

H-France Review Vol. 10 (March 2010), No. 49

Raymonde Monnier, ed., *À Paris sous la Révolution. Nouvelles approches de la ville*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008. 221 pp. Notes. €25.00 (pb) ISBN 978-2-85944-596-6.

Review by Sydney Watts, University of Richmond.

Quoi de neuf sur la Révolution? Raymonde Monnier's latest publication on Paris during the French Revolution stands out as a valuable collection of fresh ideas and illuminating scholarship, the ongoing work of a number of both young and well established historians from France and abroad. This plentiful compilation of groundbreaking research, taken from conference proceedings held at the Hôtel de Ville in October 2005, reveals the vitality of historical scholarship on this topic over the past two decades. Certainly, one would think after the flurry of publications following the bicentennial of 1789 that the subject of revolutionary Paris has been exhausted. Not so. In fact, the seventeen contributors to this collection open more historical terrain to the interested scholar than they close off. While each essay is kept brief, close to its conference paper format, many of them point to burgeoning fields of study. These historians have left behind ideological debates to focus on new topics, original historical problems, and open-ended discussion.

The questions around which the conference focused point to the place of Paris *under* the Revolution, its role as a site of acculturation that transformed its citizens as much as the city was transformed by its citizens. These scholars look to Paris as the center of revolutionary activity, keeping in mind the historical change in material conditions, social life and economic activity. Many of them contend with the fact that Paris was a growing metropolis with its own urban problems that were further challenged under the revolution. Other participants focus on the political culture that permeated urban life in ways that to a greater or lesser degree demonstrate what Parisians made of this revolutionary world. In turning to clearly delineated objects of study located in Paris (i.e., urban politics related to financing urban projects and policing the city, cultural venues such as the theatre and museums, city businesses such as construction, public transportation the meat trade, and examples of political culture as seen in sermons, engravings and Parisian academies) these scholars aim to untangle Paris from the Revolution writ large. As a result, instead of using Paris as a backdrop to this revolutionary period, Paris--its urban administration, economic life and political culture--is both the subject and object of this historical period.

While these focused, tightly written studies reveal a depth of new research underscored in citations throughout each section, they do not neglect broader questions of context. The first section on administration and finance examines the degree to which the city was able to assert its political jurisdiction over local finance and administration as well as policing its own citizens in the context of republicanism. The second section on the economy includes various studies of Paris as a market center and the ways that various forms of commerce and local businesses shaped the everyday lives of those who steered themselves through revolutionary political and economic storms without a keel. The third section on cultural practices centers on the political culture of Paris and the changing social spheres within specific artistic and intellectual communities. The three sections are prefaced by well respected scholars François Monnier, Dominique Margairaz, and Raymonde Monnier, each of whom keeps a broad sense of the enormous shifts taking place in the ways Parisians were making their way in a world

that was being re-made around them. François Monnier calls on scholars to investigate the claims administrators made in regard to their own institutional memory. Beyond the simple notion of building a new bureaucracy upon a clean slate, he demands a more nuanced inquiry to consider what these bureaucrats made of their new situation in light of their past experiences. Monnier investigates the strategies that these administrators relied on when facing problems of transition from one new government to another. He puts forth a long list of research questions that aim to uncover a much more complete and realistic understanding of the lives and ambitions of administrators. He offers suggestions to reveal a more accurate picture of public office through techniques of microhistory and prosopography. Of the three, his introduction goes furthest to chart new territory for historians, asking how public opinion inflects the inner workings of bureaucracy at the most detailed level.

The three papers that fall under this first section on administration and finance only address a few of Monnier's queries, but in ways that flush out some of the revisionist pathways sketched out by Monnier. Jean-Louis Harouel focuses on the financial problems that the city government faced at the end of the Old Regime and how it affected urban projects such as the cost and upkeep of roadways through the city. Harouel reveals how the crown's ultimate authority in urban planning and its control over municipal matters was well established under the Old Regime. Yet, as Harouel demonstrates, it was the relative soundness of the city government that allowed for urbanization to continue into a period of financial and political crisis. Pierre Belda's investigation into the quarrels between the city and the central government undermines the thesis that administrative reform under the Constituent Assembly decentralized the government. He argues that the central government exercised a greater degree of power than previously thought to subordinate the municipal government of Paris within an administrative hierarchy.

In a very probing piece written by Michel Pertué, we see how far we have come in framing questions about revolutionary activity, rioting and revolt in Paris. Pertué considers the role of policing as a way to maintain public order. He points out the great paradox inherent in this thesis: If Paris stands at the epicenter of revolution, a city constantly decried as the city of enemies, as a place where disorder reigns, what is the role of the police? But as Pertué argues it was the recognition of a municipal power extended to the police which permitted the revolution to put a level of defense in place, to neutralize a hostile prince, and to prevent the counter-offensive of a privileged population recently disempowered and disoriented by the reorganization of national lands along with the public investment of the administration (p. 51). Given this situation, Pertué carefully outlines the pressing questions historians need to pursue in order to see how the city managed to keep public peace. Moving beyond studies of what incited violence and revolt, this work opens up new ways to examine how law and order was constitutionally founded in the new state.

The second section offers various approaches to the economy, some that draw upon traditional urban history and the world of commerce and trade, and others that focus new attention on urban geography and industrial environment. Instead of figuring in economic indicators as the progenitor and response to revolutionary conjunctures, Margaraiz leads the way by proposing a simpler and more far-reaching problematic: what influence does Paris have on the economy of the kingdom or the republic? Her call for a longer and broader view is not always possible given the narrow focus of many of the papers in this collection--and Margaraiz clearly admits the limits of historical research given the lack of archival documentation--but clearly these authors frame their historical problems in ways that privilege Paris and its economic life as the central object of study. Moreover, these contributors reconfigure Paris, too often seen as the two dimensional background to revolutionary events, by bringing varying aspects of its commercial life into relief. Here, Paris takes the prominent position as the economic capital; its ruptures and continuities are viewed through clearly delineated topics such as legal battles for new construction, the logistical problems of urban transportation, and the fluctuating work force and market share in industrial and artisanal production.

Within this last subject, Jean-Francois Belhoste and Denis Woronoff make clear the scale and scope of industrial workforce in Paris, seen as a complex of economic actors, many of whose industries fell apart and reorganized under the revolution. During this period, the rise, fall, and realignment of economic activity generated a range of responses to the sudden absence of royal public works, the war effort and radical shifts in the labor market. As these authors conclude, it was during the revolution that the groundwork of nineteenth century industrialization was being laid. Eric Szulman draws a similar conclusion in his piece on the butchers and meat sellers of Paris. More than simply seeing the end of the guilds as an explosion of market activity, Szulman shows how the organization of the trade was reshaped by industrial capitalism and the massive demands of a burgeoning urban populace. Anne Cochon pursues similar problems of urbanization through the growth and development of urban transportation during the revolutionary period. The city's response to provisioning needs and demands for better access to the markets of Paris were often deterred by a fragmented transportation system that divided water routes from major thoroughfares. Carriage drivers and watermen were further frustrated by the loss of their corporate privileges and their noble clientele, the rising cost of hay for a dwindling population of horses, not to mention the disruption of routes blockaded by revolutionaries.

The questions of corporatism and liberalism, so often debated by scholars of eighteenth century guilds, play a large part in the world of the builders of Paris described by Allan Potofsky. They provide an interesting case-study of how the state responded to wild turns in the construction trades (a sector of the economy that favored speculation) that left somewhere between 5 to 7 percent of the working population unemployed at the end of the Old Regime. The crown's response to this situation took form in the *ateliers de secours*, whose corruption provided the grist for Marat's denunciations in the *L'Ami du peuple*. Potofsky narrates the swings between a hierarchical system based upon privilege and an openly competitive one based upon merit, where the state's control over public works projects wins out over the free market. The reassertion of state regulation in response to liberal experiments under the revolution is a familiar story, but as we see in Thomas LeRoux's example, not altogether an outcome of revolution. LeRoux shows how industrialists even as early as the 1770s fought regulation in the name of economic progress to forward innovations in industry, many of which were polluting the city. During the *laissez-faire* revolutionary period, these industrialists gained further ground in ways that allowed for polluting industries to flourish within the city, despite serious complaints. LeRoux explains how the state overlooked the effects of chemical processing and other industries that posed health risks, as it understood any interference would be overly restrictive to industrial development. It would take several more decades before the state would counter what LeRoux presents as the "industrialist ideology" in favor of legal protections for reasons of public health.

The final section offers perhaps the most diverse set of writings on the cultural practices of revolutionary Paris. Raymonde Monnier conceptualizes his project as a collection of research that opens up new perspectives to the promotion of republican culture and the apprenticeship in democracy. His introduction to these six essays is briefly stated, and the preface quickly turns to the historiography of revolutionary political culture, providing a highly informed review of recent scholarship that gives homage to the hefty contributions of Haim Burstin and David Garrioch, as well as a number of other francophone scholars. In designing this collaborative project, Monnier sought the work of Canadian scholars Stéphane Roy and the late David Trott. Both offer cultural studies of the fine arts, engraving and theatre respectively, in the Parisian context. The history of these art forms, their successes and failures among a changing public, provides an entry point into the making of Parisian identity, one in contrast to London engravings, the other in contrast to the Italian *commedia del arte*. Cyril Le Meur's essay on the work of Chamfort for the *Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française* points to how the artist and revolutionary enlarges our vision of events, how an artist's "aggrandizing" vision is made by the historic events in and around Paris. Her descriptions of these paintings are vivid.

Unfortunately, only one image is included in this essay that allows us to see how revolutionary history is portrayed within these artistic compositions. In the next essay, written by Isabelle Brian, the cultural

effect of being inscribed in the revolutionary moment comes forth clearly in the rhetoric of public speakers. Brian takes a novel approach to ways in which speech evolved from the structured practice of traditional sermons in the Church to the “*mauvaise discours*” of the civic sermon in the new national religion of republicanism. Beginning with the famous example of l’abbé Fauchet, Brian questions the possibilities and limits of this reformulated language that equated Christian with citizen. Her study examines the modalities of parody and harangues of a variety of religious and secular preachers. She suggests how the antithetical sermons of Robespierre and Maury, as well as the double-entendre of the Lenten message of self-sacrifice, overthrew conventional preaching and opened the way to the inspirational and highly emotional messages of the romantic age. Jean-Luc Chappey’s essay shows how specific social circles were reconfigured under the revolution, specifically the learned societies of academies into specialized, scientific circles, giving Paris the prominent place among the academic elite. His study sketches out the new systems of patronage brought about under the Directory, which, along with greater professionalization, divided amateur scholars from credentialed professors. Finally, Dominique Poulot’s study of the many uses of the Pantheon from memorial to museum, offers another look at the transformation of urban space into different symbolic uses. In breaking definitively with the past, revolutionaries sought new ways (some entirely inadequate) to memorialize their newfound history.

While this widely varied anthology can be read selectively according to one’s particular interest, its composite picture suggests how many different interpretations of Parisian exceptionalism and its revolutionary character persist. We see some economic and social actors who move along the revolutionary timeline simply contending with the changes around them, while others are propelled into a new political culture which they make for themselves. Such divergent perspectives in a single volume should be commended for its intellectual inclusivity. The central problem that this volume does seem to miss (apart from one or two exceptions) is the question of Paris’s vanguard position vis-à-vis the nation and the West. Nevertheless, these twenty-first century scholars offer us rich and provocative examples of how we might pursue the history of revolutionary Paris in ways that rely less on the engine of revolutionary spirit to carry the story forward than the situated experience and meaning born of a certain time and space. It seems clear that after nearly two and a half centuries, French historians have begun to distance themselves from an historical topic as highly charged as revolutionary Paris. Perhaps this is a good thing as we are now able to see a different set of trees in the forest.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Daniel Roche, “Introduction”

Part One: Administration et finances

François Monnier, “Administration et finances à Paris sous la Révolution”

Jean-Louis Harouel, “La question financière et ses rapports avec l’aménagement urbain”

Pierre Belda, “Les querelles entre la municipalité et l’administration générale de l’État”

Michel Pertué, “Le maintien de l’ordre: questions et réflexions”

Part Two: Économie

Dominique Margairaz, “Faire de Paris la capital économique de la France”

Jean-François Belhoste and Denis Woronoff, “Ateliers et manufactures: une réévaluation nécessaire”

Allan Potofsky, "La révolution sur les chantiers du bâtiment parisien: entre corporatisme et libéralisme"

Anne Conchon, "Paris et les transports sous la Révolution"

Éric Szulman, "Les évolutions de la boucherie parisienne sous la Révolution"

Thomas Le Roux, "Les nuisances artisanales et industrielles à Paris sous la Révolution et le Consulat (1789-1779)"

Part Three: Pratiques culturelles

Raymonde Monnier, "Les pratiques culturelles d'une capitale: paroles, écritures, regards"

David Trott, "Migration, naturalisation et transformation: les dernières années de la Comédie-Italienne en France (1752-1779)"

Stéphane Roy, "La gravure dans le rayonnement de la capitale: Paris et Londres au miroir"

Cyril Le Meur, "L'agrandissement du regard: Chamfort journaliste dans les *Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française*"

Isabelle Brian, "Prédication et révolution: la parole des prédicateurs au risque de la politique"

Jean-Luc Chappey, "Les transformations de la sociabilité intellectuelle à Paris sous la Révolution française"

Dominique Poulot, "La révolution des ancêtres à Paris: corps privés et corps publics, entre Panthéon et muse"

Sydney Watts
University of Richmond
swatts@richmond.edu

Copyright © 2010 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172