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Simone Roux. *Paris in the Middle Ages.* Translated by Jo Ann McNamara. Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Map, table. xvi + 249 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4159-4.

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It is hard to imagine a city that has exerted a more constant influence on Western history than Paris. Rome, perhaps--but Rome's ancient legacy and clerical culture made it difficult, if not impossible, to emulate. Paris--the medieval reinvention of the Roman city of Lutetia--was an urban success and served as a model for others. Paris, unlike London and many other medieval cities, never had a Charter of Liberties. But the intersection of the French monarchy, the first university, an elite bourgeoisie, artisans, day laborers, and even marginalized segments of the population coalesced to give Paris a unique identity, admired by many, and certainly worth study for those who want to know how this urban phenomenon came to be.

Simone Roux, professor of history emerita at the University of Paris-X, Nanterre, is the author of *Paris in the Middle Ages*. Among her many publications, Roux has written one book, *La rive gauche des escholiers, (XV siècle)* (1992), and several articles, specifically on medieval Paris. Originally published in 2003 as *Paris au Moyen Age*, this English version sums up her observations both for scholars and for the educated public. The translator, Jo Ann McNamara was professor of history emerita at Hunter College, City University of New York, until her recent death (on May 20, 2009, according to the *Catholic Historical Review* 95 [2009], p. 656), and a well-known medieval historian in her own right. She had previously translated Pierre Riché's *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne* (1978) for the same series in which the book under review here appeared.

Countless books have been written about Paris, but there are few in English about the history of medieval Paris. There are, of course, numerous works that detail aspects of the medieval city, such as the rise of its university, or surviving its poverty, or daily life on its famous bridges;[1] while, from another angle, myriad books cover the rise of the monarchy, which, of course, overlaps considerably with the growth and development of Paris.[2] Yet other studies trace the rise of Paris as a microcosm of medieval civilization,[3]

but few books are straightforward histories of the city itself, written by qualified historians.

Roux covers the period from c.1200 to c.1500, beginning with the walling of the city by King Philip Augustus (reigned 1180-1223), and seeing Paris through to a period of consolidation after the ravages of the Black Death and the Hundred Years War. The walled city of medieval Paris seems quite small today, completely swallowed up by the modern megalopolis. The thirteenth-century city's circumference was approximately a circle with the midpoint near today's metro station "Cité." The circle's radius was only about one-half mile (eight hundred meters) and would include the Pantheon at the outer limit of the Left Bank and the Church of St.-Eustache at the outer limit of the Right Bank. The Louvre, the Temple, the Place des Vosges, St.-Germain-des-Prés, and the Luxembourg Gardens would all have been outside the medieval walls. By 1500, though, the Right Bank's ramparts had been extended by another half mile, running along a circumference touching today's Place de la Concorde to the Place de la République to the Place de la Bastille.

Roux's approach is to focus on Paris strictly as an urban entity. The book is organized in a clear and easy-to-follow fashion. Part 1, in the words of the author, "examines the overall Parisian space, encircled by the walls of the enceinte and organized by the diverse authorities who governed it. We trace its more detailed aspects in the city streets, and seek to understand how this space was peopled, whence Parisians came, and how they were transformed into city dwellers who sometimes thought of themselves as a people superior to all others" (pp. 2-3).

It is not generally appreciated that Paris was almost willed into existence by Philip Augustus. He took a second-rank town and elevated it. The royal palace was already located there, but by extending the walls in a planned fashion, large pastoral and agricultural areas were urbanized. Roux calls attention to vineyards that were uprooted to make way for houses, reminders of which are still found in modern toponyms, such as Clos Bruneau, Clos de Laas, and Clos Mauvoisin. Roux describes the king and seigneurial lords dividing and subdividing their properties into housing units, ever vigilant to maintain control over their real estate. In a similar fashion, Philip Augustus recognized the importance of clean streets, and so ordered residents to pave them. Not all landowners were willing to bend to the royal command, but the king's *voyers* (supervisors) were placed in charge of enforcing street surfacing. Just as turning fields into houses took decades, so did street paving. Roux's study of the process of urbanization suggests that newer houses were cheaper than older ones, with the result that streets and neighborhoods became socially mixed. This conclusion modifies the prevailing belief that guilds and occupations more than anything else dictated living patterns.

As for Parisians themselves, they seem to have emigrated primarily from northern France, the Low Countries, England, and Germany. Because so few residents arrived from Mediterranean regions, "Paris remained a northern city" (p. 47). Roux subscribes to the viewpoint that the population of Paris in c.1325 was more than two hundred thousand. And as this seething mixture of human populations coalesced, Paris took on in some ways a very modern identity--not yet perhaps the City of Light--of emancipation ("town air makes free"); of a constant stream of outsiders who eventually adopted the identity of Parisians; and of a mixing of bureaucrats, shopkeepers, and students. (Were there also tourists? If so, Roux is mum about them.)

In part 2, Roux "looks at the ruling elements of medieval society in three hierarchies that checked, complemented, and sometimes overlapped one another" (p. 3). These were hierarchies of wealth, political power, and the Church. In theory, these categories were strictly delineated, but in Paris a fair bit of intermingling took place. For

example, the great bourgeoisie imitated and indeed often married into the landed nobility. One example cited by Roux is the des Essarts family, which originally came from the bourgeoisie of Rouen, but further prospered in Paris. Pierre des Essarts served as finance minister in the king's household and shortly thereafter found himself raised up to the nobility. "Like many other great personages ... (Pierre) amassed honors and privileges in two classes: bourgeois of Paris and ennobled" (p. 69). Other French cities had rich bourgeoisie, but only in Paris were they so near to the king, unquestionably the summit of political power.

For their part, nobles of the sword played virtually no role in the power structure of Paris, but could hardly afford to absent themselves from proximity to the king, who now resided permanently in Paris. One solution was to build a vast second home right in Paris, as did the dukes of Burgundy in their Hotel de Bourbon adjacent to the Louvre. As regards the Church, doubtless the most powerful presences in Paris were the venerable monasteries of St.-Germain-des-Prés and Ste.-Geneviève, which had impressive seigneuries both inside and outside the walls of the city. In addition, the bishop of Paris surrounded by his cathedral clergy, the monasteries and their numerous monks, the mendicant houses and their friars, and the university with its thousands of scholars all contributed a strong clerical flavor to the city. Yet the masters of the university "hardly enjoyed more than symbolic political power and played no great role in the government of the realm" (p. 89). In a tradition parallel to that of the great secular lords, the clerical grandees, such as the abbot of Cluny and the archbishop of Sens, obtained large houses to be used during their sojourns to Paris. Both structures still stand: the residence of the former is today the Musée de Cluny, while that of the latter is the Hotel de Sens. Another manifestation of *Ecclesia*, aside from the numerous churches themselves, were the colorful processions that wound their way through the streets on festival days.

Part 3 investigates daily life. In Paris, as in most medieval towns, houses were not just lodging but often included workshops, storage, and even retail space. Over a hundred different crafts flourished in medieval Paris, most ordered into the hierarchy of masters, apprentices, journeymen, and valets. Sometimes these guild arrangements made for surrogate families, and this might partly explain Roux's observation that "the family had largely shed its extensions and come to be defined as a couple and their children" (p. 144). In addition to the artisans, records show a large array of jobs for domestics and unskilled laborers. One document from 1297 suggests that the most common occupations for taxpaying women were grocers, chambermaids, headdress makers, dressmakers, and washerwomen. Confraternities, too, could act as extended family. It would be surprising if a French author who covered daily life did not include a discussion of food, and Roux does not disappoint. Relying heavily on the *Mesnagier de Paris*, a well-known late fourteenth-century text, Roux notes that, like today, "The Parisian market offered all sorts of commodities in abundance" (p. 177). Clothing could also be found in many styles, depending on one's social status. Roux observes that contrary to clichés about the Middle Ages, people took baths in tubs in their houses, and that "all things considered, bodily hygiene was better in the medieval period than in early modern times" (p. 186).

Aside from its general lucidity, the most impressive feature of the book is the author's strict reliance on evidence from and about Paris itself. Roux does not fill in aspects of daily life, for example, by borrowing from what is known about housewives in Troyes or processions in Rome or even merchants in London. This might seem counterintuitive, but Roux eschews overgeneralization. Her account is rock solid for what we know about Paris alone. It is clear, too, that Roux

has mastered certain texts and extracted valuable information about medieval Paris, as for example the *Mesnagier de Paris*, the *censier* of 1297, and Etienne Boileau's *Le Livre des Metiers.*

I have four criticisms of the book, listed here from least to most significant. First, Roux certainly seems more comfortable with written texts than with artistic evidence. The Limbourg Brothers' *Très Riches Heures* has several miniatures showing Paris at the end of the fourteenth century.[4] Roux knows of them, but dispatches this source with the comment: "the rampart defined the city, totally summing it up" (p. 30). But one wonders why the relevant miniatures, for the months of June and October, draw such a strong contrast between life and nature outside the city and a cold, stone skyline of royal fortresses within. Virginia Wylie Egbert's *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris* is likewise not subjected to the same sort of rigorous, systematic analysis that Roux bestows on judicial and administrative records.[5] This medieval manuscript illustrates scenes from the Life of Saint Denis that reveal a multitude of details of daily life on the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont, then the only two Parisian bridges across the Seine. Roux does call attention to the various forms of transportation that parade before our eyes here--foot traffic, pack animals, and boats. But one could go further. For example, Roux mentions various religious processions that wound their way through the city, including one in which the clergy of Notre Dame "traveled from the Cathedral to the church of Saint-Gervais by boat" (p. 42). Perhaps this is exactly what the viewer sees on folio 99r, as a group of clergy chant from a musical text while in a boat floating beneath the Grand Pont.[6]

My second criticism is that the book rests exclusively on a French-language bibliography. This certainly has the advantage of acquainting foreigners with the best and most recent of French scholarship, but it omits several fine English-language studies that could have added to the book's conclusions. Sharon Farmer and William Courtenay, for example, using different sources from Roux, both buttress her observation that Paris was primarily a northern city.[7]

One must complain, too, that a one-page index is simply insufficient. True, the French edition had no index at all. But if one ever wanted to relocate the interesting discussion of, say, the "Parisian accent," where we find that Parisians pronounced Epiphany as Tiphaine or Saint Mark as Saint Maar, it would be difficult. (It is on page 59.)

The lack of a useful map is really a problem. It is easy to imagine how this oversight came to be. The French version doubtless needed no map on the grounds that most readers would have been familiar with the streets and sites of medieval Paris. Even so, a small detail was reproduced from the Truscher and Hoyau c.1551 "bird's eye view" map of the whole city, more for effect than for pedagogy. The American publisher decided to reproduce the whole map as a frontispiece--a great idea, but flawed in execution: the map is far too blurry to be deciphered, even with a good magnifying lens. It occasionally works if you already know where to hunt. Notre-Dame Cathedral is easy to find. But how large is the Châtelet, the headquarters of royal justice and administration? It is hard to tell because it is hidden by the fold. Where is the Place de Grève where workers congregated to hire themselves out for day labor? You can find it if you already know that it borders the Seine on the Right Bank, due north of Notre Dame. Where is the Bièvre River which flows from the Left Bank into the Seine? It seems to be coursing through the monastery of St. Victor, just east of the city wall on the Left Bank, but is unlabeled. What was needed was a modern map showing these and other major sites discussed in the book. One can find such maps, though obviously these will not depict all the sites mentioned in Roux's book.[8]

Against these criticisms, it is important to note that the English edition has a useful chronological table as well as a glossary. Moreover, the translation itself seems to be extremely faithful to the original, and thus both French and English versions are models of clarity and brevity. The book has only two hundred pages of text, plus fifty pages of notes and bibliography. I found very few typographical errors, the most notable being on page 188 where the phrase "but probably more attractive distraction but probably more attractive" obviously needed one more round of editing.

Paris in the Middle Ages is a wonderful and useful book for anyone who wants to know the history of the city from the inside. And it is an important book inasmuch as the medieval period was so crucial in the formation of a city that became a beacon for so many cities in the West.

Notes

[1]. William J. Courtenay, *Parisian Scholars in the Early Fourteenth Century: A Social Portrait* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Virginia Wylie Egbert, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris: A Record of Early Fourteenth-Century Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Sharon Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris: Gender, Ideology, and the Daily Lives of the Poor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[2]. See, for example, Elizabeth M. Hallam, *Capetian France, 987-1328* (London: Longman, 1983).

[3]. David C. Douglas, "Medieval Paris," *Time and the Hour: Some Collected Papers of David C. Douglas* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), 77-93, originally published in *The Golden Age of the Great Cities* (Thames and Hudson, 1952).

[4]. A convenient printed version of this manuscript is *The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, introduction by Jean Longnon and Raymond Cazelles (New York: George Braziller, 1989).

[5]. Egbert, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris*.

[6]. Ibid., 29.

[7]. Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris*, 22; and Courtenay, *Parisian Scholars in the Early Fourteenth Century*, 121.

[8]. See Courtenay, *Parisian Scholars in the Early Fourteenth Century*, 60-61; Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris*, 14-15; and F. Roy Willis, *Western Civilization: An Urban Perspective*, vol. 1, 2d. ed. (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1977), 387. See also Egbert, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris*, 20, which draws from A. Lenoir's map in P. Géraud, *Paris sous Philippe-le-Bel* (Paris, 1837). One wonders why the Lenoir map could not have been reproduced or adapted for *Paris in the Middle Ages*.

Nantes

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