer Widows and the State in Eighteenth-Century France.” Locklin chose Brittany as a case study and confirms that “women

in the eighteenth-century often had fewer legal rights and protections than men” (p. 40). This province provided fertile ground for Locklin’s research because according to tax records “62 percent of the women in large cities and nearly 75 percent of the women in small towns and villages” (p. 40) contributed to family income, most of whom were involved in textile, cloth, clothing, or food, which could be done at home, and did not interfere with child rearing. Turant’s ambitious purpose is to examine a variety of women artists in “their relations with and admission to academies of art, their personal relations with men, women, and children in their families, and finally their professional successes as well as their failures” (p. 92). Her study should inspire further investigation on the large number of women who made a living and achieved status through their artistic talents. McLeod opens her essay on the situation of Aimé Delaroché, the largest printer in Lyon, which leads to a discussion of the complicated issue of transmission of printing rights—publishing being a profession in which a significant number of women took part. James B. Collins’s fascinating chapter on “Women and the Birth of Modern Consumer Capitalism” discusses major changes in the economy and the substantial increase in the demand for goods, which led to the creation of new professions and the expansion of others, in cities large and small.

This reader, a passionate student and scholar of eighteenth-century French women, learned a great deal while reviewing this book, and clearly appreciated the breadth of its range and scope, as well as the well-designed structure of the chapters and the balanced views they offered—all evidenced in these favorable comments. However, she was also somewhat disappointed. In a book whose purpose is to explore “the diversity of women’s work in the long eighteenth century, paying particular attention to questions of women’s economic agency” [1], four extraordinary businesswomen, whose impact on the economy of their country was immeasurable, and whose reputation shined throughout their country and beyond, were neither discussed nor even acknowledged: Marie Brizard (1714-1801), Marie-Catherine Renée Darcel de Maraise (1737-1822), Marie-Jeanne Rose Bertin (1747-1813), and Barbe Nicole Cliquot Ponsardin (1777-1866).[1] Maraise managed the second largest manufacture in France. The partner in the textile company, Christophe Philippe Oberkampf, is briefly mentioned by Daryl M. Hafter in “French Industrial Growth in Women’s Hands,” and his name is recognized by anyone who lives or visits Paris, where a street and a metro station are named after him. However, the expansion and economic prosperity of the company was due to Maraise’s able management, not Oberkampf who was often out of the country on business travel. When the partnership was dissolved, and she no longer ran the manufacture, it went bankrupt. Maraise was unusual among women leaders of large enterprises who took over the business as widows; she, on the other hand, managed the enterprise while her husband was alive. In addition to being a milliner and dressmaker for Marie-Antoinette and other French and European royals and aristocrats, Bertin, nicknamed “Ministre de la mode,” was entrusted with several diplomatic missions by the Queen of France. Many consider her the forerunner of *haute couture*. As for Brizard and Cliquot Ponsardin, they need no introduction, their names, products, inventions, technical know-how, and reputations have overcome the test of time. This calls for another volume entirely devoted to the amazing women entrepreneurs in the age of Enlightenment.

LIST OF ESSAYS

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Jacob D. Melish, "The Power of Wives: Managing Money and Men in the Family Business of Old Regime Paris"

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Judith A. DeGroat, "Women in the Manufacturing Trades at the End of the Long Eighteenth Century"

Bonnie G. Smith, "Afterword"

NOTE

[1]. For a few references on these and other women entrepreneurs, see, for example, Serge Chassagne, *Madame de Maraise. Une femme d'affaires au XVIIIe siècle* (Toulouse: Privat, 1981); Serge Chassagne and Samia I. Spencer, "Marie-Catherine Renée Darcel de Maraise," Samia I. Spencer, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography. Writers of the French Enlightenment II*, vol. 314 (2005), pp. 3-9; Michel Etienne, *Veuve Cliquot Ponsardin: aux origines d'un grand vin de Champagne* (Paris: Economica, 1994); Catherine Genec, *La modiste de la reine* (Paris: Lattès, 2004); Kolleen M. Guy, "Drowning her Sorrows: Widowhood and Entrepreneurship in the Champagne Industry," *Business and Economic History* 26.2 (Winter 1997): 505-14; and Pierre de Nouvion and Emile Liez, *Un ministre des modes sous Louis XVI. Mademoiselle Bertin* (Paris: Henri Leclerc, 1911).

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