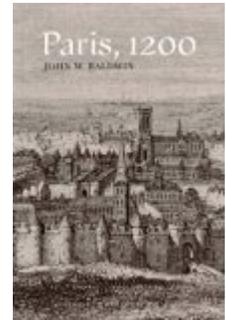




**John W. Baldwin.** *Paris, 1200*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. 304 pp.  
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**Reviewed by** David Spear

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**Commissioned by** Alexander Vari (Marywood University)

Is there an explosion of English-language books on medieval Paris? First there was Simone Roux's *Paris in the Middle Ages* (2009), and now we have John W. Baldwin's *Paris, 1200*.<sup>[1]</sup> Both were originally published in French by accomplished authors. Both are scrupulous about sticking to Parisian evidence, not overgeneralizing from later material or anecdotes from other medieval cities. Neither author uses any sort of theoretical framework, but each is keenly analytical, with the evidence ordered, interpreted, and sensitively handled. The main difference between the two works is simply that Baldwin, as his title states, focuses fully on the year 1200, while Roux paints on a broader chronological canvas. Baldwin also provides more historical context, and, happily, gives the reader a useful map. The reason Baldwin is able to zoom in precisely on 1200 is that he draws extensively on the writings of Peter the Chanter, a cleric at Notre-Dame Cathedral. This will come as no surprise to those who know Baldwin's magnum opus published in 1970, *Mas-*

*ters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle*.

As the author of *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power* (1986), Baldwin also draws on his expertise on that monarch's reign (1179-1223). Philip II, nicknamed "Augustus," ruled over France in 1200, and Paris was his capital. That "Paris was his capital" may seem self-evident, but in fact earlier French kings were more itinerant. Thus, for Louis VI (1108-27), only about 25 percent of his official documents were drawn up in Paris. Philip was born in Paris, and spent as much time there as possible: it was Philip who reinvented Paris. He ordered the construction of new walls (parts of which are still visible today), the paving of major streets and squares, and the building of covered markets (les Halles). Philip's castle at the Louvre also served as an urban presence for the king; part of his tower can be seen today at the subterranean level of that famous museum. His palace on the Île de la Cité became the foundation of the royal archives, while the Temple became the site of royal finan-

cial operations. Baldwin goes into great detail about how the government of Philip actually operated, mostly from its new headquarters in Paris. For example, we learn of the many functions of the Prévôt of Paris. He collected revenues in the city for the crown, including tax money on bread and wine. He dispersed revenues on behalf of the king, paying alms to ten different Parisian churches; reimbursed the royal chaplain and royal butler; remunerated various artisans, such as smiths, falconers, and helmet makers; and procured supplies for the royal household, such as wine, rope, and horses. He was also in charge of policing the city, including the maintenance of Paris's prisons.

Philip's urban improvements opened the city up for intense commercial development. On the left bank of the river Seine, what had been vineyards and gardens became houses. The right bank was thickly populated by the bourgeoisie. The level of commercial detail that Baldwin is able to uncover is surprising. We find, for example, that in 1200 the bakers of Paris had a monopoly on bread sales. Baking bread at home was not permitted, and non-Parisian bakers could sell their bread only on Saturdays. For this monopoly each Wednesday the bakers paid a toll to a royal official. On Sundays spoiled bread was sold, presumably cheaply and for the poor, near the square in front of Notre-Dame. The grain came from fields north of Paris, and was ground into flour at mills located under both of the city's bridges, obviously harnessing the power of flowing water. Unlike other guilds, which were concentrated in certain streets or neighborhoods, the bakers were located throughout the city. Interestingly, by the end of Philip's reign that monopoly was broken, to the extent that home ovens were allowed. The nobility, obviously important in the broader history of France, lived mostly in the countryside, only occasionally maintaining residences in Paris itself.

Paris owed part of its success to the large number of schools, which, by 1215, had officially become the University of Paris. These schools

were first located around Notre-Dame Cathedral and had spilled over onto the river's left bank. The reputation of the Parisian masters, schools, and curriculum drew students from across northern Europe, generating important economic revenue for the city. Indeed, the number of scholars was large enough that Philip agreed to significant concessions lest they flee en masse elsewhere. Philip was supportive of the university, in part because he could rely on the services of university-trained clerics in his household, especially his chancery. One tangible example of the economic consequences of the university presence was the development of the Paris Bible--a one-volume, small format text, written on extremely thin parchment. It was exceptionally portable, and "hundreds if not thousands of (such) bibles have survived from the thirteenth century--more than any commodity except for coins" (p. 45). Such a Bible could not have been produced without the requisite number of tanneries for the parchment, scribes for copying the text, and university students who used the Bible as their primary text.

Paris's signature structure--at least until the construction of the Eiffel Tower--was the Gothic-styled Notre-Dame Cathedral, about half completed in 1200. The nave loomed above the sea of one- or two-storied buildings that filled the city, but was roofless. Still, "enough of Notre-Dame could be seen to demonstrate that it was the largest and most technically perfect edifice of its day" (p. 23). Baldwin is not content merely to describe the architectural aspects of the church, but goes into depth on the liturgy; the music (chant composed by masters Leonin and Perotin); and the clergy--who they were, as well as what their duties had been. Indeed, this is characteristic of the entire book: Baldwin vividly and accurately describes the Paris of 1200 and provides a great deal of relevant context. Surprisingly, after all the focus on a single year, it turns out that 1200 was a bit unusual, for on January 13 the pope had placed all French territories, including Paris, under an interdict, meaning that no church sacraments could be

celebrated. Thus, Paris would have seemed eerily quiet in the absence of the sounding of the bells of so many churches. The interdict was the result of King Philip's having renounced his wife and then taken another, thus accused by the pope of bigamy. The interdict was lifted in September when Philip agreed to reconcile with his previous wife.

With a population of about fifty thousand people, Paris in the year 1200 was the largest city north of the Alps. It would be interesting, therefore, to summarize the conditions that allowed it to grow into the major metropolitan center it became soon thereafter. Perhaps most significant, Paris's natural resources were legion. As water transport trumped land transport from prehistory up until the Industrial Revolution, it helped that Paris straddled the Seine River. The Seine was navigable up to the coast, linking Paris with the English Channel and beyond. And at the Île de la Cité the Seine was fordable. Moreover, the Seine connected with the Marne and Oise rivers nearby, linking Paris to a significant inland waterway. Also, being located upriver often protected a city from maritime raiders. And as an added bonus, the Bièvre River, which emptied into the Seine from the left bank across from Notre-Dame, served the city as a transport for limestone quarried just south of Paris. The limestone quarries themselves were a not inconsequential resource. Just outside Paris, too, were fertile grain fields, plentiful vineyards, and dense forests, all watered by sufficient and relatively constant rainfall. And the climate was generally moderate. We can add to these natural resources human factors, such as that Paris benefited from the royal presence. Relations were not always harmonious, but at least Philip and other medieval kings were willing to work with the Parisian bourgeoisie to create a commercially active center. The university, while at times leading to town and gown turbulence, was a constant source of teachers and students who added to the net economic value of the city, in part in the form of clerical talent that remained

in Paris, as well as increasing its prestige. Relations, too, between the crown and the bishops of Paris were largely agreeable, embodied in the blending of Old Testament and Capetian strains of kingship seen in the sculptural programs on the west façade of Notre-Dame. Thus, salubrious natural conditions and burgeoning human institutions converged at Paris to provide critical mass for the growth and development of one of Europe's finest cities. Baldwin's excellent and creative book serves to remind us that the first coalescence occurred in the year 1200.

#### Note

[1]. David Spear, review of *Paris in the Middle Ages*, by Simone Roux, H-Urban, H-Net Reviews (October 2009), <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24832>.

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