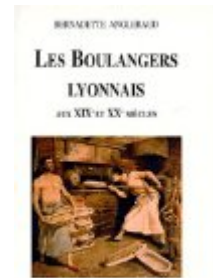


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Bernadette Angleraud. *Les Boulangers Lyonnais aux XIXe et XXe Siecles*. Paris: Editions Christian, 1998. 190 pp. 115 FF (cloth), ISBN 978-2-86496-070-6.

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Bakers figured among the “principle figures of urban sociability” according to Bernadette Angleraud, who examines the life and work of the bakers of Lyon between the July Monarchy and the First World War (p. 9). Her monograph, which originated as a dissertation directed by Yves Lequin, can be read in several ways: as a case study of urban integration, as an addition to the literature on *les classes moyennes*, as an examination of the complex symbolic meanings attached to bread and to the baker in popular culture, or as a description of an artisanal trade in transition. Angleraud clearly wishes to transcend the limitations of the “history of the trade” genre by situating bakers in the larger context of urban culture. Her approach yields insights into the place of bakers and their wives in urban networks of sociability, the function of bakeries as urban public spaces, and the sexual and spatial division of labor in the trade.

Bakers, Angleraud suggests, occupied an unstable middle ground between several fault lines in French society—between rural and urban culture, workers and employers, sans-culotte radicalism and petty-bourgeois conservatism. Most Lyonnais bakers were rural migrants from prosperous peasant families who could afford to give their sons a leg up in life. Using census data and marriage registrations, Angleraud demonstrates that they were primarily from departments within a hundred kilometers of Lyon. They typically completed their apprenticeships in small towns before arriving in the city to work as *garçons boulangers*. Marriage was a crucial rite of passage, made possible by the joining of two patrimonies. A good marriage was an essential prelude to opening one’s own shop, not only because of the initial investment required, but also because a successful enterprise necessitated the labor of both sexes. While the baker handled production, his wife took care of sales, an

operation that required not only personal charm and affability but good record-keeping skills, since many customers bought on credit.

Paradoxically, this gendered division of labor reversed the usual public/private dichotomy of the nineteenth Century. Men worked in social isolation, largely at night; women tended to the customers by day. Bakers’ wives therefore had to be polished, and possess the necessary *savoir-vivre urbain* to attract a clientele. Not surprisingly, Angleraud finds that their social origins were more urban, and above all, more Lyonnais, than those of their husbands. They tended to come from families of small tradesmen and artisans rather than peasant cultivators, although relatively few (less than 10 percent) were bakers’ daughters. A wife with familial ties to other tradesmen gave a baker a ready-made network of customers and social connections. So invaluable was a competent wife to the business that a widower typically remarried very quickly, often within months of his wife’s demise. Angleraud argues persuasively that it was largely through women that bakers were acculturated and connected to the urban milieu.

What was the attraction of a job that required isolated and heavy manual labor, conducted in an environment so hot and polluted that the baker typically sweated off three pounds a night and died in middle-age of lung diseases such as tuberculosis? Angleraud believes that it was not limited to the prospect of being one’s own boss, of gaining a modest foothold on the ladder that led to the bourgeoisie. Examining representations of the baker in popular culture, she repeatedly foregrounds the essential role which bread played in the diet of the people and its sacred aura in the Christian liturgy. Bread had a powerful mystique that rubbed off on the baker. He was simulta-

neously respected for his essential role in producing the staff of life and envied for his alleged prosperity and freedom from want.

In Angleraud's meticulously researched account, bakers emerge as spectators rather than as actors in the public sphere—sympathetic to the sans-culotte ideal of a liberal republic of small proprietors, but politically discrete and passive. Angleraud finds little evidence in police or judicial records that they figured as insurgents in the uprisings of 1831, 1834 or 1848, or that they participated in secret societies, or mobilized to defend the democratic and social republic after the coup of 2 December 1851. Bakers only became politicized late in the nineteenth century, when interventionist social legislation designed to protect workers pushed them into the political camp of employers. Nor did bakers play a prominent role in the religious life of Lyon. Their public religious manifestations were limited to the celebration of their patron saint's day, May 16, the feast of Saint-Honore. Angleraud examines inventories of bakers' property made after their deaths to determine whether religious books or artifacts figured prominently in their effects, or if sums were set aside for church burials. The evidence is inconclusive, and she is not able to say whether bakers were urban anti-clericals or retained an attachment to rural Catholicism. Perhaps, although Angleraud does not speculate about this, religiosity was more a female than a male concern, as in many peasant households in the nineteenth century.

Despite their apparent detachment from the public arenas of politics and religion, bakers were far from recluses in the urban environment. Angleraud uses several memoirs written by bakers' sons, particularly Henri Beraud's *La Gerbe d'Or*, to reconstruct the daily lives of family members. Beraud's father slept from 3 PM to midnight, joining his pals at the cafe for drinks until 2 AM, when his presence was required at the ovens. In the morning he met with suppliers. He had much more leisure time than his *compagnon*, who typically worked an eighteen-hour day, preparing the leaven, kneading the dough, placing it in baskets to rise, and delivering finished loaves to customers in the morning. Not surprisingly, Angleraud finds that bakers' *compagnons* had a high rate of turn-over. The baker's social network did not end at the cafe. Angleraud argues that the mystique which attached to the baker made him a veritable "pillar of the quarter." He functioned as a small banker, extending loans at 5 percent interest, and frequently was asked to serve as a witness for marriages and other civil actions. Similarly, his wife, by virtue of her constant inter-

action with neighborhood clients, might be called upon to testify before local magistrates about the reputation of others: "*elle est, en quelque sorte, la memoire du quartier*" (p. 177). Neither the Haussmanization of Lyon's central districts in the 1860s, nor the rapid expansion of the suburbs on the left bank of the Rhone River, appears to have altered the relationship between bakers and their customers, other than to multiply the quantity of both.

According to Angleraud, the front room of the bakery was an important urban space, the female equivalent of the cafe. It was a place for women to linger, to trade news and gossip, to see and be seen. Over the course of the nineteenth century it underwent a metamorphosis. Originally sparsely decorated with a clock and a counter, it was progressively gentrified, as circumstances and clientele permitted, to resemble a bourgeois salon, with upholstered sofas, gilded mirrors, framed engravings, and decorative motifs painted on the walls and ceiling. Consumer tastes migrated up-scale as well, with white bread and *pains de fantaisie* replacing the coarse *pan bis* of the poor by the end of the century.

Angleraud believes that bakers typified *les classes moyennes*, separated from workers by their status as employers and from the bourgeoisie by their modest incomes. They illustrate a triple upward mobility: from peasant to urban dweller, from laborer to small proprietor, from social anonymity to the status of local notables. But Angleraud may be gilding the lily a bit too much. Bakery work was a brute sort of manual labor, conferring so little prestige among artisans that bakers were routinely excluded from *compagnonnage* societies until 1860, when *compagnonnage* was to all intents and purposes obsolete in French society. Beating up bakers who posed as *compagnons* was routine fun for their counterparts in the building trades, as Agricol Perdiguer and other critics of such practices attest. Furthermore, Angleraud provides considerable evidence that bakers were in fact experiencing downward socio-economic mobility during the last decades of the century, slipping from independent proprietors to the status of piece workers for large industrial millers. Heavily regulated for centuries by both state and municipal authorities to prevent shortages and fraud, bakers did not benefit from the free market climate created by the abolition of all controls on bread in 1863. Forced to operate within a more competitive economic environment, they lacked the capital to mechanize, as more successful millers were doing. Industrial millers employing costly steel cylinders to produce finer grades of flour eased out smaller millstone operators, consolidating their hold over their bakery cus-

tomers, and introducing (in cities other than Lyon) industrialized baking operations. By contrast, few bakers were able to afford the new technologies coming on line in the late nineteenth century, including motorized kneading machines and better-regulated charcoal ovens. They also faced increased competition from cooperative bakeries, which were exempt from the *patente* until 1905. These pressures induced a “siege mentality” by the 1880s, which Angleraud contents pushed bakers politically rightward, reinforcing an employer mentality (pp. 98-99).

The erosion of artisanal independence and status has been extensively documented in a large number of urban trades in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the introduction first of capitalist production processes and later of mechanization proletarianized small producers.[1] Although Angleraud acknowledges the role played by competition and technological change in the baking industry as a whole, she does not modify her portrait of the baker as an urban “notable” during the chronological period under consideration (1830-1914). How bakers were able to retain their status as “pillars of the quarter” and defend their position on the lower rungs of *les classes moyennes*—despite their fragmentation, the competitive pressures that they faced, their relative apoliticism, and their apparently low level of religious and ritual solidarity—is not adequately explained in this study. Part of the difficulty in assessing Angleraud’s claims is that the whole issue of class, particularly the sticky problem of defining *les classes moyennes*, does not receive sufficient theoretical attention. What defines *les classes moyennes*? Shared values? Shared discourse? Material conditions of existence? Political orientation? Furthermore, using the “mystique of bread” to explain the alleged “notability” of the baker does not an-

swer the question of where he ranked in the urban social hierarchy relative to other small proprietors, skilled artisans and the emerging white-collar labor force. By studying bakers in isolation from other categories of workers, Angleraud risks exaggerating their prestige within urban social networks.

It would additionally seem appropriate in a study of this nature to incorporate more of the substantial recent literature on consumerism, particularly women’s role as taste makers, since they were the major purchasers of foodstuffs. Cooperative bakeries, which originated in Lyon, deserve more attention as an alternative to small familial enterprise. Did the cooperative ethos cast bakers in a negative light, by portraying them as exploiters? Despite these omissions, Angleraud has nevertheless produced a detailed account of a traditional urban trade in transition, which will be of value to scholars of artisanal and urban life in the nineteenth century. The attention which she pays to the role of gender in both work and the division of urban social space is a particular strength of her study.

Note

[1]. The literature on changing artisanal fortunes is voluminous. A recent collection of articles which provides opportunities for cross-cultural comparison across four centuries is Geoffrey Crossick, ed., *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900* (Hants, England: Scolar, 1997).

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