



The Land and the Loom: Peasants and Profit in Northern France, 1680-1800

Liana Vardi

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In the modern imagination the peasant survives as a creature of the land, suspicious of the outside world and resistant to change, either the repository of pristine innocence and virtue or the manifestation of everything nasty, brutish, and at best dull. *The Land and the Loom* replaces this picture with a richly textured, deeply researched portrait of the peasant's life and world in northern France in the early modern period.

Drawing on evidence culled from parish registers, notarial records, and judicial archives, Liana Vardi outlines the development of the linen weaving trade in Montigny and details the local peasants' participation. The peasants that emerge from her study are not the figures of tradition, driven solely by symbolic attachment to the land and unreasonably devoted to village solidarities. Instead they reveal remarkable flexibility and diversity, not only improving farming methods and raising yields during the eighteenth century, but also using land to finance investments in industry and to develop local business, far-flung commercial networks and complex credit mechanisms. The eighteenth-century French countryside appears as a region and time of capitalist experimentation, cut short by pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary crises. Meticulously documented, broadly interpretive, and beautifully written, this fascinating book will permanently alter conventional perceptions of peasant life and rural industry and, ultimately, the way ordinary people are seen in seemingly distant times and places.

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