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Nancy Locklin, *Women's Work and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Brittany*. Aldershot, U.K. and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007. viii + 162 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-7546-5819-1.

Review by Daryl Hafter, Eastern Michigan University (Emerita).

Nancy Locklin's *Women's Work and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Brittany* is an important monograph in helping to establish a portrait of early modern France. A balanced, numerically sophisticated analysis, the book documents the variety of actions women took, despite the restrictions that a patriarchal society and legal code put on them. Although this volume (a bit stiff since it grew out of her dissertation) hews closely to the documentary and statistical evidence, it is written with considerable flair and appreciation of the humanity of the individuals she studies. Locklin has effectively mined the archives using intelligent suppositions to fill out what the clues suggest. She also reveals the lacks, lacunae, and biases in her sources in an effort to resist claiming more than she can reasonably assert. With this material, she has been able to give us a tantalizing view of the possibilities and choices of women in the past.

The study is divided into four chapters: "The Women of Brittany"; "Work and Identity"; "Women under Breton Law"; and "Social Life and Honor." In the first chapter, Locklin discusses the vagaries of statistical data. Parish registers only have information on births, deaths, and marriages. Exempt from the *taille*, Brittany's chief impost was the *fouage*, which listed households in rural areas and villages, but not in cities. The *capitation* (a head tax), imposed on all but the clergy, was a greater source of information; but even here inconsistent recording and the loss of many documents made comparison among the population centers difficult. The geographical setting of Brittany also interfered with exact comparisons, but it also provided glimpses into the population and work structure of port cities like Brest and Saint-Malo.

The most striking element in Locklin's presentation is how often her material challenges our present assumptions about women's history. Historians have already located single women in cities where the sources of commerce and trade were prevalent. In Brittany, surprisingly, the percentage of unmarried, independent women was larger in the small towns and villages. Locklin attributes this to the fact that a high percentage of females inherited property under Breton law, allowing them to live from fees collected from renters. While widows sometimes joined households with others in the same situation, it was more often single women in the same profession, perhaps sisters, who linked their living arrangements. Sometimes these women willed donations to their housemates, showing thanks for services or for affection received, and surprisingly, the law protected these legacies from family pressure.

Challenging Olwen Hufton's declaration that women without partners often faced destitution, Locklin asserts that the reality was much more varied. Some widows, as well as unmarried women, were too impoverished to pay any taxes, but others appeared in the middle range and a few were quite well off. In villages and small towns, these women were likely to live from rental property. In cities, with more commerce, they took up work in textiles, food preparation, commerce, or odd jobs. The port cities presented their own idiosyncrasies. With husbands as fishermen or sailors, women had their own trades even before they became widows.

In answer to the common view that women remained widows only because there were not enough men to marry, Locklin asserts that widows had complete control of their legal and financial affairs; if they were in comfortable circumstances, this freedom might have kept them from seeking husbands. It remains to be seen whether Breton widows were more fortunate than the women Sarah Hanley described, whose in-laws fought to control their children and their funds, or whether they eluded the difficulties that Janine Lanza found oppressing widows in Paris.

Another of Locklin's important discoveries is the variety in married women's work. Taking Natalie Zemon Davis' comment that women's professional identity was weak because their life roles required them to be flexible, Locklin's documents show a different possibility. According to the capitation records, numerous women ran their own businesses, and did so throughout their marriages. In Brittany, the family economy was not necessarily a home workshop headed by a skilled husband, with auxiliary tasks done by wife and children. Those with seafaring husbands, whether sailors or long-distance merchants, needed trades to support the family in their absence. Nor could married journeymen sustain a household on their slim wages. In these situations, it was natural for wives to carry on a profession different from that of their husbands.

But even when husbands lived and worked in the same domicile, women might have their own businesses. Locklin cites the amusing story of a prosperous fish merchant, Andrée Boursin, who had substantial commerce with distant customers. In an altercation with one of her clients, her husband irritably protested that he had nothing to do with her trade. She, in turn, asserted that she never ran up debts, buying only what had been ordered and reeling off the particulars of past orders—all this without benefit of reading and writing. Married women performed many other independent trades in their own right both in Brittany and elsewhere. Locklin does not cite, for example, the interesting rules in Rouen's *lingères*' (linen drapers) guild that forbade husbands to participate in their wives' business affairs.

Locklin's aim is to enlarge the narrow family economy model, not to overturn it. The inner world of family business that obscures the identity of wives also hides their skill in making and managing goods. Many married women worked in tandem with husbands, acting as surrogates when the men were absent. They functioned as head of the firm and of the family when widowed. Although these mothers played a crucial role in preserving the business and handing it along to children, it would be wrong to think of them solely as conduits.

As for the shibboleth that the burden of children kept early modern women from plying their trades, Locklin cites the frequent use of wet nurses and placement of children in the poor house or the countryside. Maurice Garden first noted this practice among the silk makers of Lyon, where the wife's industrial labor was crucial to family survival. Older children found tasks in the family workshop. As a rule, mothers seldom had enough wealth to let childcare interrupt their gainful employment. To quote Locklin: "It is clear that each stage of life offered unique challenges and choices. There were necessary adaptations for marriage and childcare, but there was room to maneuver. Marriage did not always require a complete abandonment of previous skills and occupations.... [T]he various stages of a woman's life had an impact, certainly, but did not entirely dictate her work opportunities" (p.46).

Locklin's appeal for understanding the variability of women's situation is advanced in her discussion of work. A number of Breton guilds admitted women as mistresses in their own right, and even traditionally masculine trades listed a few women. Unlike the cases that Julie Hardwick reported, these women did not shun male work in an effort to preserve their femininity. Surprisingly, daughters had the same inherited rights as sons to work in these associations. The tailors' guild had a curious regulation that permitted women to become full masters, but if they married within the guild, they had to give up their license; only if they married men in other trades could they maintain their mastership.

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But the majority of women took on employment in trades outside the guilds. Here, the authorities seemed to have a particularly charitable view of women's work, allowing seamstresses, cloth merchants, secondhand goods dealers, and others to work relatively unhindered by guilds with similar trades. To be sure the guilds apprehended some individuals for illegal production—as many women as men—but “there was a sizeable gray area between full membership [in a guild] and contravention” (p.67). Despite the advantages that Bretonnes could find, the women constituted the largest number of the poor. While Locklin avoids presenting a “golden utopia,” she wishes to underscore that “the gendered nature of work did not lock women into rigid roles....and indeed, such flexibility was often a necessary component of survival in the early modern economy” (p.71).

Since historians' keen interest in Brittany stems from its relative political and legal independence, chapter three on women under Breton law is especially welcome. Locklin attributes female independence to customary codes that gave partible inheritance (equal shares) to all children. In addition, the community of goods between wife and husband could start a year and a day after marriage, allowing women to manage their property and funds for that time. The community of goods—sometimes begun immediately—gave women access to marital resources.

Traditionally, Breton women signed contracts and made wills and donations without the permission of the husband. As elsewhere, unmarried women over the age of twenty-five had the same freedom of action. They could also make their homes together and share a profession, rights forbidden elsewhere. However, the relative liberty accorded Bretonnes was successively curtailed as this province responded to the “family-state pact” that Sarah Hanley has described; by the seventeenth century, a husband's consent was needed for contracts and wills. Constricting women's actions further, the charge of leading a *mauvaise vie* (a debauched life) could cause a woman to be sentenced to exile or worse. The support of female neighbors might or might not convince the court to exonerate her.

The author's wide knowledge of the early French legal system within the context of work, sociability, and family behavior creates a vivid reconstruction of the lived experience that women and men shared. Although the author leans a bit too strongly on Brittany's singularity (women elsewhere opened their own shops), Locklin's work is a valuable contribution toward enlarging the paradigms of women's history. Our understanding of early modern France will gain much from this significant monograph.

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