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*The Personality of Paris: Landscape and Society in the Long-Nineteenth Century* by Alan R. H. Baker takes, as the main subject, the “dynamic relationship of land and life,” personality as a “product of the relationship between land and society through time” in Paris of the 1789-1914 period (pp. 1-2). The book focuses on key features in landscape conceived as cultural constructions. This is a work of synthesis in historical geography that assesses what the city of Paris had inherited historically but also the extent to which the defining characteristics from the nineteenth century remain. The author notes that the book is not “grounded wholly in original research: instead, it offers a new arrangement of other scholars’ flowers, a geographical perspective” (preface, n.p.). There are just several footnotes with page numbers in the book. In lieu of endnotes, there are lists of sources used for crafting each chapter. The sources are interdisciplinary, ranging mainly from urban, social, and cultural history to geography. The majority of the sources are scholarly works by historians published in English in the last four decades, including some works translated from French.

As a work of synthesis and interpretation with a novel perspective, the book provides a big picture of Paris’ significant traits or “personality,” focusing on the built form as it evolved over time. This approach is valuable, as the historiography on Paris is formidable; just the historiography on Paris of the 1789-1914 period is vast. The book is organized thematically, employing a “vertical approach” so that each chapter, with the exception of chapter 1, explores one topic in the 1789-1914 period (p. 2). The first chapter, treating the geographic situation and evolution of the city from the origins to 1789, succinctly lays out a substantial context for the rest of the book. The second chapter, on the population of Paris, opens by noting that Paris gained a “new and distinctive personality” in the nineteenth century, that the already important role of Paris was significantly heightened in this period through a process of centralization or “Parisianization” closely associated with modernization, which took place at the
same time as the process of “françization” (p. 19). The chapter includes discussions on patterns of immigration and migration into the capital from the provinces, so that, for example, in 1911 nearly two-thirds of the French-born population of Paris had been born in the provinces. Baker highlights a phenomenon of urban villages, initially composed mostly of men and boys.

The remaining chapters are on monuments and commemoration (chapter 3); urban transformation in the Second Empire (chapter 4); architectural iconography (chapter 5); world exhibitions (chapter 6); food, fashion, and entertainment (chapter 7); nature and the provinces as destination for leisure (chapter 8); and revolutions and wars (chapter 9), with a brief discussion of the twentieth century. Each chapter has an even-keeled tone and provides insightful analyses of key themes. In chapter 4, on the process of urban transformation known as “Haussmannization,” for example, Baker provides a nuanced assessment of the works by Napoleon III and Georges-Eugène Haussmann, highlighting important issues in historiographical debates. He underlines that significant changes to the landscape and society of Paris took place in the 1800-50 period and that the Second Empire’s urban-planning practices were based on earlier ideas and plans by theorists, planners, engineers, and architects. One of the defining features of nineteenth-century Paris, Baker states, is its remarkably small size—even after the annexation of suburbs—which belies the demographic explosion; this phenomenon helped to form its urban identity, consciousness, and “an easily grasped mental map” (p. 184).

The epilogue includes a stimulating discussion on the concept of the duality of Paris, which presents some of the varied ways in which Paris has been imagined and experienced in binary terms. Baker cites Jean-Pierre Bernard’s Les Deux Paris (2001), which examined seven hundred works of fiction in the 1850-1914 period that collectively constructed a myth of Paris as singular and unique, on the one hand, but also always divided in two, along the binaries of “day and night; opulence and poverty; capital and revolution; above and below ground; masculine and feminine; living and dead” (p. 185). Baker also argues that nineteenth-century Paris had a “split personality,” that it increasingly became “two cities, a socially divided city” due to the social dislocation and geographical separation of the working classes from the wealthier classes, which increased especially during the 1850s and 60s (p. 184). As the nineteenth century wore on, alongside the traditional Right Bank/Left Bank split, a divide between the wealthier west and the poorer east became a salient feature, so that, the author argues, increasingly Paris evolved into two cities. This split was also spatially experienced, Baker underlines, with the population of the central district growing much more slowly than in the peripheries. This discussion on the concept of two cities could have been developed further. Baker aptly posits that “different contemporaries and historians identified different ‘realities’ as well as different ‘imaginings’ of Paris,” that there were “multiple versions of Paris, both real and imagined” (p. 182). It would have been fruitful to expand further on this notion and how the idea of multiple Parises, and thinking of cities on a spectrum, subvert the concepts of Paris conceived in binary terms. During the long nineteenth century the binary way of thinking about the world perhaps reached its apogee in the “Western” world. As binary concepts held a huge sway in conceiving the world as “modern” vs. “unmodern,” “civilized” vs. “primitive,” “masculine” vs. “feminine”—which was also superimposed onto the “West” and the “East” binary—and so on, such binaries in turn became central precepts of imperialism. Such constructs, which have been analyzed by Edward Said and others, show that in urban history binary conceptions should be investigated more rigorously and by integrating scholarly interpretations advanced in related fields. In these ways and many others, this book can generate pathways for fur-
ther research and discussions on conceptualization, memories, and representations of cities toward the idea of multiple Parises. The book also generates questions on the complexity of writing histories of lived experiences, seeking to represent voices that have been left out, and how spatial, visual and landscape-oriented perspectives enrich and can be complemented by other approaches.

Specialists of particular topics will no doubt find parts of the book pertaining to their specialties necessarily condensed. For example, there is no discussion of how the ideologies and motivations for urban planning of Prince Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the president of the Second Republic, changed as he became Napoleon III following a coup d’état. Adolphe Alphand, who played a significant role in Second Empire urban projects, is mentioned just a few times. In a discussion of the impact of the Franco-Prussian war, there is no mention of the infrastructural destruction by French authorities for defensive purposes. The major contribution of the book lies in having a comprehensive range of important aspects, drawn from decades of reading, presented in a single volume, which allows also for making new and significant connections. This book could be used in a variety of undergraduate courses in geography and history. Each chapter is illustrated with a number of images—mostly photographs—in black and white, and in addition there is a separate section of maps and charts in color.

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