Thomas Brennan. ***Burgundy to Champagne: The Wine Trade in Early Modern France*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. xxi + 350 pp. $39.95 US (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5567-2.**

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With Thomas Brennan's *Burgundy to Champagne: The Wine Trade in Early Modern France*, we have a compelling addition to the literature on commercial capitalism and the nature of the market in the early modern period. Through a solidly researched exploration of one of the most commercialized sectors of the French economy, the wine trade, Brennan enters the debate over the extent of commercialization in France, the role of the crown in regulating the process, and the patterns of market evolution. The natural comparison for this material is the work done by Steven Kaplan and others on the grain trade of Old Regime France, and Brennan makes this comparison explicit in the text and notes.

Brennan's particular focus (despite the title of the book), is not on the entire wine trade of France, but on the domestic, interregional trade originating in Champagne and Burgundy and serving the growing Parisian market in wines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Within this trade, provincial brokers were key. Brennan carefully explains their role and traces its evolution, both as an integral part of the process of commercialization and as a reaction to changing conditions affecting the market. He is successful in making the case that increasing commercialization, particularly through the role of the broker, did play a role in the expansion of the market in wine. Yet, as he himself concludes, his work particularly points to the limitations on and obstacles to this process of commercialization.

Viticulture was necessarily a market-oriented activity. Wine producers, both large and small, needed to sell their product in order to survive. Producers' account books therefore focus on the challenges of selling the wine more than on making it. The wines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not made to be aged. They were also stored and shipped in barrels, in which they could not last more than a couple years. The period between the harvest and the following spring was thus a crucial time, in which information about the new crop was at a premium, and much of the speculation took place.

Much of the wine of poorer quality was sold locally or within the region, but Brennan focuses on the betterquality product which entered the interregional market centered on Paris. Merchants faced difficulties in locating attractive wines in distant provinces, arranging purchase from a host of small proprietors, paying taxes, and providing conservation of the product and shipping to Paris. For producers, the task of finding buyers, setting a competitive market price, and gaining information on the merchants' solvency proved equally daunting. Here, the services of a provincial broker became invaluable.

Brokers had been facilitating commerce in the wine trade since the early sixteenth century. Known as courtiers, they would wait until merchants arrived in their region, then introduce them to growers, guarantee the purchase price, and arrange for shipment to Paris. Often city officials, they were also supposed to be royal agents beginning in 1576. In the ideology of the late medieval marketplace, they assured the transparency necessary for fair exchange.

By the late-seventeenth century, though, the role of the provincial brokers had undergone a quiet revolution. Now identified as commissionaires (commission brokers), they indeed charged a commission, rather than a flat fee, for their services. They also handled most exchanges themselves. In theory, once merchants had sent their orders, the broker purchased wines in the merchants' behalf and sent them to Paris. In reality, the brokers frequently purchased the wines before any orders had come in. As the sole source of information to both merchants and growers, they virtually controlled all information about wines and prices. Knowing both at what price merchants were willing to buy and at what price producers were willing to sell, they were often accused of speculating in wines themselves. Such speculation was illegal, both because it cheated the royal administration of sales taxes and because it contradicted the official conception of the broker's role.

In fact, by the early eighteenth century, indignation ran high against the provincial brokers and their apparent monopoly of the wine trade. Not only were they speculating in wine, but they were making loans of barrels and credit in order to set prices on their own terms. A court case in Auxerre in 1737 brought these complaints to the fore, and a parlementary inquiry showed that these activities were widespread. The market in wine had become far more sophisticated. Brokers, in playing the role of financiers, had allowed for the extension of the market into the provinces and ensured that production would be tailored to consumers' tastes. Yet many viticultural communities were outraged that the very individuals who were supposed to represent their interests and assure the transparency of the market, instead practiced a "monopoly" on information, and served their private business concerns.

The provincial brokers, however, did not retain their privileged position for long. As transportation networks improved and as alternative credit mechanisms appeared, provincial growers in greater numbers began to bring their own wines to Paris. The new journals of commerce, in providing information about wines and markets, also increased the number of speculators in the market and sapped the brokers' monopoly of knowledge. The Parisian market grew ever larger, incorporating regions further afield into its orbit. These changes, Brennan argues, restored some of the transparency of the market, although the "public sphere" was now one of information exchange rather than community regulation.

Brokers reacted differently to these changes. Where brokers remained within the Parisian orbit, as in lower Burgundy, they did not innovate on their methods, but flooded the market with cheap wine. Where access to Paris was more difficult, brokers were forced to engage in new practices and seek new markets. Throughout the early modern period, the domestic and international wine markets had evolved quite differently. Brokers in international centers such as Bordeaux and Nantes had distinguished themselves from courtiers quite early, and had begun speculating in wines before the commission brokers of the domestic market. Brennan thus argues that in the wine trade, there was a noticeable distinction between the international markets of the periphery and the internal market focused on Paris. In the second half of the eighteenth century, brokers in Champagne and parts of Burgundy also began to seek international markets. In Burgundy, they focused on high quality wine which could be aged and sought buyers throughout Europe. They became *negociants*. In Champagne, brokers eventually began to sell sparkling wine in bottles. Yet, although this procedure enormously increased the value of wine, brokers turned to this alternative very slowly. Only with a severe market slump in the 1760s and 1780s did they begin to bottle the wine themselves and to obtain the profits of production. Modern wines were thus first produced for an export market, in which brokers had finally taken on the role of wholesale merchants.

Brennan's research into the domestic wine trade of Champagne and Burgundy is detailed and solid and his representation of the market convincing. On the whole, while his study shows the growth of the market and its increasing sophistication through the role of the commission broker, it also points to the limits and difficulties of the process. Wine was a delicate commodity to handle; its transportation was difficult; and its price structure was erratic. Further, ideas about the market and its proper organization lagged significantly behind the way it actually operated.

Still, there are some questions which remain unresolved. First, while Brennan states that the wine trade was essential to the commercialization of the French economy, it is questionable whether the scope of his study allows this general conclusion. It is clear that the domestic wine trade grew in both size and sophistication during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the focus on this one market sector cannot provide conclusive evidence for the commercialization of provincial society. For such a conclusion, we would have to see how the market in wine affected other sectors of the economy in the provinces; indeed, we would even like to know what effects the long distance market had on wines sold locally.

Second, although Brennan asks in his introduction what effects the wine trade had on the culture of viticultural communities, the nature of his evidence speaks to this issue only in part. We do learn of the hostility to commission brokers in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Brennan does provide the producers' view of the market, especially in Chapter 1. Yet the viticultural communities appear only in so far as they interact with the commission brokers, so that it is unclear how culture changed in response to the market. In each case, Brennan has asked important questions, but they would require a different research focus to obtain completely satisfactory answers.

Finally, one greater analytical generalization would be helpful: How much does the author see the changing structure of the market in wine as the product of random conditions, or alternatively, as following a general pattern of commercial evolution? Brennan's analysis presents the market as evolving from (1) transparency through regulation to (2) opacity through control of information to (3) transparency through an exchange of information in a Habermasian public sphere, accessed by private individuals. Yet many of the innovations in business practice were the product of necessity, as the divergence in practices among brokers in Burgundy in the eighteenth century shows. To what extent, therefore, was the control of the commission brokers a fortuitous accident in the changing structures of the domestic wine market, or to what extent was their role integral in the evolving parameters of commercial capitalism in early modern France?