

## Protestants and Bourgeois Notability in Eighteenth-Century Paris

*David Garrioch*

Until the second half of the seventeenth century, Protestants in Paris participated in many aspects of city life alongside their Catholic peers. They were admitted to the trade guilds and to the learned academies, and many held administrative and venal offices. They served in the Parliament and other leading institutions, and some were accepted in fashionable salons.<sup>1</sup> This began to change after Louis XIV's assumption of personal power in 1661, as the Royal Council progressively excluded Huguenots (as French Reformed Protestants were called) from many occupations, especially the most prestigious ones. The process culminated with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, after which a series of laws denied civil rights to Huguenots and required them to convert to Catholicism.

Nearly all the Paris Huguenots, threatened with legal sanctions, arbitrary imprisonment, and with *dragonnades* like those taking place in the provinces, signed abjurations. Many, however, maintained their Protestant faith in private, praying and reading the Bible within their families. They rarely attended Catholic religious services. Although at first there were periodic attempts to enforce Catholic practice, after 1710 the Paris authorities largely turned a blind eye to the Protestant presence. The police only intervened if there were complaints from Catholics, or what they

---

David Garrioch is Professor of History at Monash University, Australia. He has written on eighteenth-century Paris, on early modern European towns and on the Enlightenment, notably on friendship, philanthropy and cosmopolitanism. His most recent book is *The Huguenots of Paris and the Coming of Religious Freedom, 1685-1789* (Cambridge: 2014). Current projects include a fire history of European cities and a history of religious confraternities in Paris before the French Revolution.

<sup>1</sup> Menna Prestwich, "Religious Frontiers and Co-existence in Paris in the Age of Richelieu and Mazarin (1624–1661)," in *Les frontières religieuses en Europe du XVe au XVIIe siècle*, Robert Sauzet, ed. (Paris, 1992), 264-67. More generally, see Michel-Edmond Richard, *La Vie des protestants français de l'Edit de Nantes à la Révolution (1598–1789)* (Paris, 1994 and Paris, 1966), 11-119, and Keith Luria, *Sacred Boundaries. Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, D.C., 2005).

called a “public scandal,” and even then the punishments fell far short of those prescribed by the law.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know exactly how many Reformed Protestants lived in Paris in the eighteenth century. A large number had emigrated in the 1680s, but others had moved from the provinces to escape persecution. Still more arrived from Switzerland and other Protestant countries: ironically, the French government actively recruited artisans from these places, promising them the right to practice their religion in private. Many of these immigrants married Paris Huguenots. In the early 1700s there may have been as many as 4,000 Reformed Protestants in the city, and the indications are that their number multiplied across the century: one historian has put their number at 7,000 by 1789.<sup>3</sup> This means they made up between one and two per cent of the city’s population. While concentrated in certain sectors, notably banking, clock- and furniture-making, goldsmithing, and the wine trade, Huguenots could be found in a host of occupations. They concentrated in the parts of the city where these trades were located, but could be found in most quarters. Some were poor, others extremely wealthy.<sup>4</sup>

This paper focuses on the affluent Huguenots. It builds on recent writing that has re-examined the institutional structures of Paris through the prism of social and cultural history, using the key concept of “notability.”<sup>5</sup> Notability was the quality that gave access to institutional and symbolic forms of power within the city, and that was at the same time created by exercising such forms of power. I will suggest that although the system of bourgeois notability in Paris was in many respects constructed against Protestantism, changes in the course of the eighteenth century gradually enabled them to regain access, and hence to become part of a city-wide bourgeoisie that was gradually re-emerging in the final decades of the century.

Affluent Protestants were indisputably ‘bourgeois’ in their way of life. They enjoyed, like other well-to-do Parisians, comfortable apartments with all modern conveniences. For example, Marguerite Girardot de Préfond’s apartment overlooked the river and contained fine furniture, clocks, mirrors and tapestries. She had a small library of books, the walls were hung with paintings, she owned a large quantity of linen and silverware, and the dresser held five dozen fine porcelain plates.<sup>6</sup> Many people like her were legally ‘bourgeois’ too, since they satisfied the basic

<sup>2</sup> David Garrioch, *The Huguenots of Paris and the Coming of Religious Freedom, 1685-1789* (Cambridge, 2014), 54-66.

<sup>3</sup> Orentin Douen, *La Révocation de l’Edit de Nantes à Paris*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1894), 477-78; Francis Garrioch, “Genèse de l’Eglise réformée de Paris (1788-1791),” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 137 (1991): 33, note 21.

<sup>4</sup> Garrioch, *Huguenots of Paris*, 90-105.

<sup>5</sup> The key theoretical work is Robert Descimon, “Le corps de ville et le système cérémoniel parisien au début de l’âge moderne,” in *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciaires dans les villes européennes (Moyen Âge et temps modernes)*, Marc Boone and Maarten Prak, eds (Louvain, 1996), 73-128. See also David Garrioch, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie, 1690–1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); Laurence Croq and Nicolas Lyon-Caen, “La notabilité parisienne entre la police et la ville: des définitions aux usages sociaux et politiques au XVIIIe siècle,” in *La notabilité urbaine, Xe-XVIIIe siècles*, Laurence Jean-Marie, ed. (Caen, 2007), 125-57; Laurence Croq, “Essai pour la construction de la notabilité comme paradigme socio-politique,” in *La notabilité urbaine Xe-XVIIIe siècles: actes de la table ronde organisée à la MRSH du 20 et 21 janvier 2006*, Laurence Jean-Marie, ed. (Caen, 2007): 23-38; Mathieu Marraud, *De la Ville à l’État: La bourgeoisie parisienne, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009); Mathieu Marraud, “La juridiction consulaire de Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: entre dignité royale et notabilité bourgeoise,” in *Les corps intermédiaires économiques: Entre l’Etat et le marché*, Clotilde Druelle-Korn, ed. (Limoges, 2011), 45-63.

<sup>6</sup> Archives nationales, Paris, Minutier central des notaires (hereafter MC), LXXIII 897, 29 December 1767.

requirements enforced by the courts: they lived for most of the year in Paris, paid taxes in the city and lived in a way appropriate for their rank.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the crucial element of bourgeois status that Protestants could not enjoy, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, was notability. This was expressed and consecrated through the exercise of leadership roles in civic and local institutions. The most numerous of such roles were to be found in the 120 or so trade guilds that existed until 1776 (their precise number varied over time). Every year each guild would elect, depending on its size, one or more *juré(e)s*, *gardes*, or *syndics* who would over the next two years run its affairs and enforce the rules of the trade. In some guilds, once their period of active administration was complete, they would join the *bureau*, the main decision-making body of the trade. The former officials had a preponderant role in guild meetings and were often able to run the trade in the interests of their own families, which frequently intermarried. In many cases, the sons or daughters of former guild officials enjoyed special privileges, such as cheaper admission to the guild or a pre-eminent position if they were in turn elected to a leadership role.<sup>8</sup>

A second area where notability was constructed was the fifty or so Catholic parishes (again, the number varied during the century). Every year two men were chosen, in each parish, to fill the position of churchwarden (*marguillier*), who managed the temporal affairs of the parish. Like the guild officials, they served for two years, receiving parish income and paying the bills. Once their term expired, they automatically joined the assembly of elders (*anciens*), which elected the new churchwardens and approved all major financial and policy decisions, such as building a new chapel, investing accumulated funds or taking legal action. Most parishes also elected a poor relief administrator (*commissaire des pauvres*) who drew up the lists of people entitled to receive assistance and who oversaw the parish charity school.<sup>9</sup> The churchwardens also controlled the allocation of pews and of tombs, both of which gave local families a prominent place in the church and proclaimed their importance. Since the nobility tended to go to monastic churches in the eighteenth century, the parishes became largely bourgeois property.<sup>10</sup>

Lay religious confraternities offered similar benefits to a wider range of people. Found in both parish and monastic churches, in the first half of the eighteenth century there were around 500 of these associations. About half were limited to particular trades and were most often run by the elected guild officials. The rest had broadly the same administrative structure as the parishes: usually two officials elected for a two-year term to run the affairs of the confraternity, organizing both regular

<sup>7</sup> Joseph di Corcia, “*Bourg, Bourgeois, Bourgeois de Paris* from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 223-32. Robert Descimon, “‘Bourgeois de Paris’: les migrations sociales d’un privilège,” in *Histoire globale: histoire sociale: actes du colloque des 27-28 janvier 1989*, Christophe Charle, ed. (Paris, 1993), 173-82.

<sup>8</sup> On specific guilds see Steven Laurence Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775* (Durham and London, 1996), 164-67. Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham & London, 2001), 257-66. More generally, Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wage: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge, 1989), 63-64 and David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley, 2002), 80-81.

<sup>9</sup> David Garrioch, “Parish Politics, Jansenism and the Paris Middle Classes in the Eighteenth Century,” *French History* 8 (1994): 403-19.

<sup>10</sup> Garrioch, *Formation*, 48-52. Laurence Croq, “Du lieu des notables à l’espace public bourgeois, la transformation des formes socio-spatiales de la vie religieuse dans les églises paroissiales parisiennes (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles),” in *La religion vécue. Les laïcs dans l’Europe moderne*, Laurence Croq and David Garrioch, eds (Rennes, 2013), 192-93, 203-4.

religious services and funerals for members. As in the parishes, after their period in office they joined the assembly of *anciens* which elected the new administrators, audited the accounts and made all the major decisions. Although the leadership of some confraternities extended beyond those who would be defined, in socio-economic terms, as 'bourgeois', the majority were in the hands of this group.<sup>11</sup>

Other elected offices were far more restricted. The twenty-six administrators of the Paris hospital system (*hôpital général*) were lawyers and legal office-holders.<sup>12</sup> The members of the city's commercial court (*juges* and *consuls*) were recruited overwhelmingly from the leading merchant guilds, the Six Corps, with only occasional representatives of other trades. The court, like most other Old Regime institutions, formed a corporation and, as in the parishes and confraternities, those who had served their term joined the company of *anciens* that offered advice and made important decisions about financial and other matters.<sup>13</sup>

The most prestigious of all elected offices in the city was that of *échevin* (alderman): "A bourgeois reaches the peak of glory when he becomes an *échevin*," observed Louis-Sébastien Mercier, "He is sated with honor when he sees a street bearing his own name."<sup>14</sup> The post conferred life nobility, and in practice was recruited exclusively from among the leaders of the Six Corps and particular groups of legal officials.<sup>15</sup> The elections, however, offered another opportunity for prestige: the pre-selected *échevins* were publicly chosen in an electoral assembly made up of bourgeois representing the different quarters of the city, and being selected to participate in one of these assemblies was in itself an honor.<sup>16</sup>

A variety of other elected offices existed in different parts of eighteenth-century Paris. 'Syndics' were chosen to run the different annual fairs, the *foires* Saint-Germain, Saint-Ovide and Saint-Laurent. The users of the Bièvre River also elected syndics to enforce the rules governing water use and river maintenance, and they too were prominent local bourgeois.<sup>17</sup> This was the structure adopted whenever some local task needed to be done, allowing the work to be overseen by educated citizens. For much of the eighteenth century there were thus well over 1,000 elected positions available in the city every year. Certainly not all bourgeois males, and only a tiny proportion of bourgeois women, were chosen. Those elected were usually proposed by one of the members of the governing body, and they had to enjoy a sound reputation and be trustworthy since they sometimes handled quite large sums of money. This meant they needed to be well established and known to the group. They also had to be considered capable of undertaking the work required, which included, since these were all unpaid roles, possessing sufficient affluence to devote time to the often onerous administrative tasks involved. In most cases, too, if expenditure

<sup>11</sup> The registers of a number of confraternities survive in the LL series of the Archives nationales [henceforth AN].

<sup>12</sup> Their occupations are listed, year by year, in the *Almanach royal*. See also Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1923), 277.

<sup>13</sup> Marraud, "La juridiction consulaire de Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: entre dignité royale et notabilité bourgeoise," 49. Amanda D. Kessler, *A Revolution in Commerce: The Parisian Merchant Court and the Rise of Commercial Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 2007), 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, nouvelle édition, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: 1782-88), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Junges, "Les échevins parisiens au XVIIIe siècle" (PhD diss., L'École nationale des Chartes, 1996), esp. 48-76.

<sup>16</sup> Laurence Croq, "Les 'bourgeois de Paris' au XVIIIe siècle" (PhD diss., Paris I, 1997), 251-64.

<sup>17</sup> Garrioch, *Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 58-61. On the fairs, Robert M. Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York and Oxford, 1986), 28-29, 140-49.

exceeded income, the elected officials had to pay bills out of their own pockets and were reimbursed only at the end of the year after the accounts had been approved.<sup>18</sup>

In return, they received a range of tangible and intangible benefits. These offices conferred varying degrees of power and influence, particularly in the larger guilds and parishes and in the prestigious confraternities, and they often permitted an element of patronage. But above all, the positions offered that most valuable of commodities in the Old Regime: honor. Churchwardens might be the first to receive the sacraments at Easter and Christmas and had a special place in religious processions. The turn of the administrators of confraternities came on the feast-day of their patron saint, when they occupied a foremost place. The leaders of the guilds had a similarly prominent place in corporate ceremonies, and enjoyed particular privileges that set them apart. Their names were published, they represented their trade in dealings with higher authorities and they expected a degree of respect from the fellow guildsmen or guildswomen. Being elected to any of these roles in itself indicated the esteem in which they were held by their peers. Hence the plaintiff in one court case found it difficult to argue that her opponent had deliberately deceived her, since “the offices of *garde* of [his] guild and churchwarden of his parish with which he is honored bespeak his probity.”<sup>19</sup> Even after their term was over, the holders of office continued to enjoy honorific privileges. The former administrators of parishes and confraternities sat in special decorated pews close to the main altar or to their chapel. Men would list the various offices they had held, in the same way as people today put letters after their names.

Nor, in the case of male officials, were these honors enjoyed solely by the person who actually occupied the position. His wife and children not only basked in reflected glory, but enjoyed privileges such as the right to present *pain bénit*, bread to be blessed for later distribution, or to take up the collection on certain feast days. Family weddings and funerals were often conducted by the *curé*, who only officiated on important occasions. The wives of churchwardens might also enjoy a place of honor at religious services, and were often appointed to the parish women’s charity committee, itself a source of patronage and prestige.<sup>20</sup> Families continued to insist on the status of a bourgeois office-holder who had died. Funeral notices enumerated the various honors held by the deceased: “Jacques Ferry, former *consul*, former *garde* of the grocers, former *fermier du roi*, former charity commissioner and former churchwarden [of his parish], former administrator of the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and of Saint Agnès.” When wives or widows died, their husband’s offices would be listed: “Françoise Oudin, wife of Jacques Brignon, merchant furrier, former *garde* of his guild and former administrator of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament at the Trinity [Hospital].”<sup>21</sup>

Any man wanting to make his mark and to be recognized as a leading citizen sought election to one of these positions. But not all positions conferred the same degree of honor: there was a clear hierarchy. A key position in a large, wealthy guild or parish was of higher status than the same role in a less important one. Even within the one parish, the greater prestige of certain confraternities was marked by their prominent place in processions and the location of their pew in the church. A small

---

<sup>18</sup> For example, in the parish of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, the churchwarden was owed 165 *livres* at the end of 1731: AN LL707, fol. 199.

<sup>19</sup> *Mémoire pour demoiselle Chotart*, quoted in Kessler, *Revolution in Commerce*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Garioch, *Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 97.

<sup>21</sup> AN, placards nos. 1452, 6528. John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1981), 286-88.

number of city-wide religious associations were highly select bodies, claiming to have been founded by royalty and admitting only men and women of recognized standing.<sup>22</sup> Election as an administrator of the hospitals, or as a judge or *consul* in the commercial court, was even higher honors.

For most individuals, the lesser offices represented the limit of their aspirations and the culmination of their career. But those with the right qualities and connections could climb to dizzying heights. Sometimes one role could open the door to another. For example, at Saint-Jean-en-Grève, only men who had served as charity commissioner were eligible for election as churchwardens.<sup>23</sup> Members of the commercial court were chosen overwhelmingly from among those who had formerly served as officials in the leading guilds.<sup>24</sup> But above all, it helped to come from a family whose members had already held similar positions. For example, Marc-Antoine Nau held leadership positions in the drapers' guild and in his parish, then as judge in the commercial court and finally was named administrator of the Paris hospitals. Whatever his personal qualities, Nau owed his various positions at least partly to the fact that seven men of the same name were churchwardens in the important parish of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, that several of his brothers, brothers-in-law and cousins were officials in one of the major guilds, and that no fewer than ten members of the commercial court were his close relatives by blood or marriage.<sup>25</sup> This family was a particularly successful one, but it was common, in the guilds and parishes of Paris, for members of the same families to be elected to leadership roles, and marriage connections were widespread within the bourgeois elite.

For the city's Protestants, however, these doors to notability were closed. Obviously, they could not and did not wish to become churchwardens of a Catholic parish or leaders of a confraternity. They did find ways into the guilds, but election to a leadership position was not possible: even if the Catholic majority overlooked their religion, it was unlikely that the police would do so. The more prominent positions of judge or *consul* in the commercial court and honorific offices in the city administration were also out of the question. Both as individuals and families, Protestants were excluded from the key mechanisms of bourgeois notability and from certain means of social reproduction, however wealthy and respectable they might be.

Nor was this solely a political form of exclusion: it was also a symbolic and spiritual one, a denial of a social identity. Even in Paris, where parish and community of inhabitants were no longer synonymous, the parish remained at the heart of an imagined spiritual community, particularly in the Jansenist theology that was so strong there.<sup>26</sup> The guilds were also imagined as spiritual communities, whose members automatically and compulsorily belonged to the trade confraternity and who had a mutual responsibility of Christian (Catholic) brotherhood. Guild meetings were often held on the feast-day of their patron saint, sometimes after mass, and members were supposed to attend the funerals of masters and mistresses who died. Although these bonds too had been dissolved to some degree by the growth in guild

---

<sup>22</sup> *Prières et instructions à l'usage de la confrérie royale de la Sainte Vierge, S. Sebastien et S. Roch érigée en l'église de l'hôpital royal des Quinze Vingts à Paris* (Paris, 1728). See also Laurence Croq, "Le déclin de la confrérie Notre-Dame aux prêtres et aux bourgeois de Paris sous l'ancien régime," *Paris et Ile-de-France: Mémoires* 50 (1999): 243-89.

<sup>23</sup> Bibliothèque nationale, manuscrit français 21610, fol. 127.

<sup>24</sup> Marraud, "La juridiction consulaire," 52-53.

<sup>25</sup> Marraud, "La juridiction consulaire," 53. Marraud, *De la Ville à l'État*, 151-54, 161, 271.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Lyon-Caen, *La boîte à Perrette: Le jansénisme parisien au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2010), 414-17, 421-38.

membership and by other changes, they remained strong in some trades well into the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Protestants were excluded from these spiritual communities and from the symbols and forms of solidarity that structured them. These included participation in the communion of the mass, in the processions that ritually delineated the streets and houses belonging to the parish, and in collective celebrations of the patron saint of the confraternity or trade. The bourgeois leaders of the parishes, confraternities and guilds enjoyed a prominent place in all of these rituals. But equally important in the construction of bourgeois identity were the marks of status afforded by family rites of passage, particularly funerals. At the end of the seventeenth century, wealthy Parisians stipulated in their wills the key components of the funerals they desired: which bells would be rung; the number of priests and candles; and, sometimes, the number of poor people recruited from the local hospital or from the parish school who would be given a small sum to ensure their presence and their prayers. The local community, if not the entire parish, participated in the process of death and commemoration, from the moment the neighbors followed the host into the bedroom of the dying person to the funeral and the burial. A former officeholder in a parish, guild or confraternity would often have his or her funeral provided by that body, and the leading members would attend, each holding a candle. Subsequently there would be memorial masses, at which the spiritual community was exhorted to pray for the deceased.<sup>28</sup>

The will of an affluent seventeenth-century bourgeois would also contain bequests, almost invariably including gifts to religious institutions and to the poor of the parish.<sup>29</sup> This was intended to assist their souls to enter Heaven, but it was also a social obligation that accompanied bourgeois status. It was a statement of rank and an affirmation of the place of the deceased and of his or her family within the city. Protestants were not part of any of this. Before the Revocation, they had had their own parallel educational and charitable institutions, their own separate community, but these had all been destroyed in 1685. They had no access to many of the key markers of bourgeois identity.

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the religious element in bourgeois social identity and in the construction of bourgeois notability was to diminish. There were two key ways in which this happened. First, many of the elected positions I have described disappeared, the largest number in 1776 with the abolition of the old guilds. When they were restored later that year, their number was reduced from around 120 to 50, and hence the number of elected positions was more than halved. At the same time, the *anciens* were deprived of any automatic role in the guild, although as individuals they could still participate in the election of new officials. Henceforth, the 200 or 400 wealthiest masters or mistresses, depending on the size of the guild, were to elect ‘deputies’ who would take over most of the role of the old assembly of *anciens*, including the selection of the new *gardes* from among their own ranks. We do not know exactly how the elections operated after 1776, and it is likely that in some cases the old oligarchies were able to exercise control within the new structures.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, the new positions within the guild leadership appear to

---

<sup>27</sup> David Garrioch, “Royal Policy and the Secularisation of the Paris Guilds in the Eighteenth Century,” *French History and Civilisation* 4 (2013): 24-33.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Chaunu, *La mort à Paris: XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1978), 356-61 ; McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 234-58, 270-302.

<sup>29</sup> Chaunu, *La mort à Paris*, 421-23.

<sup>30</sup> Steven Kaplan, *La fin des corporations* (Paris, 2001), 268-69, 76-80.

have been just as prestigious as the old ones, and it is possible that the role of ‘deputy’ offered a new source of prestige. This was nevertheless, as Steven Kaplan has argued, a “new corporatism,” keeping something of the form of the older institutions, but destroying much of their collective and corporate identity.<sup>31</sup> A crucial element of this was explicit official rejection of the concept of guilds as spiritual communities. The trade confraternities were abolished in February 1776, and the August edict explicitly forbade their re-establishment. Henceforth, the guilds were – legally – to be solely economic organizations, and there was no longer any requirement for new entrants to be Catholic.<sup>32</sup> In some ways this was recognition of longer-term changes that were taking place, but it also hastened them, seriously undermining the corporate and religious character of bourgeois notability.

The parishes also came to play a lesser role in the construction of bourgeois identity. The end of burials under the church floors, by the 1770s, reduced the prominence of tombs and the collective memory of those interred there, and the disappearance of family pews, from the middle of the century on, robbed bourgeois lineages of their privileged place in the church (noble families tended to go to monastic churches rather than parish ones).<sup>33</sup> Bequests to religious institutions also declined.

The wider decline of the confraternities was also a significant part of this process. It was linked to the secularization of the guilds, since over 120 trade confraternities were abolished in 1776. But many others disappeared at around the same time: of around 530 confraternities that existed in Paris in the 1750s, just over 100 seem to have survived in the 1780s. There was growing criticism of their activities as “superstitious,” and the development of more individual forms of religious belief undermined their collective ethos. The bourgeois of the city no longer saw their role in the same way, as moral leaders within a parish or professional spiritual community. Their role in the construction of bourgeois identity was not entirely lost, since the surviving ones included the most prestigious parish and city associations, and therefore were those that conferred greatest status on their leaders.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, like the reform of the guilds, the decline of the confraternities eliminated many of the elected positions and the ceremonies that had been so important an element of bourgeois notability.

The second way in which the religious component of notability was declining was through the appearance of new sources of influence and status, particularly those sponsored by the royal government. The role of the guilds was limited by the proliferation of monopolies outside the old corporate structure: there were over two dozen *manufactures royales* in Paris in the late 1780s, and over 100 craftsmen with a royal *privilège* that enabled them to work in the city without guild approval. Guild authority was increasingly limited by the *inspecteurs des manufactures* and by various *régies*, which also enjoyed monopolies granted by the Crown, which were established in certain industries.<sup>35</sup> It became far easier for talented entrepreneurs to win royal and public recognition partly or wholly outside the guild system: men like Jean-Baptiste

<sup>31</sup> Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 603-6. See also the essays by Minard and Kaplan in Steven L. Kaplan and Philippe Minard, eds, *La France, malade du corporatisme? XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Paris, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> The text of the February and August edicts can be found in Alfred Franklin, *Dictionnaire historique des arts, métiers et professions exercés dans Paris depuis le treizième siècle* (Paris, 1906), 780-92.

<sup>33</sup> Croq, “Du lieu des notables,” *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> This paragraph is based on my current research on Paris confraternities.

<sup>35</sup> Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, 216. On the *inspecteurs*, Philippe Minard, *La Fortune du colbertisme: Etat et industrie dans la France des Lumières* (Paris, 1998).



Réveillon, Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf and many others, won prizes and government-guaranteed monopolies.<sup>36</sup>

Other new sources of notability, however, were outside the government's control. For example, men like Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre became household names through their writing and their reputations were to win them election during the Revolution.<sup>37</sup> Status and esteem were also to be gained in the assemblies and societies of different kinds that multiplied in the later eighteenth century. The most important, numerically, was freemasonry, which developed rapidly in Paris from the 1760s on. Some of the several hundred new lodges formed were aristocratic, but a great many were bourgeois, their statutes formally excluding 'mechanics'. The exclusion of "the vulgar", as non-masons were termed, was one of the hallmarks of masonic language and ritual. For thousands of bourgeois men and a small number of women, admission to a lodge, by invitation only, was a form of recognition by their peers, and the emphasis placed on urbane sociability reinforced the sense of belonging to an elite. And although meetings and banquets were closed to non-members, membership was no secret, since servants attended part of the proceedings, many lodges participated in public ceremonies and some were even mentioned in tourist guides.<sup>38</sup> Exclusivity, sometimes ostentatious, was a characteristic of all the new forms of bourgeois sociability that flourished in the final decades of the Old Regime: "sociétés bourgeoises," as some of them were called, including reading circles, theatrical and musical societies, dining clubs, philanthropic groups and similar bodies.<sup>39</sup>

All of this meant that leadership positions in the guilds, the parishes and the confraternities, which had been central to bourgeois notability until the 1760s, were now rivaled by other sources of status. The new forms of recognition, furthermore, were open to a wider range of the "middling sort," including some of those who were excluded from parish or trade organizations because they did not have the necessary family connections, or because of their religion. This included the bourgeois Protestants of the city.

Ironically, it was the royal government and its local representatives that provided the first openings. In 1744, three Protestant bankers, one Lutheran and two belonging to the Reformed Church, were among the bourgeois notables who were chosen to advise on a new street-cleaning tax. The city authorities had decided to replace the old system, by which householders and shopkeepers were responsible for sweeping the street, with a new one employing professional street cleaners paid for by the new tax. The question was how best to collect the money and the local bourgeois were considered the best people to decide, presumably since the tax would fall mainly on them. The local police officials therefore called a meeting of "notables" whom they each chose in their quarter, 160 men in total.<sup>40</sup> The police officer who chose all three Protestants was perhaps unusual, but there was no protest from his superiors or from the citizens in whose name the men were summoned.

---

<sup>36</sup> For sources and further examples, Garrioch, *Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 136-43. See also Leonard N. Rosenband, "Jean-Baptiste Réveillon: A Man on the Make in Old Regime France," *French Historical Studies* 20 (1997):481-510.

<sup>37</sup> Mercier to the Convention in 1792, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in his district: *District de Saint-Marcel: Assemblée générale de la Commune dudit District, pour le mardi 1er septembre 1789* (Paris, 1789).

<sup>38</sup> Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *L'Autre et le frère: L'Etranger et la Franc-maçonnerie en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1998), 445-92.

<sup>39</sup> David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790* (Cambridge, 1986), 173-80.

<sup>40</sup> Croq and Lyon-Caen, "La Notabilité parisienne," 136, 153.

By the 1750s, Protestants were being accepted into various kinds of government-sponsored employment: a Lutheran became chief clerk of the royal printer and Huguenots were permitted to purchase venal offices, some purely honorary and others that involved real jobs, such as supplying the military, working in the postal service, the Paris customs and the royal lottery. The furniture-maker Pierre Migeon was even allowed to purchase a minor municipal office that was part of the traditional bourgeois hierarchy of honor, that of *dixainier*, which involved attendance at certain public ceremonies. By the 1780s, Huguenots were working for the Ferme Générale and in the household of the Duc d'Orléans. In 1781, Antoine Court de Gébelin, Swiss by birth but of Huguenot origin, and notorious as the first officially recognized representative of the French Reformed Churches, was appointed as one of the royal censors, though he may never have been given any jobs to do.<sup>41</sup>

These appointments are signs that a new definition of notability was being applied. The Lieutenant-General of Police defined it explicitly in 1776, when another attempt was made to establish advisory local assemblies in Paris: the men chosen, he said, should be “persons who by maturity in age, the solidity of their business, and the integrity of their reputation, will confer honor on the position.”<sup>42</sup> Religion was not an issue. The same criteria were those that enabled Protestants, in the 1770s, to be admitted to freemasons’ lodges. Foreign Protestants had long been welcomed in the aristocratic lodges, but not Huguenots. And despite the later reputation of the lodges as secular and even anti-religious, mid eighteenth-century bourgeois freemasonry in Paris was very Catholic. The 1755 statutes of the Grande Loge of Paris obliged masons to be baptized and to go to mass regularly. The lodges were to celebrate the feast-day of John the Baptist, and to provide memorial services for lodge members who died, each brother carrying a candle. This changed in the 1770s, after the creation of the Grand Orient, and it is only then that we find small numbers of bourgeois Huguenots being admitted.<sup>43</sup>

This was a sign of changing attitudes towards Protestantism among at least some bourgeois Parisians. It is one of a number of indications that the Huguenots, after three generations or more in the wilderness, were being reintegrated into bourgeois society. There is growing evidence of connections across confessional lines, such as the appearance in the 1770s and 1780s of Catholic witnesses attending Huguenot weddings at the Swedish chapel.<sup>44</sup> Some of the guilds had removed anti-Protestant clauses from their statutes, as early as the middle decades of the century.<sup>45</sup> Although the old honorific system never admitted Protestants, the doors to some of its anterooms had begun to open: I have mentioned Migeon’s purchase of the municipal office of *dixainier*, and in the 1780s members of the Cottin family often served as arbiters in the commercial court, acting as conciliators in disputes and advising the judges. By then, too, a handful of leading Protestants, mainly bankers and merchants,

---

<sup>41</sup> Garrioch, *Huguenots of Paris*, 68-70. Yves Durand, *Les Fermiers généraux au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1996. First published 1971), 601-2. Herbert Lüthy, *La Banque Protestante en France de la Révocation de l’Edit de Nantes à la Révolution*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1959-1961), 208.

<sup>42</sup> AN Y13728, Albert to commissaire Gillet, 30 April 1776.

<sup>43</sup> Pierre Chevallier, *Histoire de la Franc-Maçonnerie française*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1974-5), 120-22. Garrioch, *Huguenots of Paris*, 192-93.

<sup>44</sup> Garrioch, *Huguenots of Paris*, 195-96.

<sup>45</sup> Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris 104300, *Nouveaux statuts de la communauté des maîtres et marchands chaircuitiers de la Ville et faubourgs de Paris* (Paris, 1754); AN K1030, statutes of metal polishers, 1744 and 1765.

were active in the Société philanthropique, alongside much of the Catholic elite of the city.<sup>46</sup>

The growing acceptance was on both sides of the religious divide. Some wealthy Huguenots adopted the long-standing bourgeois custom of leaving bequests to the Catholic parish poor. The first example I have found was in 1748, when Louise Girardot left 200 *livres* to be distributed by the *curé* of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. Others did the same in the following decades.<sup>47</sup> Along with a shared commitment to the central values of enlightened bourgeois society (in so far as this can be deduced from libraries, paintings and other possessions, and from naming practices), all the evidence suggests a convergence between Catholics and Protestants at this level of society.

Across the second half of the eighteenth century, then, religion was becoming less and less central to bourgeois identity and status in the French capital. This did not necessarily mean that religious belief was any less important, either to Catholics or to Protestants. But it did reflect a very significant change in the dominant Parisian system of notability, after over 200 years when Catholic religion had been one of its defining characteristics. This transformation was to have significant consequences: it would facilitate acceptance of religious freedom in 1789 and it consolidated the unity of bourgeois patriots at the beginning of the Revolution. One Huguenot was a member of the provisional municipality in 1789 and in 1790 became one of the sixteen administrators of the city, while another was elected as one of the forty-eight municipal officers. Other Protestants were prominent in the National Guard and in the sections.<sup>48</sup> By then, therefore, bourgeois Protestants and bourgeois Catholics – formerly two quite distinct groups – had become Protestant and Catholic bourgeois. Admittedly, their alliance would not survive the Revolution, as many Catholics came to blame Protestants for its policy towards the Church.<sup>49</sup> But for the moment, what united them socially and politically had become more important than the religious divide between them.

---

<sup>46</sup> Kessler, *Revolution in Commerce*, 359, note 210. *Calendrier philanthropique* [sic], *Année 1789* (Paris, 1790).

<sup>47</sup> MC X 485, 4 July 1748. For other examples, AN Y59, fol. 261 verso, 3 January 1767; MC LII 399, 6 August 1758; Archives de Paris DC6 249, fol. 74 verso, 18 April 1764.

<sup>48</sup> Garrioch, *Huguenots of Paris*, 213-14.

<sup>49</sup> Michèle Sacquin, *Entre Bossuet et Maurras: L'antiprotestantisme en France de 1814 à 1870* (Paris, 1998), esp. 324-25.