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The Silk Industries of Medieval Paris: Artisanal Migration, Technological Innovation, and Gendered Experience

Margriet Hoogvliet

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its values, hopes and fears, its structure and shape" (xv).

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Farmer, Sharon

The Silk Industries of Medieval Paris: Artisanal Migration, Technological Innovation, and Gendered Experience

Philadelphia: University of

Pennsylvania Press

354 pp., \$ 69.95,

ISBN 978-0-8122-4848-7

Publication Date: November 2016

In this excellent book, Sharon Farmer studies the luxury silk cloth industries of thirteenth-century Paris, resulting in highly valuable new insights on the international mobility of skilled artisans and women's economic activities.

In the introduction, Farmer sets out the main goals of her study: showing that a genuine silk industry was present in Paris during the thirteenth century and that the introduction of the required techniques could only have taken place by means of the immigration of merchants and skilled artisans from the lands around the Mediterranean. A second important thesis is that Paris offered female silk entrepreneurs more possibilities than the same industries in Mediterranean towns. The main historical sources used are Parisian guild statutes (c. 1266–1365), tax assessments (1292–1313), and household documents from several European aristocratic courts. These are extensively reproduced in the second half of the book, based on both edited and unedited sources.

One of the most important ideas expressed throughout the work is the connectedness of Paris to the wider Mediterranean world, including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, suggesting the necessity of extending Mediterranean studies to northern France. Next to this, Paris as a multicultural city in the thirteenth century is a recurring theme. This gives rise to some important critical remarks about modern ideas concerning immigration and the supposedly rural and national French ancestry (2).

The first chapter deals in more detail with immigrants in Paris during the thirteenth century, such as Lombard bankers; scholars; aristocrats; and, most important, merchants and artisans from nearby regions such as Flanders, Burgundy, and Germany, and also from surprisingly distant areas such as Iberia, Italy, Cyprus, and *outremer* (from the other side of the Mediterranean). The following chapter provides technical information about extracting silk thread from cocoons, as well as the production of luxury textiles such as silk cloth, veils, gold cloth, and velvet. Next to this, Farmer presents the international trade networks through which the required materials, knowledge, skills, and people might have travelled from China to Paris.

Chapter 3 examines the organization of the silk industries in Paris by specialized entrepreneurs, together with information about less wealthy silk workers, many of them immigrants. The geographically widespread origins of the people involved is surprising, although one could have reservations about some attributions; for example, the surname Tabarie does not necessarily refer to the town of Tiberias in the Holy Land (93), but could also be based on *tabard*, an Old French word for tunic. A very useful aspect of this chapter is the plotting of people active in the silk industries on a map of medieval Paris, which allows for some interesting discoveries about concentrations and proximities.

The focus is shifted to gender in the next chapter. A few women entrepreneurs became extraordinarily wealthy because of their activities in the silk economy. Most female silk workers, however, remained of very modest fortune, although the historical documentation shows that many of these women were independent and that the *ouvrières de soie* had organized their industry in a female guild. The opposition of male versus female taxpayers might, however, be less rigid than sketched by Farmer, because names of male taxpayers in the tax assessments in reality often represented a married couple running the family business together.

The final chapter turns to financial aspects of the silk industry in Paris and examines the relation between female silk workers, Lombard bankers, and Jewish pawnbrokers. Less convincing in this chapter is the depiction of Lombard men as sexual predators, "vibrat[ing] with male sexual energy" (147), as the sole explanation for the female silk workers' preference for female Jewish moneylenders. This seems to be based on cultural and gender stereotyping, rather than on historical realities.

Farmer's approach is interesting from a methodological perspective, as well. First, the use of spatial approaches for the study of situated activities in the townscape of Paris, both geographical and social, is very effective. Second, her treatment of fragmentary and incomplete data from the thirteenth century is daring and innovative. By combining them with a broad spectrum of contextual data, including international or later parallel phenomena, Farmer is able to paint a much livelier picture of the silk industries in thirteenth-century Paris than would have been possible based on local data alone. The argument could, however, have been more calibrated. For instance, there is a slight tendency to present "plausible hypotheses" from one chapter (75) as established facts in the following one, which risks annoying a few fact-fetishizing historians. Finally, more in-depth methodological reflections on the use of fragmentary sources and on spatial approaches would have made the overall argument stronger.

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Reid, Fiona

Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists

London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic

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ISBN 978-14725-1324-3

Publication Date: February 2017

In this largely synthetic study, Fiona Reid, who teaches at the University of