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Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello, eds., *Histoire de la virilité*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011. Illustrations, notes, and index of names. Volume I: Georges Vigarello, ed., *De l'Antiquité aux Lumières: l'invention de la virilité*. 588 pp. 38.00€. (cl). ISBN 10: 2020980673. Volume II: Alain Corbin, ed., *Le Triomphe de la virilité: le XIXe siècle*. 493 pp. 38.00€. (cl). ISBN 10: 2020980681. Volume III: Jean-Jacques Courtine, ed., *La Virilité en crise? XXe-XXe siècle*. 566 pp. 38.00€. ISBN 10: 202098069X.

Review by Robert Aldrich, University of Sydney.

Since the publication of the *Histoire de la France rurale* and the *Histoire de la France urbaine* in the 1970s and 1980s, French publishers have enjoyed issuing multi-volume compendia on particular subjects, works written by distinguished academics but meant for the general public as well. The volumes come handsomely produced, well-illustrated and often neatly packaged in a slipcover. Such is the *Histoire de la virilité*: three volumes, fifty chapters, 1666 pages, 156 full-colour plates of illustrations, weighing in at about four-and-a-half kilos and costing more than a hundred euros. 'French' does not appear in the title, but this is essentially a history of virility in France and in the European cultures, all the way back to Antiquity. Virility is not clearly distinguished from masculinity—some, though not all authors, view them as different—but there appear throughout identifiable traits.

One of those traits is a set of physical qualities, often theorised by physiologists in times past and present, and the sense that the ideal incarnation of the virile man is one with a healthy, well-toned and fit body: the Greek statue come to life. This virility, the authors concur, exerts itself in two primary arenas. One is sex, the virile man as sexually potent, the possessor of women and the sire of children, whose performance and productivity provide proof of manliness. Virility has also expressed itself historically in war: preparedness for military service, bravery on the battlefield, readiness to take up arms (or raise fists) in duels of honour, street brawls or competitions on the sportsground. To varying degrees, however, this virility must be tempered; moralists, medical experts and arbiters of taste have promoted self-possession, duty and a large degree of sexual continence as virtues that civilise base virility. Over the centuries, virility has also implicitly or explicitly been contrasted with the attributes of the feminine, with regularly occurring concerns about dangerous transgression of gender boundaries. Virility was both corporeal and cerebral, a virile mind in a virile body. It had to be earned and proven, safeguarded and defended. The ideal of virility was also multivalent, used by right and left, religious and secular, bourgeois and *populaire*, but generally viewed by its defenders not only as a marker of manhood but a guarantor of national vigour and defence of *la patrie*. It is perhaps telling that General de Gaulle, commenting on the Indochinese war in 1949, said: "Il faut à la France un régime viril" (vol. III, p. 392).

In the very long sweep covered by these volumes, the authors chronicle the transformation of virility, not least in medical views of what constitutes the man. The texts and illustrations show some continuities and reappearances; eroticised images of virile men are a constant, with twentieth-century swimming costumes replacing Renaissance codpieces to highlight male attributes. Change there is, too, across time and social condition; the virility of Louis XIV, dapper in his silks, satins and slippers, is hardly that of the nineteenth-century peasant or proletarian, or of a *poilu* or a Jean Gabin. Much of this general story will be familiar to historians of sexuality, gender and social history, but the authors provide insight into multiple issues either through overviews or in more focused case studies.

The first volume, edited by Georges Vigarello, covers the longest historical expanse, from Greco-Roman Antiquity to the Enlightenment. Not surprisingly, classical views of virility are the source of modern (French) perspectives, though with substantial metamorphosis: from pagan to Christian, from a virility that encompassed pederasty to one that in principle accommodated only heterosexual coition, from an emphasis on warrior virtues in archaic society and chivalry in the Middle Ages to a virility more at home in the salons and boudoirs of the eighteenth century. There is a wealth of intriguing information and some novel approaches; Claude Thomasset splendidly organises the first part of his discussion of the Middle Ages around the symbolism of the bear. Attentive readers can piece together micro-histories of the accoutrements of virility, from the length of hair (Roman beards, barbarian hirsuteness and monastic tonsure) to the size of genitalia.

Taken collectively, the authors point to the multiple incarnations of virility. A particularly fascinating chapter by Jean-Marie Le Gall treats the virility of clerics, whose vows of chastity and obedience, and retreat from warfare, would seem to put them at odds with athletic, heroic and lusty manliness. The chapter on Louis XIV, by Stanis Perez, is a tour de force, while Arlette Farge reveals the practice of *virilités populaires* away from the courts of early modern Europe. Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen's chapter on men in painting--the virile significance of gloves, the stomach and the leg--is a delight. Most chapters glance over European modes of virility outside of France (with the partial exception of Renaissance Italy), though Vigarello's own contribution looks at "le viril et le sauvage" in the new worlds overseas.

The second volume, edited by Alain Corbin, focuses on the nineteenth century, and the approach becomes more thematic than chronological. The chapters build up a general idea about a nineteenth-century style of virility in France, increasingly codified by such institutions as education and military service, especially after the 1870-1871 fiasco: the "triumph of virility" heralded by the title. Ivan Jablonka's chapter ably begins the story with childhood--clothing, schooling, sport--as the "voyage vers la virilité," followed by several chapters on the army ("le brevet de virilité," in Jean-Paul Béraud's nice phrase), and on the duel as a settling of quarrels; the last man to die of a duel in France perished in 1903. Sport, too, gets a chapter as the "expérience de la virilité." Studies of virility in the labouring classes and among priests complement similar ones in the preceding volume. There is a section devoted to the French overseas, with one chapter on voyagers, another on colonial conquerors. The volume closes with chapters about challenges to virility. Corbin's own excellent essay looks at fears about sexual virility such as impotence, spermatorrhea and sterility, and Régis Revenin surveys homosexuality in France. A concluding brief chapter by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau shows how immanent anxieties concerning male virility became terrifyingly real with the mutilations of the First World War, the theatre in which it was put to the test.

Some of this material is well known, here as in the first volume, but with much new and fascinating in the wide-ranging nineteenth-century tome, and it is impossible here to mention all the themes. Another chapter by Corbin, for instance, on the "nécessaire manifestation de l'énergie sexuelle," reveals how many *grands hommes* wrote in detail, and often salaciously, in their diaries and letters about their sexual experiences. Mérimée, Flaubert, Maxime du Camp, Delacroix all had relatively infamous and protean sex lives, but who knew what a randy fellow Michelet was? Michel Pigenet, writing on virility among workers, reminds readers of different norms in the nineteenth century from later times for sex, virility and respectability: the age of sexual majority was set at eleven in 1832, raised to thirteen in 1863. A surprise in Revenin's chapter is a report detailing how often butchers at La Villette, the *forts des Halles* and other butch workmen were given to homosexuality, a counter-image to the effeminate dandified *pédé*. A great deal of sex, and in many positions, took place outside of the borders prescribed by medicine, law and religion. Other expressions of virility also occurred outside legitimated channels, notably the fist-fights and punch-ups that seem to have been common.

Nevertheless, respectability demanded a taming of virility, whence the fear about losing control, whether through masturbation and involuntary emissions or of virile intemperance in public and private life. Properly directed, virility could serve the regeneration of France, the fertilisation of its overseas empire, the muscling up of a populace readied to confront European enemies. In all of this, of course, keeping women under the control of menfolk was hardly coincidental; the authors recall the unequal grounds for divorce instituted in 1884 and the legal provision, in force until 1907, that husbands collected the salaries of their wives. In a man's world, cabarets, as well as barracks and bordellos, were the privileged domain of virility, but the paterfamilias ruled at home as well.

The third volume, edited by Jean-Jacques Courtine, continues some of the themes of the earlier two; there are again chapters on sport and adventure. The topic of the virility of the priest disappears, however, the *curé* a vanishing presence in French life. Not surprisingly, there is a chapter on virility in the cinema, a new medium for its display and promotion. The essays in this final volume, with a few exceptions, such as a chapter on fascist virility, move backwards and forwards along a long twentieth century, sometimes with just a bit too much roving between periods and topics, and a curious selectivity. Florence Tamagne's chapter on homosexuality, for instance, gives ample coverage to movements and behaviours in the 1970s and 1980s, but devotes only a couple of lines to Arcadie, the pioneering homophile organisation of the 1950s. This volume is far more international than the first two, with discussions ranging across Europe and North America. The U.S. historian Christopher Forth, the sole non-French contributor, devotes a thoughtful chapter to "Masculinités et virilités dans le monde Anglophone," although perhaps only the French fantasize that the culture of *les Anglo-Saxons* is undifferentiated from America to Ireland to New Zealand. The world outside Europe and the "Anglo-Saxon worlds" appear mostly in a chapter on colonialism.

The focus, thus, remains France, but there seem a few lacunas. The chapter on fascism says almost nothing about virility in the French right-ring movements of the 1930s and under Vichy. That on the colonies zooms in on prostitution in the empire with very little on the notion of virility among the *pièdes-noirs* and in the cult of *algérianité*. And what about virility in the present-day *outré-mer*, particularly in the West Indies with its legacy of slavery? Surprisingly, there is a great absence of discussion of migrants in France—only three or four pages to cover the earlier Portuguese, Spanish and Italians, and the latter-day migrants from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. Yet certainly the virility of the young men in the *cités*, a manifest issue of political concern over the past decade and more, would have merited a chapter. Contemporary issues might indeed have received more attention. Might there have been a final chapter on the age of the internet, when virility has gone viral with chat rooms, porn sites and video clips?

The third volume does include much fine work. Anne Carol's comprehensive chapter on medicine explains not only the evolving theories about the male body, but also the medical and surgical interventions into the male anatomy. A chapter on "Virilités criminelles" by Dominique Kalifa is particularly interesting on attitudes, behaviours and social regulation. Bruno Nassim Aboudrar's fascinating essay on the penis at last removes the fig-leaf from the seminal symbol of virility. Christine Bard provides much insight on male virility "au miroir des femmes."

Certain changes in the history of twentieth-century virility are evidenced in this third volume. Working-class fisticuffs and other such quotidian violence gradually abated; violence against women, also widespread in past times, began to face increasing, if belated, censure. The physical fitness movement typified by gymnastics and the Olympics in the late nineteenth century gained force through the twentieth, and indeed the beefy three-pack of volumes concludes with a chapter on body-building. Americanisation insinuated its way into French virile life, from tee-shirted James Dean and Marlon Brando to gay liberationists, and to the avatars of Superman and Spiderman—rather different images of virility than tubby Astérix or cute Tintin. The sexual revolution (rather surprisingly, not the subject of a chapter in itself) recast sexual norms. Women moved into professions traditionally the preserve of

men; the decline of the old agrarian and industrial economies further closed off old arenas for masculine virility. Indeed, virility looked increasingly endangered, and Jean-Jacques Courtine suggests that the vogue for body-building and gym workouts may just be overcompensation for the loss of possibilities for the exhibition of real-man virility in other forums.

The recent date of some changes or lack of them is nonetheless a reminder of how solidly attitudes and laws were set in France. In discussing working-class virility, Arnaud Baubérot's chapter reminds readers that at the beginning of the 1950s, a third of fourteen-year-olds and more than half of those over sixteen already were wage-earners. Sexual violence long endured with little challenge. A man who murdered his wife still pleaded in a court in 1962: "Je ne l'ai pas frappé plus qu'à l'ordinaire" (vol. III, p. 73). Gender stereotypes, and the sexism and misogyny that underlay them, have been long lived. During the Algerian War, for example, at the ceremony at which parachutists were awarded their credentials, the commander ordered all the men to kneel with the words "À genoux les gonzesses"; those successful in their training were commanded: "Debout les hommes" (vol. III, p. 208). Not until 1970 did the law change authority over children from *puissance paternelle* to *autorité parentale*. Not until 1996 was mandatory military service abolished, ending the quintessential rite of passage to virility, especially when, in earlier times, the conscript often followed his examination by the military board with a visit to the brothel, claiming to be "bon pour le service, bon pour les filles" (a saying common at the time). The opposition of homophobes to gay marriage provides further evidence of entrenched attitudes about sex and gender, virility and parenthood. But when the mayor of Montpellier pronounced Vincent Autin and Bruno Boileau "united by marriage according to law" in May 2013, the couple's kiss broadcast live on television, perhaps a new model of virility was born.

In a work that it is so long and comprehensive, it seems ungenerous to wish for greater attention to favourite figures or themes or to ask for more chapters. Men such as Alberti and Winckelmann nevertheless get relatively little attention in the first volume, no matter the importance of the one in formulating a Renaissance notion of virile individualism and of the other in breathing new life into the classical models of virile beauty during the Enlightenment. The books make little attempt to look at regional variations of virility; one wonders whether codes of virility in a Corsica reputed for vendettas and an iron standard of male honour were the same as in Catholic Brittany or Germanic Alsace. The virtual silence on migrants is a major omission. A chapter on popular music would have been entertaining. So would have been more comparative perspectives: France and Germany, France and Britain, or other juxtapositions. There is, it might be added in passing, a certain *franco-français* concentration not only in the text but, in the sources; chapters on virility and colonialism largely ignore such "Anglo-Saxon" historians of gender, sexuality and European expansion as Antoinette Burton, Philippa Levine, Mrinalini Sinha and Ann Laura Stoler.

The colour illustrations, a portfolio for each chapter, are a very attractive aspect of this book. There are, however, no guides to further reading or bibliographical essays, though readers can more laboriously mine the extensive footnotes. A welcome addition is an index in each volume, a feature so annoyingly lacking in French books, though even here it is restricted only to personal names. The unfortunate lack of a subject index makes it difficult to connect interesting dots. In the third volume, in addition to a chapter on homosexuality, there are very useful pages on that topic in the chapter on crime, and significant passing references elsewhere, but they remain hidden for a reader who does not read everything. Similarly, it is not easy to work out if there is a specifically Parisian virility by chasing up the paragraphs and pages devoted to the capital in the three volumes. Some tantalizing subjects pop up here and there but only the most energetic reader will be able to find out about them; with many scattered references to fashion, there is no way for someone interested in how clothes make the man to work out the patterns.

Notwithstanding these points, the *Histoire de la virilité* is a great achievement. Lecturers will welcome chapters for course readers, and a number merit translation for an English-speaking audience; a 'best of

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compilation in English would be a valuable publication. There is much matter for discussion in tutorial rooms. Was there, for example, a difference between a royalist, a republican and a revolutionary virility? To what degree did *ancien régime* virility persist into the new regimes? If there is a 'crisis' in virility, what and when is its genesis? The *Histoire de la virilité* should certainly offer inspiration for further studies of emotions and beliefs, practices and policies, both in France and elsewhere. Will there be now a multi-volume *histoire de la fémininité*?

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