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H-France Review Vol. 13 (January 2013), No. 4

Natacha Coquery, *Tenir boutique à Paris au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle: Luxe et demi-luxe*. Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques (CTHS HISTOIRE), 2011. 406 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. 28.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7355-0733-7.

Review by Daryl M. Hafter, Eastern Michigan University.

Natacha Coquery has written a delicious book that manages to be both a serious scholarly volume and a delectable analysis of luxury in the world's fashion capitol. She faced the task of using an enormous array of products and activities to make a coherent story of how elite shopowners dealt with their customers. Like Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Coquery used details to create a vivid impression of commerce in the eighteenth century. She has conjured up a three-dimensional picture of Paris that serves to bring us right onto its busy streets. Illustrative of her ability to present a lively, active scene, she entitled her book not "The shop in Paris," but "*tenir boutique*," that is, "having a shop" or "running a shop." This enables her to show every aspect of commerce, as it flows through the eighteenth century, and also to demonstrate all that shopkeepers had to do to stay in business.

We first see Paris as a wealthy traveler would, as sights and boutiques to visit are described. The almanacs and tourist guides with this information assume that visitors will be interested to see how various novelties are made, suggesting carpenters' and jewelers' workshops as places to explore. The shops merit as much interest as monuments and churches; people come to Paris to be dazzled by luxury goods that contribute to a heightened ambience of refinement and elegance. Paris becomes, for the reader of this book, a physical presence, as the streets are described, one after another, with their individual traits. The busy, narrow, sinuous Rue Mouffetard, for instance, is the authentic lung ("*le véritable pulmon*") of the quarter. Streets housing necessities like food, clothing, and household items are "nibbling" their way into the outskirts. In less built-up areas, manufactures of faience, porcelain, hardware, earthenware, and breweries are "here at their ease" p.137.

Coquery takes us through the city's network of byways, pinpointing where the shops selling luxury goods are located, and where the customers live. In the course of this tour, we learn that some luxury shops are scattered away far from high-class neighborhoods, and that some customers are spread through the city. But most high-level shopping occurred on the rue Saint-Honoré near the Palais-Royale, an area where the aristocracy had been settling since the seventeenth century. The Île Saint-Louis had 800 merchants, mostly in luxury trades, as did the area around the Place Dauphine. Architectural features like the placement of churches and monasteries, the development of new enclaves, orient us to the social composition of the inhabitants. From the author's painstaking research, we learn exactly how many *merciers*, *bonnetiers*, *drapiers*, *lingères*, *horlogers*, *bijoutiers*, *quincailliers*, *épiciers*, *rôtisseurs*, and *tapissiers* were on each street. These data are made even more appreciable in tables and maps at the back of the volume. They are a testament to Coquery's many significant articles and publications through years of archival study.

One of her objects is to analyze the particularities of doing business in the eighteenth century, distinguishing it from the time before and after. Coquery points out a number of seventeenth-century practices that persisted, like advertising in almanacs, having high-class shops cluster in better neighborhoods, and shops that specialized in one sort of object. Boutiques were the norm, usually attached to workshops that produced a part of the products sold. And the old practice of using bills of credit, as well as barter, cash, and sale on appraisal, continued from earlier times. However, the unique characteristics of eighteenth-century-merchandising stand out. There was a great proliferation of shops to service the explosion of items consumers were seeking. Quicker fashion change existed in every branch of production, in clothing of course, but also in jewelry, watch mountings, furnishings, architectural embellishments, table settings, candelabra, and snuff boxes. Society's approach to buying shifted from condemning luxury to glorifying it.(and esteeming the artisans who made it.) A comparison of streets between almanacs of early and late eighteenth century shows a change in cultural values: in 1716, the area was praised for its calm, in 1771 the later almanac complained about the lack of shops and business there.

Almanacs themselves already existed in the seventeenth century, but their number expanded later along with the quantity of advertising and information for readers. As a preamble, the first section of the book analyses the almanac and tourist guides as artifacts of growing commercialism. They are the source of much historical data—the rise and fall of commercial streets, the increasing number of shopkeepers in various trades—and also a testament to the growing commerce in various quarters of the city. As Daniel Roche noted in his pointed, important preface, “the transformation of a socio-cultural rapport with consumption is shown...in new media in which the boutique and its publicity touches society, from ordinary people to elites” (p.13). Advertisements can be found in the almanacs, leaflets, posters, and journals indicating shopkeepers' promoting of their goods. Coquery calls this advertising, “the emergence of a commercial literature,” a new language of enticement that repeats the words *elegance, delicacy, finesse, taste, distinction, beauty, ingenuity, and invention*. Growing consumer interest points to the rise of commercial almanacs as a publication venture. Is this also a function of increased literacy? Or is it a mark of greater affluence and tourism?

Intensifying the plastic nature of her analysis, the author traces the physical properties of major streets, peopling them with artisans, shopkeepers, and merchants. We learn of beautiful buildings, now demolished. The reasons for shop placement vary: warehouses serve for those who know in advance what they want; stores with display windows are necessary for attracting casual customers to luxury goods. Unsurprisingly, food preparation is thick upon well-populated streets, and trades like street pavers, hardware sellers, upholsterers, and basketmakers cluster together elsewhere. The author emphasizes the heterogeneity on many streets, the grouping of similar shops on others—a tension between dispersion and concentration throughout the city. The luxury trade, however, resided in the heart of Paris, the Île de la Cité, the rue Saint-Honoré, and the streets and quays nearby.

After locating shops in their external space, the next step is to bring us inside. As Coquery writes, “The boutique is at the same time a place of sale, of buying, and of manufacture, but it is also a place of credit, of sociability, of conflict, of spectacle, of tourism, of leisure, of fantasy, etc., a place where a culture of consumption is constructed” (p. 24). To enter this intimate space, the author singles out two merchants of luxury goods, whose information comes from ledgers and papers deposited after their business failures. (To this information she adds more than a hundred other examples of bankruptcy papers.) Nicolas Augburg, a *marchand joillier bijoutier* and Maturin Law, *marchand tapissier miroitier*, typify prosperous merchants of expensive things. Augburg's clients are a mix of courtiers, aristocrats, merchants, and wealthy bourgeois. The aristocrats (at 5 percent) and artisans are the most frequent repeat clients. The others, one-time customers passing through or merchants restoring their own stock, often barter material. Law's

customers are from the aristocracy, but almost an equal number are shopkeepers and artisans, both groups living near him. The jeweler trades with others in his craft, while the upholsterer has business with a greater number of artisans--those with cloth, wood, metal for nails and internal structure of furniture--that are necessarily in less crowded neighborhoods.

Coquery takes pains to point out the variety in the quality of goods displayed by the jeweler. Pieces range in cost from a few *livres* to 1,500 *livres*. Although a vender of luxuries, Augsburg also buys rings, pins, necklaces, and watches that are old or damaged; he repairs and enhances them to sell for more. By the 1750s, false gold and silver, and plate are considered novelties rather than fraudulent goods. Payments too are varied and irregular, with little reference to seasonal rhythms.

In an excellent section on credit, we learn how seldom cash was used in payments. Always risky, credit takes a number of forms: *credit en conscience*, for merchants and artisans, *billets d'honneur* for aristocrats, and for the many, *billets* under *sous-seing* (private contract).<sup>[1]</sup> Coquery also stresses the wide variety of payment modes, from a combination of barter plus bills of exchange, to several kinds of mixed commercial paper. This mixture reflects the structural fluidity of business associations and even the idiosyncratic way bankruptcies were imposed. While admitting that these practices were old-fashioned habits of pre-modern trade, the author suggests helpfully that they imparted flexibility, important to the age. They were the outgrowth of a society intertwined in confidence and good faith among traders. Embedded--she uses the English word--in the commercial world, the shops' credit depended on the assumed norms of upright community behavior (p. 212). The customary role of boutiques as lenders of small and large amounts, even without sales, made credit more available, but also added to frequent business failures.

By means of its meticulous use of detail and thorough reference to other scholarly works, this volume underscores themes about the early modern period that are now confirmed. No longer may we wonder why business in France was not crippled by the lack of a national bank: the shopkeepers themselves lent small and large sums to prospective customers. Failure in trade, once considered the end of an enterprise, is now understood to be only a part of an ongoing process, in which the unfortunate is not expelled from the business community or from his business associates. Bankruptcies, if conducted without dishonesty, induced the creditors to levy the easiest possible terms, and sometimes were even a means of judging a debtor's assets rather than forcing payments.

The taste for consumer goods that grew in the eighteenth century created a new world of shops, and made a new activity of shopping. This book shows how Paris, the center of European luxury, fared through this social and economic change. Erecting shops with *vitaines* sparkling with precious jewelry, forming companies ready to supply elegant furniture, the commercial life of Paris is gracefully portrayed by Natacha Coquery. *Tenir boutique à Paris* is a most welcome addition to the increasing number of works on the economy in old regime France, and a thoughtful, engrossing, authoritative book to read.

#### NOTE

[1] *Sous-seing*, or private deeds, are contracts made under the authority of a notary. The contracts are recorded in the notary's papers, but considered private, so they are not recorded in any public ledger (important, perhaps, to someone who doesn't want his business to be known to others).

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ISSN 1553-9172