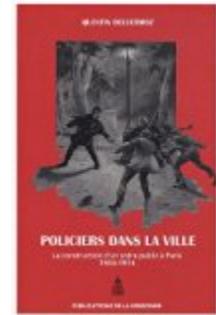


Quentin Deluermoz. *Policiers dans la ville: La construction d' un ordre public à Paris, 1854-1914*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2012. 408 pp. 38 EUR (paper), ISBN 978-2-85944-698-7.

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The Spectacle of Order

Few urban projects were presumably as torturous as the policing of nineteenth-century Paris, with its labyrinthine underworlds, outbreaks of fatal disease, flourishing sex industry, omnipresent homelessness, and wild population growth. And then, of course, there were the city's generationally spaced revolutions, which ensured that each political regime faced fierce insubordination virtually from its inception. How was this city of motley political stripes made governable? Political legitimacy depended on a performance of municipal order, which, as Quentin Deluermoz argues in this interesting history, depended on the uniformed policeman. This study charts the Parisian beat cop's thorny path to respectability, demonstrating along the way that the development of Paris—for decades now a principal site in the scholarly dig for urban modernity's origins—would have been unthinkable without him. Although neither the suggested periodization of modernity nor its key tenets (rationalization, social discipline and control, the civilizing process) will surprise readers, this study adds interdisciplinary breadth and analytical depth to our understanding of the rise of republican order in urban space. Urbanists interested in crime and policing will find in *Policiers dans la ville* an undeniably essential component of Parisian cultural history.

The book is divided into two parts that follow chronologically: the first part examines the visual presence and conflicting representations of police officers beginning in 1854, the date of a reform that granted them an “ostensible” presence in the city; the second part traces the evo-

lution of the policeman into a specifically Parisian figure, an actor to whom residents could feel a personal attachment that accorded nicely with their idea of Paris as the capital of a republican regime from the 1880s onward. What sets this study apart is its agile movement between the political history of institutional development and the cultural production of public space. Inspired by Goffmanian sociology, Deluermoz analyzes the street as the stage upon which the low-paid beat cop went to work with the tools of rationalist modernity. His job entailed gathering information through metronomic patrols of a small quarter to which he was assigned for several years.[1] In a recognizably Foucauldian process, the cop became the face of the state, his penetration into the city's tiniest nooks serving to discipline residents. At the same time, he functioned like a political advertisement that was organized around the enactment of a new public order characterized by “visibility, proximity, and movement” (p. 13)

How did this strategy play out on the street, where political ideologies melted into everyday exchanges between police officers, shopkeepers, tourists, and residents? Deluermoz makes brilliant use of the Paris police archives as well as journalistic and literary sources and visual culture, selecting emblematic cases to illustrate the broader evolution of social interaction—tellingly, he uses the term “confrontation” more than once—in support of his argument that the rapport between policemen and ordinary Parisians fundamentally transformed the French capital. The book leads in, for example, with an incident

that took place in the Belleville neighborhood on a June night in 1873. A thirty-two-year-old worker jostled three police officers there and told them, “This sidewalk is more mine than yours, and if you weren’t three, I’d teach you a lesson” (p. 11). The sidewalk, Deluermoz explains, was a recent innovation, the epitome of modern rationalization, yet the issue of its proprietorship was contentious from the outset. The political context of the dustup was just as fraught: the Paris Commune of 1871 had left the police with a reputation for violent repression and abuse, so everyday street encounters were charged with significance, a fact that undermined the cop’s standing as the arm of the law. In this way, the author highlights the mutable nature of concepts like “public order” and “public space” at a pivotal passage in their history.

As a study of representations, *Policiers dans la ville* traces the beat cop’s gradual “integration” into the landscape, which was aided by mass-cultural products (p. 208). Tourist guidebooks encouraged visitors to approach policemen for help, and postcards and advertisement posters often featured policemen as “metropolitan markers,” that is, as symbols within a popularized aesthetic of urban fluidity and regularity (p. 200). In the 1880s and 1890s, the Paris Prefecture cultivated its modern image as well by touting the professionalization of policemen through training and test taking, as well as the new practice of recruiting men with a record of good behavior. Here we are reminded of the etymological link between polis, police, and politesse: the prefecture

sought to regulate the comportment of its men no less than that of the residents they were hired to protect. Yet in a democratic society, this could not be a mere top-down process, as Deluermoz is careful to point out. Ordinary Parisians needed to be convinced, seduced. A memorable figure in the development of the police’s rhetorical appeal was the Prefect Louis Lépine, a hands-on administrator who tried to communicate more directly with the people. Not coincidentally, Lépine built a public persona for himself as the “father” of Paris policemen (p. 227).

The success of these and other innovations rendered the Paris police a republican institution that was self-consciously designed to look French: Parisian cops carried a white club, in contrast to their counterparts in London, whose clubs were black. A metric of the police’s integration may be found in the sharp drop in acts of aggression against officers from the 1880s on—a figure that echoed the general decline in violent crime. When, however, officers were killed in the line of duty, the public funeral—a full-fledged tradition by the turn of the twentieth century, always extensively covered by the press—offered a solemn occasion to situate the “victims of duty” squarely within the realm of patriotic public servants (p. 307). From there, the tide of nationalism could accomplish whatever work remained.

Note

[1]. See, especially, Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959).

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