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Reynald Abad, *Le Grand Marché: L'approvisionnement alimentaire de Paris sous l'Ancien Régime*. Paris: Fayard, 2002. 1030 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. 45.00 € (pb). ISBN 9-782213-611440.

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When we think of feeding people in *ancien régime* Paris, we generally visualize the vitally important and politically explosive problem of the trade in grain and its products. Indeed, Steven Kaplan has detailed the complex and precarious processes by which Parisians acquired their daily bread and authorities confronted the menacing prospects of a provisioning breakdown.[1] Reynald Abad's meticulous work based on his 1999 doctoral thesis reminds us that Parisians, even the *menu peuple*, did not live by bread alone.[2] He carefully reconstitutes the geography of production, distribution networks, and actors involved in provisioning the capital's inhabitants with their other foods: meat and fish, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and grocery items. There emerges a readable and sophisticated study of the "chain of human activities that led from the production of food to the markets and shops of the capital" (p. 13).

Abad begins with a survey of the general physical, political, and cultural context in which Parisians provisioned themselves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He then divides his work into three parts that represent three major "families" of food. His choice of family mirrors contemporaries' categories: livestock and meat for the *boucheries* and *charcuteries*, salt- and fresh-water fish and shellfish, and the *menues denrées*, a diverse rubric that included garden produce, dairy products, game, and articles for the *épicerie*. About each he answers five principal questions: where it came from, how it got to Paris, who marketed it, how much Paris consumed, and how authorities responded. He also evaluates social consumption patterns and their effects on market development. At the end, he integrates previous historians' work on three other food families: grain, wine, and salt. Finally, he considers the broader roles Paris food consumption played in the kingdom's economy.

He concludes that even as early as the seventeenth century every province in the kingdom produced something for Paris and each category of food had a distinctive pattern of provisioning. Abad analyzes each pattern (sometimes for each food item) and offers maps of provisioning zones and transportation routes, calendars of supply, and charts of the different actors involved in each trade.

Abad insists that despite the uncertainties of production, the distances from Paris, and the obstacles confronted on route "food frequently arrived in the markets and shops of the capital on the appointed day, even at the appointed hour" (p. 816). He confirms the importance of land transportation to Paris, but also complicates it when he reveals that, in the 1780s, 15 percent of all food entered Paris by water, 38 percent by land, and 47 percent by some combination of both (p. 817).[3]

He argues that the general historical preoccupation with the grain trade has encouraged us to underestimate the important roles trade in other foods played in the kingdom's economy and politics as

well as to generalize too readily from the grain trade to other provisioning activities. Abad seeks to counter these assumptions by confronting his own work with what is already well known for grain. He claims that the debates over liberalizing the grain trade in the second half of the eighteenth century did not extend beyond the question of *subsistances* (p. 54): authorities remained “partisans of the market economy, [but] adversaries of free trade” (p. 55). Even after the mid-eighteenth century they continued to privilege Paris over the rest of France and to resort to intervention (including occasional price fixing or manipulation) whenever they perceived a threat to regular supply.

For example, Paris officials zealously supervised and regulated meat provisioning (beef, mutton, veal, pork). During the shortages of 1714–15, 1724–15, 1767–70, and 1786 authorities purchased livestock and influenced prices (pp. 356–81). While their methods of intervention evolved—from overt supply and price manipulation to more clandestine and subtle forms of influence—they never retreated from endorsing regular supervision and intervention during periods of shortage. During the 1724 crisis, the government bought cattle, publicly referred to them to as *bœufs du Roi*, and branded them with *fleurs de lys*. By the 1766 crisis, the government also bought cattle for Paris, but slipped them into herds transported and branded by merchants who normally provisioned the market, thus influencing prices by increasing supply. However, Abad might have overemphasized this point of contrast, for he describes behavior similar to that which Judith Miller has recently illustrated.^[4]

Abad offers a tentative and more provocative explanation for the government’s continuing and largely uncriticized regulation of commerce less vital to human survival. He posits that the government’s interest in the supply and price of foods that fed more leisured Paris derived from a concern to secure their social needs. The active, elaborate regulations that governed the trade in fish (especially oysters) reveal an attentiveness to health concerns, certainly. But they also reflect efforts to serve the tastes of the capital’s most elite inhabitants. Abad implies that authorities were particularly sensitive to the political and social consequences of disturbing elite entitlements. He argues further that while intervention in such products caused producers and merchants to grumble, it never provoked consumer rumors of a “famine plot” similar to that generated over the grain trade (p. 369). Of course, virtually everyone ate bread and the poor depended on it for survival—thus explaining its omnipresence in political discourse—but elites’ consumption of finer foods clearly exercised a pressure of its own.

Despite its social and political importance, the grain trade played a relatively minor role in the capital’s overall expenditures on what it ate. In fact, only one fifth (21 percent) of the money Paris spent on food each year went to grain and its products (pp. 806, 818). Consumers spent 13 percent on drinks (12 percent on wine alone), 23 percent on meat, 8 percent on fish, and 35 percent on *menues denrées*, especially fruit and vegetables (9 percent) and spices, sugar, coffee, tea and cocoa (9 percent).

Indeed, Paris consumers generated a hearty food bill. During the 1780s, Parisians spent 132 million *livres* on food, a sum equivalent to what the monarchy spent to equip and maintain its troops during peacetime in the 1770s and 80s and over one third of what it collected in taxes in 1775 (pp. 806–7). Obviously, Paris concentrated tremendous riches, which its consumers redistributed to the provinces. Eighty-seven percent of what Paris spent on food stayed in France, while another 7 percent went to its colonies and 6 percent to foreign imports. Since every province participated to some extent in the export of food to Paris, Abad concludes that Paris “furnished itself from a market of national scope” (p. 797).

Of course, not every province benefited equally. On the one hand, Alsace, Roussillon, and Navarre-Béarn exported only small quantities of wine to Paris and their total receipts equaled a mere 0.06 percent of the capital’s total expenditures. On the other hand, Ile-de-France, Normandy, and Champagne received 67.19 percent of all payments, with Ile-de-France alone attracting 34.05 percent (p. 871).

Abad suggests that we stop considering Paris a great “predator” and, instead, see it as a force for economic development (p. 812). He lends support to earlier arguments that provisioning Paris provoked specialization in agriculture, a process underway since at least the second half of the seventeenth century: pasturelands in the *pays d’Auge*, fish ponds in the kingdom’s center, fruit groves and market-gardens in the *banlieues*, fish packaging manufactures around Dieppe, poultry fattening in Maine, and oyster culture in Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue, etc. (pp. 812-3).^[5] The diverse character of Paris demand coupled with the relatively larger profit margin derived from luxury items—as opposed to the smaller margins from basic necessities—to encourage economic development, which, in turn, “contributed to liberating the French economy from its narrow dependence on cereal production” (p. 814).

However, arguments about the predatory character of Paris appear more founded when we consider what happened in years of scarcity. For example, grain shortfalls provoked great distress in places where, in normal years, locals rarely had to compete with outside contenders. Abad demonstrates that during meat shortages the monarchy commissioned merchants to scour new markets for livestock (p. 356). One wonders how locals reacted to the sudden exodus of their meat supply to the capital: as a threat to a local food supply or as a welcome opportunity for profit?

Abad’s conclusions about agricultural productivity in the kingdom ring more optimistically than those previous studies which pointed to its highly localized and uneven nature.^[6] His arguments for economic growth call for more nuance, especially given his own evidence of stagnating meat consumption during the eighteenth century (pp. 384-88). Moreover, he sometimes seems to conflate the broad extent of the Paris provisioning network with the emergence of a national market, as when he asserts that “Paris vivait du marché national” (p. 816). Since many historians now claim a national market developed in France only in the mid-nineteenth century, these assertions appear overstated.^[7]

Abad recognizes, of course, that he builds upon and synthesizes important literature on various aspects of Paris provisioning. His notes and bibliography reflect his debts, but he has also plumbed a wide variety of primary sources: administrative correspondence and papers, memoirs, treatises, fiscal records, and literary works. He has even produced a useful table that analyzes them (pp. 103-6). He also readily acknowledges the limitations these same sources have imposed. By the eighteenth century authorities had developed fairly accurate statistics about food that entered Paris legally but still had little real grasp of the extent of smuggling or the size of the market that flourished outside its gates. Moreover, Parisians produced certain provisions—vegetables, milk, and fish—within their own walls and thus escaped the sharp, statistical eyes of the General Farm. Finally, he can tell us nothing about food distribution through resale, by which the common people diversified their diets more affordably.

Yet despite the fact that Abad limits himself to estimating food arriving in the capital and how much Parisians spent on it he gives us glimpses of aspects of consumption habits (p. 109). Thus, he tells us that while elite Parisians greatly enjoyed oysters, they had not developed a taste for other shellfish (p. 519). Their passion for wild game proved so profitable that quite a poaching and smuggling business emerged to serve it (p. 716). And they preferred olive oil from Provence, especially from the region around Grasse (p. 776).

In sum, *Le Grand Marché* makes a significant contribution to the economic history of *ancien régime* Paris and the France that produced and marketed food for its tables. It also intersects with recent interests in the economic role of elite consumers as well as the ways the government responded to their social needs. It is rich in both detail and in analysis and will certainly become essential reading for a long time to come.

NOTES

[1] Of Steven Kaplan's many works, see in particular his *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976); *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade during the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). Recently, Judith Miller has also contributed *Mastering the Market: The State and the Grain Trade in Northern France, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Alain Clément, *Nourrir le peuple, entre Etat et marché, XVIe et XIXe siècle. Contribution à l'histoire intellectuelle de l'approvisionnement alimentaire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

[2] "L'Approvisionnement alimentaire de Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," dir. Jean-Pierre Poussou (Paris IV).

[3] Kaplan emphasizes the growing importance of land routes for the grain trade, *Provisioning Paris*, 104-5; Guy Arbello, et al. *Atlas de la Révolution française, 1, Routes et communications* (Paris: Éditions EHESS, 1987), 26-27.

[4] Moreover, Kaplan and Miller also argue that economists could not get a great many administrators to endorse fully free trade in grain, even after the government decreed it.

[5] See previous work on this, for example, Bernard Lepetit, *Les Villes dans la France moderne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988); Michel Philipponneau, *La Vie rurale de la banlieue parisienne* (Paris: A. Colin, 1956); and Bernard Garnier, "La Mise en herbe dans le pays d'Auge aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Annales de Normandie* 25: 3 (1975): 157-80.

[6] See Philip T. Hoffman, *Growth in a Traditional Society: The French Countryside, 1450-1812* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[7] Jean-Michel Chevet, "National and Regional Corn Markets in France from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of European Economic History* 25 (Winter 1996): 681-703; Chevet and Pascal Saint-Amour, "L'Intégration des marchés du blé en France au XIXe siècle," *Histoire et Mesure* 6(1991): 93-119; and Nicolas Bourguinat, *Les Grains du Désordre: L'Etat face aux violences frumentaires dans la première moitié du XIX siècle* (Paris: Éditions EHESS, 2002).

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