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Donna J. Bohanan, *Fashion Beyond Versailles: Consumption and Design in Seventeenth-Century France*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2012. x + 154 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$40.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8071-4521-0.

Review by Lianne McTavish, University of Alberta.

Donna Bohanan bases her book on postmortem household inventories produced between 1680 and 1715 in Dauphiné, a province in southeastern France. The early modern sources, now located in the Archives départementales de l'Isère, provide descriptive lists of the objects owned by wealthy families, ranging from paintings to plants, textiles, and kitchen utensils. Despite the length and detail of some of the inventories, the author admits that the documents are "highly problematic" because they are not necessarily comprehensive, and lack information about the arrangement of interior spaces (p. 5). Insisting that they nevertheless convey meaningful data, Bohanan uses these inventories to explore the social values and lifestyles of noble Dauphinois families (p. 6). The author looks for broad patterns of consumption, moving from the particular to the general and back in her quest to place the listed objects within a wider historical context. While aiming to expose what specific luxury items meant to people living far from the centers of Paris and Versailles, Bohanan's study also reveals the possibilities and limitations of her methodology.

Bohanan's first chapter provides the backstory for her main narrative about the increasing consumption of expensive household objects during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. She focuses on the *procès des tailles*, a lengthy challenge to the tax exemptions enjoyed by nobles in Dauphiné. The bitter debate ended in the 1630s, when families that had been ennobled after 1602 lost their tax exemptions, but maintained other privileges (pp. 25–6). Bohanan contends that this threat to noble legitimacy had lingering effects, especially on those who were newly *anoblis*, leading them to acquire and display opulent, stylish, and exotic goods as a way to solidify their superior rank. At the same time, she places their efforts in relation to the more gradual changes to noble identity occurring throughout France. Describing the so-called Military Revolution, the author explains that as the noble provision of military service declined, so too did the legitimacy of noble rights and privileges. Instead of exhibiting valor, noble families in Versailles, Paris, and Grenoble (the capital of Dauphiné) sought distinction from the lower orders by cultivating good taste and associating themselves with fashionable objects.

Chapter two begins with a general discussion of the "demoralization" of the consumption of luxury goods. The decorative household objects that regularly appeared in postmortem inventories, including paintings, tapestries, Oriental rugs, and clocks, had long conveyed splendor and continued to do so, but increasingly associated their owners with good taste rather than corruption or indulgence. Bohanan notes that silver services and accessories were particularly able to convey the rank and status of noble families, creating visual evidence of their lineage (p. 32). In terms of exotic luxury consumption, the author finds fascinating details about the collection and display of trees and plants. Inspired by both the Orangerie at Versailles and the decoration of Parisian *hôtels*, including that of the Duchess of Guise, several Dauphinois nobles invested heavily in orange trees, placing them in large tubs or urns (pp. 32 and 48). In 1708, the château of the *anoblis* Perissol-Alleman family in Allières, for instance, featured fifty-two orange trees in white and blue wooden boxes, as well as fig trees and jasmine plants (p. 53).

Bohanan argues that this interest in exotic luxury consumption not only conveyed fashionable taste but allowed provincials to participate in the colonizing tendencies of French garden design, in keeping with arguments made about the politics of early modern French landscaping by Chandra Mukerji.[1]

In the third chapter, Bohanan offers what is arguably her most interesting discussion of the changes in interior design that occurred in Dauphiné as quickly as they did in the more central areas of France. Whereas *le luxe* was the focus of chapter two, in this case the author explains the principle of *régularité*, or the effort to create a unified interior by purchasing matching sets of furniture upholstered in the same fabric and installed in rooms decorated with a single color. Inspired by the Marquise de Rambouillet's *Chambre bleue*, furnishing an entire room in a cohesive manner displayed both sophisticated planning and sheer expense, especially when the abundant textiles were not mechanically produced (pp. 59–60). Bohanan argues that in keeping with the fashions in Paris, the postmortem inventories from Dauphiné reveal an increasing attention to color in the precise language used by notaries, who took the trouble to describe such hues as *muse* (a brownish gray) or *citron* (a pale lemon yellow) while distinguishing between numerous shades of red (p. 58). She explains that when the records indicate multiple sets of matching textiles, it is likely that color schemes were changed seasonally, with slip covers and billowing skirts able to alter the appearance and silhouette of chairs (p. 61).

Chapter four notes an increasing interest in comfortable furniture, especially the *fauteuil de commodité*, a kind of easy chair that could be reclined, sometimes with moveable parts. Bohanan finds that these chairs rapidly made their way into the households of Dauphiné, offering yet another example of how fashions moved from Paris to the provinces. Along with such other commodious furnishings as day beds, modes of interior lighting, and mirrors, these chairs responded to changing understandings of corporeality. The author argues: “based on the inventories presented herein, that the same was true of France, where remote parts of the realm included, there was a growing awareness of the body and its relationship to the physical environment on the part of craftsmen and consumers” (p. 86). Expanding on the historical context for the modifications to interior decoration, Bohanan invokes the shifting patterns of aristocratic sociability. Whereas medieval forms of hospitality had featured large groups of people from various ranks feasting within ceremonial spaces, early modern practices saw noble hosts taking an interest in individual comfort within smaller, exclusive social gatherings held in the private areas of their homes.

In her fifth and final chapter, Bohanan extends her discussion of noble entertainments to include food ways. Here she provides the bigger picture for the extensive lists of kitchen ware recorded in the inventories. Impressive in both the number and variety of items, a noble *batterie de cuisine* could include cast iron and tinned copper stock pots, various kinds of ceramic pots, terrines, tinned copper pans with lids, multiple caldrons, pewter bowls, tin molds, wooden spoons, spatulas, and colanders. In a welcome contrast to previous chapters, Bohanan reproduces parts of the inventories in this chapter, providing a concrete sense of the investment of noble families in both cookery and entertaining (pp. 95–8). While avoiding quantitative assessments elsewhere, here the author conveys the sheer number of accompanying accoutrements, including table linens. The townhouse of Pierre de Pannat, for example, was equipped with eighteen dozen napkins and twelve tablecloths of Venetian cotton, among many other textiles related to dining (p. 112). This clear and consistent emphasis on dining leads the author to explore the gradual alteration of French cuisine, enhanced by La Varenne's well-known *Le cuisinier françois* of 1651, with its recipes for the bouillon, roux, and herb-infused vegetable dishes that replaced the longstanding emphasis on heavily spiced medieval stews.

Overall, Bohanan's book is informed by solid archival work and should please historians in its provision of context, the potentially endless act of framing original sources.[2] She succinctly summarizes the relevant secondary literature, and the results will interest scholars of early modern consumption, material culture, and fashion. Contributing to these burgeoning fields, Bohanan convincingly demonstrates that fashions related to interior design were transferred to Dauphiné via publications,

engravings, and personal observations at much the same pace as they were to such centers as Versailles and Paris. The author successfully searches for patterns to compare the consumption in Dauphiné with that taking place in other parts of France (and to a certain degree in England), and her attention to the language of the notaries is laudable.

Early modern scholars will nevertheless find little that is new in this book. For the most part, Bohanan synthesizes previous scholarship, proving that the arguments made elsewhere also hold for her provincial sources. Most of the text is devoted to summarizing the work of others, with surprisingly little detailed attention given to the particularities of the inventories. Although Bohanan is not interested in providing a quantitative survey, more replication of the lists and associated data would have been welcome. I turned to the book's bibliography and counted the fifty-five individual names appearing there in order to get a sense of the scope of her project. At the same time, given its focus on providing historical overviews, Bohanan's book is highly descriptive and light on theory, with only a few passing references to the work of Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. It is therefore well suited for undergraduate teaching, especially if instructors can provide more in depth discussions of the concepts of class, taste, identity, and fashion.

The real problem is the source material itself, for as Giorgio Riello has shown, inventories must be approached with caution.^[3] Bohanan's desire to discover what the objects listed meant to their owners is practically impossible to fulfill without additional source material, though she makes a convincing case for what such objects meant in general. The limitations of the author's method are epitomized by the book's illustrations, which were hand drawn by Teresa Rodriguez to show a Louis XIV-style pediment mirror and *lit imperiale* among other typical items. These generalized figures are meant to compensate for the absence of surviving material objects in the written inventories, and they have a ghost-like presence. Serving as diagrams, the figures provide an idea of what the missing objects looked like. Their lack of specificity, color, and texture is, however, ultimately unsatisfying.

NOTES

[1] Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] Norman Bryson, "Art in Context," in Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer, eds *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis* (London: Continuum, 1994), pp. 66–78.

[3] Giorgio Riello, "Things Seen and Unseen: The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and Their Representation of Domestic Interiors," in Paula Findlen, ed., *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2013), pp. 125–150.

Lianne McTavish
University of Alberta
lmctavis@ualberta.ca

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