

1974-02-06b: [BOURGEOIS Wealth] The Dijonnais Taisand Syndrome

Roupnel, "Ville et Campagne", 131-132 gives a summary of the letters of one Taisand (a wealthy bourgeois used often by Roupnel because a good bunch of his letters survive) as he tries to secure some charge which will give him the exemption from taxes. From what we know of Taisand's money-lending operations (pp. 231-2), he probably really benefited from the exemption; but Roupnel's purpose is to illustrate the grubby side of this bourgeois mentality, the selfishness, and the lack of concern for whatever public charge was involved that he would have to perform if he secured an office entitling him to the exemption. The caricature of the bourgeois gentilhomme could not be more severe, also, in the snobbishness of Taisand regarding the manners of his times.

This kind of anecdotal approach to the mentality of the officeholders of the ancien régime is a formidable obstacle to my effort to re-create the mentality of the officialdom at large. It would be of no value to have ten good and upright officials proven from their correspondence (God, what a bore that would be!) for every one Taisand: the one selfish and snobbish type outweighs ten of the other in power to create a type. The modern wants to believe that anyone who sought privilege, and adopted attitudes of superiority, in the fashion of Taisand, has to be despicable; he, and all like him, and the "all like him" means not others who have his personal attitude, but all bourgeois climbers like him--who are then assumed to have his personal attitude. The logic is: Taisand is a bourgeois climber; Taisand is selfish and snobbish; therefore all bourgeois climbers are selfish and snobbish. It is the flaw of the undistributed middle.

What I'll have to do is accumulate all the particular bits of evidence of this kind, sort them out, and make some methodological critique of the question. One thing I'm sure of: the very historians who pillory this kind of bourgeois attitude would themselves, meeting the same bourgeois today, get along very well with them; but they'd scorn personally the peasants they adore writing about.

More Roupnel, on "Ville et Campagne", p. 163. Anecdote showing how bourgeois separated themselves from the class below, mimicking the *cours souveraines* elevation above bourgeoisie. A decision of 1704 that a certain Gervas could not be exempted from lodging *gens de guerre* "vu qu'il ne vivait point borgeoisement, mais était maître d'hotel."

Idem. In 1690 Apothecaries claimed that their profession was *libérale* and that they were equal to bourgeois & merchants.