
H-France Review Vol. 16 (March 2016), No. 42

Gabriel Audisio, *Une ville au sortir du Moyen Âge: Apt-en-Provence (1460-1560)*. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2014. 11 + 439 pp. Maps, tables, graphs, notes, bibliography, and index. 29 EUR. (pb). ISBN 978-2-8124-3064-0.

Review by Gayle K. Brunelle, California State University, Fullerton.

Une ville au sortir du Moyen Âge: Apt-en-Provence (1460-1560) is one of the many fine local histories French historians regularly produce. Although Audisio asserts that there is a “historiographical desert” (p. 12) in France when it comes to urban history, from the perspective of historians of other regions of the world, there are quite a few studies of French cities and urban areas. Audisio is correct, however, that most focus on larger cities rather than on smaller or medium-sized communities such as Apt-en-Provence, located in the modern department of the Vaucluse. Like most of these local histories, this book is meant for multiple audiences—historians focused on the region, in this case Provence, historians of cities and towns, and social historians seeking a better understanding of life on the intimate level of a fairly small city. It shares many of the features and drawbacks of this type of history, excellent research, in this case based on notarial registers, and the close attention to detail that notarial registers make possible, which can be extraordinarily useful for scholars, but can also be overwhelming for non-specialists and in some cases discourage asking larger questions or relating the particular to the general, in this case Provence and/or French society during the ancien régime.

Because this book is based almost entirely on notarial records, it also raises important questions regarding what notarial acts can tell us about the social structures, economy, political struggles, and everyday life of a town like Apt-en-Provence, as well as what they elide or obscure. One of the potential problems with notarial records is that many folks, in some communities the majority, lacked the means to register transactions with a notary, or at least to have recourse to notaries as frequently as their more affluent neighbors. Thus while notarial records often give the impression of encompassing the whole community, in reality they tend to reflect the interests, concerns, and financial affairs of the upper half of the society much better than they do those of the poorer sort. We have to understand what notarial records are: in essence, they are contracts, personal or public, and usually involve a financial exchange of some sort—commercial exchanges, sales of land, financial arrangements in marriages, wills, and inheritances, or public or private debts of all sorts. Individuals had to pay to have their contracts notarized, which meant that the value of the agreement involved had to meet or exceed the cost of having it notarized. Even in Provence, where recourse to notaries seems to have been more common than in northern France, the poor are still likely to be underrepresented in collections of notarial documents. And the much smaller agreements that peppered the lives of ordinary French people, rich and poor alike, albeit especially among the poor, were never notarized and are thus lost to historical study, and with them the parameters of social and economic relationships binding these sectors of the society.

In addition, different communities tended to register different types of documents and with varying frequencies. In some cities, such as Rouen in Normandy, also blessed with very well preserved and largely complete notarial records for the early modern period, commercial documents were usually recorded in separate registers from those containing marriage contracts, wills, and acts related to real

estate or *rentes* (annuities). Commercial acts in Rouen accounted for at least a third of all notarial entries. In Bordeaux, by contrast, which was equally a commercial nexus for its region of France that by the mid-seventeenth century had overtaken Rouen as a center of regional and overseas trade, far fewer commercial documents have survived for the period prior to the eighteenth century. Those still extant are mingled with other types of notarial contracts in bundles divided up by the notary, rather than being separated out in registers as in Rouen. And not all of the archives of *bordelais* notaries survive. Scholars know that Bordeaux had many more notaries whose records have disappeared partially or completely. Since notaries tended to specialize, this means that scholars inevitably have a distorted picture of how much of the city's economy commerce of different magnitudes actually comprised. We cannot know the volume or value of the contracts the missing notaries handled in comparison to those notaries whose archives are extant. Audisio points out that the registers of at least one Apt notary during the period he is studying, that of Jean Raquin, is entirely missing. All this is to say that notarial documents can be incredibly useful for historical research, but they also pose certain problems and can distort as well as illuminate.

It is to Audisio's credit not only that he performed the labor of making his way through Apt-en-Provence's many notarial registers, with the help of his student Jacques Leclerc, but also that he raises at the outset significant questions regarding how historians should use notarial documents, and what they can and cannot tell us about the history of a community. He points out that Apt had no parish records extant until the end of the period he is studying, and few other sources suitable for a social history of the town besides the notarial records. Hence he views this book in part as a methodological experiment. This aspect of the book alone renders this study useful to social and economic historians who may have little interest in Apt-en-Provence or its region, because it illuminates the need for methodological transparency on the part of scholars. It is a case study, in other words, of methodology even while it also contributes to scholarship in early modern French urban history.

It should be noted that the 652 registers preserved for Apt in this period contain in total over 130,000 acts. Audisio and his research collaborator Jacques Leclerc, who did most of the work of transcribing the documents, focused on the more informative acts, in particular marriage contracts and testaments, as well as documents related to the Waldensian heretics that Audisio has studied throughout his career, and some contracts related to sales, apprenticeships, and repayment of debts. This focus, on approximately four thousand acts in all, and two-thirds of them marriages and wills, itself shapes the resulting study. Two-thirds of the total number of acts in the registers, for example, involved purchases or the repayment of debts of various types, making Audisio's sample quite different in content from that of the totality of acts preserved for Apt. The exclusion of the rest from the study, understandable as it is given the unmanageable numbers of these acts overall, undoubtedly skews the resulting research toward the "middling" and upper levels of the population who were more likely to notarize these types of contracts in the first place and have more to say in them, given the larger values involved in the transactions. Audisio does point out that traces of Apt's humbler citizens can be found in the witnesses to acts. Still, while ordinary receipts by themselves often contain little information, in the aggregate they can offer a more complete picture of the many economic transactions that bound together societies, if for no other reason than less affluent people who themselves would be unlikely to notarize many contracts often appear in acts when they owed money, sold a product, or performed a service for an individual who did have the means and motivation to notarize the act. But such are the constraints of historical research using notarial acts absent a well-funded team of researchers who can systematically read, digitize, and analyze a complete series of notarial registers. In his first chapter, Audisio provides background on the production of notarial acts and an excellent analysis of the process of reading (deciphering in many cases) and analyzing them that students and scholars unfamiliar with this type of document will find very useful.

In focusing on the century of 1460-1560, Audisio has opted to study a particularly dynamic period in the history of Apt-en-Provence, which also helps his book transcend the limits of municipal history. Apt-en-

Provence was a “middling” town in size and importance, a regional center of commerce and urbanity. Moreover, 1460-1560 bridges the late Middle Ages and the early modern era. And in Apt the transition from medieval to Renaissance was particularly fraught, first because it was only in 1481 that Provence officially was integrated into the French realm. This resulted in legal and institutional changes that impacted the lives of most people in Apt. Second, although most of Provence at this time remained faithful to Roman Catholicism, Apt bordered on territories where religious dissidence—Catharism and Waldensianism, in the Middle Ages and by 1560, Protestantism—had won over significant portions of the population. There were also changes to the town’s demographics as it received migrants, especially from the Luberon, who were fleeing the religious turmoil and economic devastation of the mountainous regions around Apt and whom the town viewed as potentially disruptive to its relative religious harmony. The town’s notarial documents reflect the impact of all of these political, institutional, religious, and cultural changes.

Audisio is most interested in writing a social history of Apt-en-Provence. In particular, he seeks to ascertain “who owned what” in the town and who ran it and who controlled its affairs. In addition to the notarial acts, he consulted the deliberations of the municipal council for 1532-1560, and the two surviving land registers for 1535 and 1536. In a legal and juridical sense, Apt was a small city, with defensive walls and a city government and privileges, including the right to determine its own citizenry (*droit de la bourgeoisie*). In 1460, the city held some twelve-hundred or so people. By 1560, Audisio estimates that the population had more than doubled, reaching about three thousand inhabitants. Apt’s reach extended beyond its walls, as it was the principal city of the Luberon region, and multiple economic and social relationships linked it to the surrounding countryside, where many of Apt’s wealthier citizens owned land. Apt’s process of selecting city councilors not surprisingly favored the wealthy, but it did guarantee that of the nineteen councilors at least eight would come from the ranks of the commune’s peasants and artisans, which made the municipal government much more open than that of many other French cities in the period. Members of Apt’s elite not surprisingly always filled the principal offices, the two syndics (later, consuls), the secretary and the treasurer. The latter office in particular required a man of means, as the treasurer often had to cover revenue shortfalls from his own purse or risk arrest. Like most early modern municipal governments, the councilors dealt with health and welfare, policing and town defenses (including the perennial problem of maintaining the walls), as well as collecting taxes and ensuring a reliable food supply, especially significant if they wanted to head off urban unrest.

One of the most significant challenges facing Apt in this period was the influx of “foreigners,” including many refugees from the surrounding mountains of the Luberon, fleeing religious persecution and the economic disarray that ensued from religious strife. Plague and warfare had greatly reduced the population of Provence by the mid-fifteenth century, but natural increase and especially migration reversed that trend during the ensuing century, so that the population of Apt more than doubled between 1460 and 1560. Most of this increase came from migration to Apt and the surrounding countryside, although the bulk of the migrants were not “foreign” in the modern sense, as almost three-fourths of the migrants came from surrounding dioceses. Most of the rest came from Turin, Geneva, and Italian-speaking territory on the eastern side of the Alps.

So unlike larger commercial cities, Apt’s immigrants were for the most part similar in culture and language to Apt’s native population. What the migrants had in common was that they were descending from the overpopulated and impoverished mountains to the plain, and many settled not within the city’s walls but rather in the surrounding countryside. Thus most of these migrants were peasants seeking fertile land to farm. They boosted the region’s economy immensely, given that Apt itself was primarily an administrative center for an agricultural region and most of the city’s inhabitants maintained close ties to the countryside. But, as Audisio also points out, the migrants brought tensions to Apt as well, given their religious heterodoxy. As a result, much of the focus of the city council in this period, and of Audisio’s book, was on how to manage change and integrate “strangers” and “strange” (French) laws as

the city both became part of France and subject to French laws, and host to many newcomers bringing customs and religious ideas foreign to Apt. Most of the “Lutherans” settling in Apt came from the region of Savoy or from Geneva, which also became the refuge of at least some of the sixty or so natives of Apt who gravitated to Protestant ideas. By 1560, the terminus of Audisio’s study, religious strife had begun to break out in Apt, heralding the beginning of a new era in the city, as in France.

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ISSN 1553-9172