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Jean-Claude Daumas, ed., *Les révolutions du commerce: France, XVIIIe-XXIe siècle.* Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté /Les Cahiers de la MSHE Ledoux, 2020. 360 pp. Figures, indexes and biographies. €30.00 (pb). IBSN 9782848677224.

Review by Erika Vause, St. John's University.

Revolutions, or at least those retroactively designated as such by historians, seem to vanish back into historical continuity almost as quickly as they are designated as ruptures. This is particularly true in the economic realm. Even as "the" Industrial Revolution became first two, then three, and then possibly four different industrial revolutions, scholars began to challenge the periodization of industrialization as well as the extent of its discontinuity with earlier practices.[1] In the 1980s, with such "de-revolutionizing" scholarship under way, cultural and social historians touted a "consumer revolution" that precipitated later industrialization.[2] Shortly afterwards came Jan de Vries's "industrious revolution" in consumer behavior.[3] Scholarship on France played a key role in this "discovery" of the Consumer Revolution.[4] Yet, despite a rich historiography on consumption, the parallel history of distribution—of the shops, stores, markets, and fairs through which French consumers acquired new goods—has remained largely unstudied until quite recently, in opposition to the copious literature existing on Anglo-American developments.[5]
Entering this conversation, Jean-Claude Daumas's edited volume *Les révolutions du commerce* aims to fulfill two goals simultaneously. On one hand, the volume showcases the exciting breadth of work on modern distribution with which French scholars are currently engaged. More ambitiously, as suggested by its title, it is preoccupied with questions of "revolution." Can we speak of "commercial revolutions" to complement the other economic revolutions of the eighteenth through twenty-first centuries? If so, how many "revolutions" were there in systems and practices of distribution? Where do we define their beginnings and ends? Although Daumas's volume does not provide a definitive answer to these questions, it represents a welcome starting point for conceptualizing an understudied topic.

Les révolutions du commerce is organized into three broadly thematic but unequally sized parts. Part One, by far the largest of these three sections, is titled "De la boutique au commerce concentré" and consists of seven chapters arranged roughly chronologically from the late seventeenth century through the Trente Glorieuses. Although connected by their common discussion of the tensions between commercial innovation and tradition, the pieces in this first part are quite diverse in their approaches and subject matter, ranging from historiographical syntheses to deep dives in regional archives.
In the first essay, Natacha Coquery summarizes a thesis asserted in her other work that the eighteenth century witnessed a growth in the culture of consumption but not an actual "revolution in commerce," given the dependence of innovation on a traditional social milieu. To this end, Coquery returns to the rich material she has mined in previous works on the embedded nature of the Paris luxury trade within the aristocratic milieu of the eighteenth-century city.

In the second piece, Julien Vilain tackles the same question as Coquery, but investigates this dynamic outside of Paris and other major commercial hubs. Resourcefully mobilizing a wide range of archival material, from inventories to bankruptcy dossiers and *affiches*, Vilain essentially agrees with Coquery in arguing against the eighteenth-century consumer revolution thesis. His evidence from Lorraine indicates that the most noticeable trend in this period was not the overwhelming growth in commerce, but increased competition among merchants that compelled them to mobilize new techniques for attracting customers.

Vilain's piece resembles the third article, in which Marie Gilet examines the practices of the provincial boutique over the tumultuous nineteenth century. Rather than finding either revolution or rigid traditionalism among these *petit commerçants*, Gilet's skillful use of sources uncovers a process of adaptation and small innovations through which boutiques borrowed practices from newcomers like the *magasins de nouveautés* and later the *grands magasins*, including giving more attention to shop appearance and the use of publicity. At the same time, traditional practices, like shopkeeper-customer sociability and the use of credit, sometimes allowed boutiques an edge over newer rivals.

The fourth essay sees Jean-Claude Daumas synthesizing the well-established historiography of the great urban department store in order to claim that these establishments did represent a real "revolution in commerce" during the nineteenth century. He not only examines the innovations offered by Boucicaut's Au Bon Marché, delving into issues of product distribution and marketing techniques, but also explores how the *grands magasins* expanded outwards beyond Paris.

Anaïs Albert's article provides a logical successor to Daumas' piece, expanding on the latter's discussion of credit-based department stores. It is unfortunate that so little work has been done on Grands Magasins Dufayel and similar stores that attracted working class consumers via extensive and innovative credit practices used not just in the stores themselves but also in participating enterprises. Albert's piece deserves special mention for illuminating these important institutions. In addition to Dufayel, Albert showcases the histories of "second" and "third" level stores that operated on similar principles, whether city- or nation-wide, Bon Génie or Aux Classes Laborieuses or in neighborhoods, like Aux Enfants de la Chapelle.

In the sixth essay, Denis McKee describes a parallel, if less well-known, mid-nineteenth-century transformation in mass consumption: the rise of *succursalisme* [creation of franchises]. While the *grands magasins* arose in Paris, *succursalisme* was an invention of the provinces (Reims), and while the *grands magasins* were based on thoroughly capitalist principles and catered to the bourgeoisie, the *succursales* were heavily influenced by cooperativist ideals and aimed to make necessities cheaper for the masses. McKee's piece focuses on how major *succursales*, including Les établissements économiques des sociétés mutuelles de la ville de Reims, the Docks rémoise and Société rémoise de l'épicierie, des vins et spiriteux, came to dominate staple commerce in Reims and then expanded elsewhere.

In Part 1's final essay, Oliver Londeix provides a kind of sequel to the sixth and uses Casino's unusually rich company archives to demonstrate how the *succursaliste* vision transformed from the turn of the century through the Trente Glorieuses. Founded in 1868 in Saint-Etienne on the branch model popularized in Reims, Casino embraced many *succursalist* principles. Londeix's article includes some fascinating glimpses into the "emotional labor" of twentieth-century capitalism in practice, including Casino's 1930s "smile campaign" and debates about the perceived depersonalization of commerce with the adoption of American-style self-service.

Part 2, “Le commerce au prisme du produit” is much smaller than the first part, consisting of only three essays. These are again organized roughly chronologically and trace the transformation of relationships among producers, distributors, and consumers of a specific product or product type. Theoretically, this product-oriented approach to the question of innovation seems useful. However, particularly given the fashion for product-oriented histories, it seems strange to limit these discussions only to Roquefort, bottled water, and then the much larger category of food products. The randomness of these items, as well as their limited number, gives the reader the impression that this partition is less the expression of a carefully designed methodological approach and more the result of a need to organize a given set of papers.

Philippe Meyzie’s essay is the most general of these product-oriented pieces, tracing the history of grocery sales over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a way that resembles the articles in the first part of the book. Meyzie considers the wide variety of venues through which French people bought their foodstuffs, ranging from fairs and markets to street-sellers, smugglers, and boutiques. The heart of McKee’s study, however, focuses on grocery stores [*épicerie*], and particularly how *épiciers* sought to adapt to new competitors catering to well-heeled customers, such as *patissiers* and *confisseurs*, as well as to the *magasins de nouveautés* and *grands magasins*.

By contrast, Sylvie Vabre’s article homes in on the changing distribution paths of one extremely precise product, Roquefort cheese. As Roquefort became an increasingly prestigious cheese for the urban bourgeoisie, the trajectories that brought that cheese to French tables changed, favoring centralization. Nevertheless, in analyzing the networks among distributors in various French cities in the late 19th century, she makes the case for substantial regional differences in these paths.

In the tenth essay, Nicholas Marty shows the changing ways in which bottled water has been disseminated to French consumers. Since mineral water was considered a medicinal product, the transformations of the bottled water industry have been driven by concerns about fraud and hygiene as well as being subject to attempts by pharmacies to monopolize its sale. Another through line in Marty’s piece is the ever-increasing power of wholesalers, which, by the end of the twenty-first century, manifested in the near-total oligopoly of Perrier, BSN Gervais Danone, and Nestle as suppliers of French bottled water.

The third and final part of the book, “La distribution de masse: passé, present, avenir,” consists of four articles. While the other two parts of the book provided chronological accounts from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, this section is much more focused on the more contemporary period, taking on mass distribution from the 1930s through the early 2000s. A longer chronological scope would have made this part of the book more consistent with the other two sections.

In his article, Alain Chariot recounts the various laws enacted between 1936 and 2008 to regulate mass distribution. The first of these temporarily paused the creation of new five-and-dime stores (*prix unique*). In the aftermath of World War II with the rise of inflation and government commitment to liberalism, official support was lent to mass distribution as a means of modernization and efficiency. Starting in the 1970s, however, a movement against the grand surface stores, starting with the neo-Pujadist Jean Royer, precipitated a series of laws (Loi Royer, Loi Galland, Loi Raffarin) designed to restrain the power of big stores in the interests of *petit commerce.* Across time, Chariot shows

how these debates engaged strikingly similar questions relating to urban space, inflation, and tradition.

The twelfth essay in the book, again by Jean-Claude Daumas, follows the arrival of the *grande surface* store in France, the *supermarché* in 1957 and *hypermarché* in 1963. The formats of these stores, heavily influenced by American models, truly brought mass consumption to France. Daumas spends an equal amount of time on innovations in commercial practice (i.e., self-service and the placement of *hypermarchés* in the outskirts of urban areas) as on the history of specific stores (principally Carrefour and Auchan, but also several others). After the height of *grande surface* success in 1970s and 80s, there were challenges to its dominance, including hard discount chains (Aldi and Lidl), second-hand shops (Au Bon Coin) and, perhaps, most notably, e-commerce. Underlying such visible challenges, Daumas argues, are underlying demographic factors.

Anaïs Legendre's essay provides an alternative genealogy of mass distribution in France, linked not to Americanization but rather growing out of Catholic social doctrine. Originally based in Brittany, the Mouvement Leclerc, led by the charismatic figures of Edouard Leclerc and then his son Michel-Edouard Leclerc, was characterized by family capitalism, decentralization, and discounted products. Legendre traces the evolution of this "commercial school" from its emergence in the post-War era to its height in the 1970s and its gradual decline in the 1990s.

Philippe Moati's article is less a history than a speculative piece concerning the direction of recent commercial trends. In particular, Moati argues for the shift from "product orientation" to "customer orientation" in an economy increasingly focused around taylorization to individual consumer needs. In this "replenishment economy," in large part defined by digital technology, traditional *grande surface* stores face challenges in competing with e-commerce.

Daumas's conclusion returns to the question of "revolutions in commerce" with which his introduction began. After the extensive discussions of various commercial innovations supplied by the volume's fourteen essays, Daumas proposes dividing these novelties into three "types" of transformation: 1) small changes to commercial practice that grew logically out of prior practices that were more adaptations than ruptures 2) innovations that gave rise to original commercial concepts (for instance, the *succursale*) but did not shift the landscape of distribution entirely and 3) innovations that truly broke with the past. By this measure, Daumas concludes that there were perhaps only two "level three" events in modern distribution. The first was the commercial revolution initiated by the *grands magasins* of the mid-nineteenth century and the second was the mass distribution of the Trente Glorieuses. Daumas posits that the contemporary transformation of commerce represents less a revolution than a hybridization of physical and digital commercial orders, although he also considers all classification premature.

It is perhaps impossible, in an edited volume, to both allow contributors to present their independent findings while also attempting to present coherent answers to major conceptual questions. Although *Les révolutions du commerce* does not entirely answer its own questions about revolution, it nevertheless effectively highlights the state of a burgeoning field and provides fertile ground for new research.

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Philippe Moati, “Commerce et distribution : la fin de l’histoire ?”

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NOTES

[1] A good summary of this reconsideration of the Industrial Revolution can be found in Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson, “Rehabilitating the Industrial Revolution,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 45, no. 1 (1992): 24-50.

[2] Initiated by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H’s Plumb’s edited volume, *The*

Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England (London: Europa Publications 1982), the Consumer Revolution sparked a cottage industry around probate records and depictions of consumer excess in cultures across the pre-20th century world. Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold provide a good overview of this literature in "Consumerism and the Industrial Revolution," *Social History* 15, no. 2 (1990): 151-79.

[3] See Jan De Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution," *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 2 (1994): 249-70.

[4] Although French scholars like Daniel Roche revolutionized this field in books such as *La culture des apparences. Essai sur l'Histoire du vêtement aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, (Paris: A. Fayard, 1989) and *Histoire des choses banales. Naissance de la Société de consommation, XVIIIe-XIXe siècle*, (Paris: A. Fayard, 1997), the Consumer Revolution in France was above all championed by American historians. See, for example, Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siecle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[5] Natacha Coquery, whose *Tenir boutique à Paris au XVIIIe siècle : Luxe et demi-luxe* (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2011), provides one major exception to this neglect, begins her contribution to this volume by situating her discussion in terms of the strength of British literature on shopkeeping, including the work of Jon Stobbart and Claire Walsh. In the historiographical imagination, at the very least, England certainly lives up to the infamous soubriquet "a nation of shopkeepers."

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