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Marianne Thivend, *Ces femmes qui comptent: Le genre de l'enseignement commercial en France au XIXe siècle.* Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2024. 320 pp. Notes, maps, references, and index. €22.00. (pb). ISBN 9782729714390.

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By tracing the history of education that prepared women to work in bookkeeping, accounting, and other commercial activities, Marianne Thivend aims to situate women "who count" more broadly in the economic and social changes occurring during the second half of the nineteenth century. Just as the push to extend the acquisition of literacy owed much to local and parental demand before the French state took legislative action, so too the history of commercial education started with local and private initiatives.[1] Efforts in Lyon loom large in Thivend's study, which reflects her considerable familiarity with both local and national sources, previously demonstrated in her *L'Ecole républicaine dans la ville: Lyon 1870-1914*.[2] Local initiatives in Paris also figured prominently but those in other cities, including Marseille, Bordeaux, St. Etienne, Le Havre, and Angers, are not neglected. Drawing from local, departmental, and national archives and publications that include commercial *annuaires* and bulletins, textbooks and professional manuals, the proceedings of national and international congresses, and feminist sources, Thivend provides a detailed study of a part of women's education not previously included in various works on girls' and women's access to primary and secondary schooling or universities. Most work on French technical and commercial education has focused on that provided for boys and men, and for that reason, Thivend also used studies on English and American commercial education for models and comparisons.

Nineteenth-century education with commercial and industrial applications could include, for women, classes in design, sewing, and dressmaking, but Thivend limits her study to commercial instruction, noting that its introduction for girls and women typically came after that for boys and men. The Code du Commerce of 1807 required enterprises to keep accurate accounts, and people doing that work were termed *comptables* or *teneurs de livres,* and sometimes *calligraphistes* because good handwriting was essential. A distinction between the *comptable*, who organized the keeping of accounts, and the *teneur*, who entered data, came later. Commercial education for women, which also included commercial law and business practices, first developed in urban areas with a lower-middle-class population of artisans and shopkeepers who valued the assistance of wives and daughters or who wanted women family members to be able to earn a living or contribute to the household. Because women often participated in small family businesses, the first commercial courses for them were frequently held at night or on Sunday,

before they were lengthened and scheduled at other times. Gender distinctions in accounting roles sharpened during the twentieth century.

In Lyon, the city council and chamber of commerce financed the first accounting course for women in 1857. Élise Luquin, a teacher, was central to its functioning until her death in 1898, and she is one of two women who figure prominently in the book. Her student, Marguerite Malmanche, is the other. Luquin was the daughter of a *négociant* in silk whose family business in the Croix Rousse underwent bankruptcy in 1849-1851, causing a decline in the bourgeois family's status. While her father and his brothers sought other employment in the silk industry, Élise prepared for teaching. Thivend speculates that she probably attended a *cours normal* run by the Société pour l'instruction primaire in the Rhône department, which had promoted laic education since 1834. By then, women's work in commerce had a long history. The 1866 census for the Rhône recorded 4,228 *patronnes* in commerce, along with 8,500 *patrons*, and for industry 6,796 *patronnes* and more than 30,000 *patrons*. Although women already kept accounts in many family businesses, more training, including a better grasp of arithmetic, was deemed useful for avoiding bankruptcies. Of course, many housewives also kept accounts, as contemporary manuals for *économie domestique* indicated. For her sustained contribution, Luquin received the distinction of *chevalier* of the Legion of Honor in 1896. Her pioneering course for women, Thivend argues, pushed "les barrières du genre d'un monde professionnel en construction" (p. 54).

The commercial program that Luquin directed in Lyon had parallels elsewhere, not only in private offerings but also in *cours secondaires*, *écoles primaires supérieures* (*eps*), and *écoles professionnelles*. In 1867, Luquin's course began receiving subsidies from the Ministry of Public Instruction, then under Victor Duruy. Courses in other cities eventually received subsidies, some of them from the Ministry of Commerce. Until the educational reforms promoted by the Minister of Education, Jules Ferry, the differences between secondary courses, higher primary schools (*eps*) for post-primary students, and professional schools were less distinct than they became after 1879. The diversity of offerings in commercial education, public and private, thus parallels the considerable diversity that Rebecca Rogers found in secondary-level schooling for young women before the Camille Sée law of 1880 established girls' public secondary schools.[3]

In Paris, a private philanthropic organisation created the first commercial courses for women. The Société pour l'enseignement professionnel des femmes (SPEPF) opened several schools during the 1860s, and had twelve by the late 1870s. Known as the écoles Élisa Lemonnier, they served pupils aged twelve and older and were largely overseen by women on their executive committees, many of them bourgeois. Unsurprisingly, their teachers had more modest backgrounds. The first SPEPF school, directed by Joséphine Marchef-Girard, offered general education in the morning and, in the afternoon, professional training in couture, engraving, and porcelain painting, as well as commercial instruction. Several competing Catholic schools also opened in Paris between 1867 and 1871, but focused more on training *ouvrières* than on commercial preparation. The Paris Chamber of Commerce also created night courses for women during the 1870s. In 1873, the city of Paris began allocating subsidies to SPEPF schools and, in 1906, it took control of them.

Marguerite Malmanche (1847-1913), trained by Luquin in Lyon, became a central figure in promoting commercial education for young women not only in Paris, but nationally. Octave Gréard, as *inspecteur d'académie* in Paris, favored creating accounting courses for women, and Malmanche directed one of them. She also introduced a certificate of commercial studies, promoted courses at the 1878 universal exposition in Paris, and in 1879 was delegated to inspect women's commercial courses in Paris. By 1884, Paris had thirteen such courses for women and fourteen for men.

Once the national government decided to expand women's professional education during the 1880s, the Ministry of Commerce asked Luquin to organize commercial courses in various cities and, in 1886, she began tours of France as an *inspectrice générale* for commercial and professional education. She and Marchef-Girard were also delegated in 1888 to inspect professional training in higher primary schools for girls. These special roles for women in administrative matters at the national level paralleled the longstanding assignment of women inspectors for *écoles maternelles* and the first appointment of a woman inspector for girls' primary schools in 1891. Luquin and Malmanche also participated in congresses on professional and technical education. In 1901, the Ministry of Commerce finally named an *inspectrice* for its *écoles pratiques du commerce et d'industrie* (*epci*), selecting Anna Vigneron, *directrice* of the *epci* in Le Havre. Malmanche, for her efforts, was made a *chevalier* and then *officier* of the Legion of Honor.

As Thivend traces how the French state drew on local precedents to shape national policies on professional education for women as well as men, she also notes feminist organizations' interest in expanding women's employment opportunities in commerce, a parallel to advocacy for admitting women to various professions. Both Luquin and Malmanche couched arguments for employing women in terms consistent with prevailing gender norms, as did many contemporary feminists. Thus, Luquin stressed that young women working in a family's business were in a safe space and that wives often needed to aid husbands. Malmanche cited women's qualities of patience and orderliness, as well as the appropriateness of work not requiring great physical strength. Employment guides for women echoed such emphases. Gender-specific arguments also mirrored feminists' advocacy when they identified special professional niches for women educators, doctors, and lawyers, arguing that women's innate qualities enabled them to provide special help to women and children.[5] The feminist daily *La Fronde* reported on commercial training and new *syndicats* for women.

Thivend's substantial discussion of preparing women for commercial work also includes a survey of who taught and the subjects offered. Luquin and Malmanche had trained to become primary school teachers (*institutrices*) and they encouraged their better students to obtain teaching *brevets* even before the state made training *institutrices* a priority with the Bert law of 1879. Luquin had prepared 102 teachers in Lyon by 1882 while in Paris, Malmanche had directed a *cours normal*. As commercial subjects became part of the *epci*, the Ministry of Commerce instituted a requirement that *epci* teachers hold a *brevet supérieur*. Between 1892 and 1912, the number of *epci* for young women rose from two to thirteen, as compared to fifty-nine for men, and a shortage of suitable teachers for them finally led to the opening in 1912 of the École normale de l'enseignement technique (ENET). Unlike the sex-segregated departmental and higher normal schools preparing teachers for primary and secondary schools, the ENET was

partly coeducational, with two industrial sections for men, a women's section combining industrial and domestic training, and two commercial sections for both sexes. Previously, some of the municipal and private courses for adults also had been "mixed," and Thivend considers that the working-class and lower middle-class origins of their teenage and young adult students contributed to making acceptable a mixing of the sexes that was not tolerated for the more bourgeois students in secondary schools.

Just as some women teaching in normal and secondary schools wrote textbooks for girls' schools, so Luquin and Malmanche gained recognition for manuals for commercial courses. The first of four manuals that Luquin published between 1859 and 1886 marked the first intrusion by a woman into a category of publication once exclusively masculine. Her 1880 textbook for teaching accounting and business practices included arithmetic, geography, commercial law, and bookkeeping. While noting women's presence in commerce since ancient times, her text also, of necessity, cited the legal incapacity of married women to engage in contracts without a husband's approval. Widows and single women did not face this restriction. Malmanche addressed only accounting in manuals published in 1889 and 1894 for teachers' use in the last year of primary schools, and in *cours complémentaires*, *eps*, *epci*, and professional schools. One manual was reissued nine times by 1921. Eventually, commercial programs often included foreign languages, especially English; political economy; and applications for colonies. The practical experience of Luquin and Malmanche also earned them a place in 1890, along with two other women, on the thirty-six-member commission revising the commercial option in higher primary schools. The new 1893 program was largely identical for boys and girls, except for units on the rights and duties of women in commerce and legal restrictions on married women. Unsurprisingly, as demand for women typists in public and private offices increased noticeably after 1900, private institutions also began offering training. Malmanche would argue, however, that introducing classes in typing and stenography should not cause a reduction of other commercial courses because she wanted instruction to lead to a wide range of employment options for women.

Thivend's final chapter addresses the work experiences of women trained in commercial courses. Of the students in Luquin's courses in Lyon between 1861 and 1888, many worked in family businesses and often married within their socioeconomic class. In one exceptional case of social advancement, however, a woman became a very successful *entrepreneuse* who prospered by opening commercial courses, which she continued to run, after marriage, with her husband, an accounting professor. Another student was the feminist Marie Bonnevial, who taught in Lyon and later at a private professional school in Paris. As the demand for office workers increased, a more elaborate distribution of duties evolved, increasingly discriminating based on age, class, and gender. Professional organizations for accountants, like other professional organizations, often limited access in order to preserve advantages of salary and status. The Société académique de comptabilité (SAC) was a notable example; in 1906, only thirteen women were among its 647 members. In the Seine department in 1900, all 4,500 members of the Association des comptables du commerce et de l'industrie, dating from 1847, were men. Job placement bureaus often marginalized women as well by directing them to certain categories of work. Women who headed commercial programs sometimes combatted this by helping female students find opportunities. By 1900, women trained in commercial courses were working not only in family businesses but also in offices, banks, and public services, including telephone and telegraph bureaus.

In this detailed and complex study, Thivend has effectively demonstrated that commercial and professional education for women before 1914 was restricted by assumptions about gender, as was the case for girls' secondary schools, but she also insists on its role in providing more employment possibilities for women.[6] The exceptional careers of Luquin and Malmanche illustrate how ambitious women could exercise authority and display expertise without challenging the Third Republic's emphasis on "l'égalité dans la différence" (p. 260). Both played a role in persuading cities and then the French state to develop commercial education for women from the lower middle class and working class. As Thivend notes, more research remains to be done on the history of women who followed these two pioneers and their contemporaries after 1918. Nonetheless, for future research on commercial education, Thivend's valuable addition to the literature on a neglected aspect of education for girls and women provides the essential starting point.

NOTES

[1] François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Lire et écrire: l'alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules Ferry*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

[2] Marianne Thivend, *L'Ecole républicaine dans la ville: Lyon 1870-1914* (Paris: Belin, 2006).

[3] Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

[4] Linda L. Clark, *The Rise of Professional Women in France: Gender and Public Administration since 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapters 1, 2.

[5] Linda L. Clark, "Les Femmes dans les professions qualifies et le féminisme, des années 1880 aux années 1930," in Christine Bard, ed., *Les Féministes de la première vague* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), pp. 119-129.

[6] Françoise Mayeur, *L'Enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles sous la Troisième République* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977).

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