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Simone Roux, *Paris in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. xvi + 249 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, chronology, glossary, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8122-4159-4

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As the largest city in medieval Europe, the home of the esteemed University of Paris, and the seat of the French monarchy, Paris often serves as a backdrop for many of the well-known dramas of medieval French history. There is certainly no shortage of studies set in medieval Paris. But what about the city itself? How did its inhabitants live and work? What effect did the royal presence have on ordinary Parisians? What did it mean to identify as a “Parisian”?

This is the Paris that Simone Roux, a specialist in Parisian social history, aims to uncover in her book *Paris in the Middle Ages*. Originally published in French in 2003 and now appearing in an English translation by the late Jo Ann McNamara, Roux’s study incorporates and builds upon much of her own previously-published research on medieval Paris. Roux’s stated goal for the book is to “construct a history of Parisian women and men during the last three medieval centuries” (p. 1). Mining a range of fiscal, property, and judicial records, Roux constructs a study of daily life in a medieval city, while consciously avoiding reference to the “big events” and players (including the medieval church) that often take center stage in historical accounts of Paris. Roux emphasizes Paris’s unique convergence of royal, seigneurial, and municipal authorities, but only insofar as these authorities were responsible for producing the records that afford us a glimpse into the lives of ordinary Parisians. While Roux is careful not to allow these authorities to dominate the narrative, she frequently reminds the reader of the difficulties involved in uncovering daily life on its own terms, outside the perspective of the city’s power structures. Yet, thanks to Roux’s keen eye for the possibilities of the available sources, we get several fascinating glimpses of medieval Parisians, their lifestyles and networks, and their relationship to the city itself.

The book is divided into three parts, each focused on a different “organizational pattern” (p. 2). Moving from a discussion of urban space and its organization (part one), Roux turns to the hierarchies of power governing the city (part two); part three, the longest section of the book, examines the daily life of medieval Parisians, where Roux’s interests ultimately lie. Avoiding the twelfth century, which Roux argues would turn the focus onto the rise of the Capetians and away from the city itself and its inhabitants, Roux begins her study in the thirteenth century. Starting with a short discussion of the city walls constructed under Philip Augustus (r. 1180–1223), Roux introduces what turns out to be an important theme in the book: the sometimes confrontational, sometimes cooperative relationships between royal power, seigneurial powers, and ordinary Parisians. Although Roux does not offer any overarching arguments about how Paris and its inhabitants changed over time, one theme that emerges

is the extension of royal authority over the course of the Middle Ages. While this is certainly not a surprising conclusion, Roux's study is unique in that it proposes to examine this change from the perspective of ordinary Parisians.

Part one, "Paris and its Inhabitants" describes the process of demarcating, settling, and organizing urban space. In chapter one, "Urban Space: Designers and Occupants," Roux charts Paris's slow and halted transformation from agricultural to urban space. As several studies have noted, Paris's development into a preeminent medieval city was very much the result of the initiative of Philip Augustus, who ordered the building of the walls that marked the boundaries of Parisian space, much of which was still rural at the time of the walls' construction. Roux makes deft use of the available sources, demonstrating the effect the walls had on the transformation of rural space into urban space, while noting the various conflicts between royal and seigneurial jurisdictions caused by the walls, which traversed ecclesiastical lands. Throughout the chapter, Roux uses abbey registers, cartularies, and court cases to sketch a fascinating picture of Paris growing with the encouragement of these authorities, as well as through the initiative of people who soon came to identify themselves as Parisians. Turning to Parisians' relationship to their city, Roux refers to testimonies of Parisians describing certain landmarks, which attest to Parisians oral knowledge of their urban environment. Judicial authorities occasionally solicited this knowledge to settle jurisdictional or property disputes. Over time, as Roux points out, royal and seigneurial interests in regulating and identifying space in the written record conflicted with ordinary people's oral knowledge of Parisian streets and landmarks, as well as a certain desire for anonymity, at least as far as tax-collectors were concerned.

Chapter two, "Street Scenes: Marvels and Perils of Parisian Life" begins with several brief glimpses of street life in medieval Paris drawn from artwork, poetry, and literary descriptions of the city before turning to municipal and royal records, the sources from which Roux obtains most of her evidence. Here we learn about the conflicts that arose between royal and seigneurial powers as they dealt with the challenges of organizing urban life with its shared spaces, particularly with regard to maintaining the streets and keeping space clear and sanitary for public use. As Roux demonstrates, these efforts were haphazard and more reactive (i.e. when a situation had reached crisis) than proactive. Nevertheless, as Roux argues, drawing attention to the need to respect public spaces was an important part of the development of "urbanity" among medieval Parisians.

The wealth and opportunity offered by medieval Paris, as is well known, attracted migrants, helping the population to recover in the later Middle Ages following the demographic crises of plague and war. In chapter three, "Parisians," Roux mines a variety of sources in order to suggest migration patterns. Using evidence from the Left Bank (which unfortunately Roux does not precisely identify or cite in a footnote) as well as Parisian tax assessments from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (the *rôles de la taille*), Roux examines surnames that refer to geographical origins in order to get a sense of migration patterns. Based on a limited number of persons identified by geographical surnames, Roux concludes that the majority of Paris's migrants came from surrounding villages and cities north of the Loire, making Paris a northern European city.

Part two, "A Kaleidoscope of Hierarchies" examines the various hierarchies that ordered this culturally and socio-economically diverse city. The first of these hierarchies, wealth, is addressed in chapter four, "The World of Money: Haves and Have Nots." Here, Roux primarily concentrates on the upper bourgeoisie and the doors their economic and administrative expertise opened for them both in municipal and royal government. Drawing on some of the research of Boris Bove, Roux describes how the Parisian bourgeoisie built up their wealth over several generations as drapers, furriers, mercers, and moneychangers, rising to prominence—and often into royal service—with the skills they developed as investors and businessmen.[1] Roux spends less time on the "have nots," who are much less likely to show up in the royal and seigneurial records Roux favors. Drawing on the work of Bronislaw Geremek

and Michel Mollat, Roux describes the various sources of charitable assistance on which the poor might draw, as well as the rise in hostility towards the poor during the crises of the later Middle Ages.[2] Roux does not mention Sharon Farmer's work on the Parisian poor, which demonstrates the possibilities of canonization records in getting at the lives and experiences of the poor.

Turning to political authorities governing Paris (chapter five: "The World of Political Power"), Roux emphasizes the multiple layers of political power—royal, municipal, ecclesiastical, seigneurial—all of which the French kings sought to order under themselves. As the capital and residence of the kings of France, Paris was at least a part-time home for the nobles of the realm. It was also the home of numerous officials, whose responsibilities sometimes overlapped or conflicted with one another. Parisians certainly felt the presence of this power, as they dealt with—and manipulated—the various agents with whom they had contact. Although, as Roux argues, the nobility did not play a role in the governance of medieval Paris, they served the king and were, therefore, a major presence in the city. Roux emphasizes the ways in which this power was manifest in the magnificent buildings scattered throughout the capital. Describing a city peppered with grand residences, Roux reminds the reader at every turn that it was the Parisians who built the fabulous mansions and met the needs of the city's esteemed guests. Roux is also attuned to the practicalities of Paris's stature as a royal city, as the city had to accommodate the princes and nobles who lived in Paris permanently, as well as those who visited the capital.

Roux's study generally avoids discussion of religious life in medieval Paris, relegating Parisian ecclesiastical institutions and clerics to a single chapter (chapter six, "The World of the Church"). Roux defends this choice by arguing that greater emphasis on religious life and institutions "would have reinforced the popular notion that the essence of medieval Paris was religious" (p. 98). Consequently, Roux focuses primarily on the worldly powers of the church, presenting a description of the various levels of religious authority present in Paris and the ways in which these authorities attempted to assert their powers and defend their rights, especially as seigneurial lords. Using registers for the various ecclesiastical seigneuries with lands partially enclosed within the city walls, Roux describes several interesting instances of conflict between royal and ecclesiastical officials over rights and privileges, as well as between ordinary Parisians and church officials. The chapter ends with a short discussion of university scholars, drawn from Roux's book *La Rive Gauche des escoliers*, focusing on the degree of political clout and international esteem enjoyed by Parisian masters in the Later Middle Ages.[4]

Part three: "Of Work and Days" is the longest part of the book, reflecting the main interests of the author: uncovering the daily lives of medieval Parisian using documents of practice. Accordingly, this section is more concerned with the "ordinary" people who show up in the records, particularly their familial and occupational networks. Chapter seven, "In Shop and Workroom," which I found to be one of the most interesting chapters in the book, begins with a fascinating discussion of Parisian shops and work spaces. Drawing on property records that include chance descriptions of medieval houses, Roux paints a vivid picture of daily life in the homes of Parisian artisans. Roux rounds out the chapter with an analysis of Étienne Boileau's *Livre des Métiers*, skillfully demonstrating the possibilities of this source, which reveals much about the image crafts people hoped to convey, as well as the various hierarchies, conflicts, and concerns within each of the guilds.

Chapter eight, "Networks of Solidarity: Obligatory Bonds and Chosen Ties," examines the different associations—familial, occupational, and voluntary—that both supported and restricted medieval Parisians. Using the 1297 tax assessment to get a sense of household composition, Roux analyzes the way in which assessors listed taxpayers. While assessors normally only listed the male head of household, there are several examples of households represented by women, indicating that women were sometimes recognized as heads of households. Roux also notes instances of assessors listing parents separately from their children, suggesting that these sons and daughters had separated

themselves from the family home and were living independently (albeit next door to their parents). Significantly, the tax assessments shed light on voluntary associations; assessors occasionally recorded several apparently unrelated people as belonging to the same household households. Building on her previous research on women and work in medieval Paris, which was based primarily on the *Livre des Métiers*, further analyzes the 1297 tax assessment to conclude that Parisian women were represented in many, though certainly not all, of the occupations practiced in medieval Paris and played a significant role the economy.[5]

Most of the sources that have survived for medieval Paris are unconcerned with the mundane details of the ordinary life. The final chapter of the book, "Lifestyles," assembles chance references to just such details, particularly on public and private space, eating, sleeping, dressing and bathing. This chapter is especially cautious about what one can conclude based on the limited documentation. Combing the available sources for descriptions of urban residences, Roux makes several interesting observations about how the vocabulary used to describe houses and rooms in property records reflects changing notions of individual privacy, as Parisian began to designate specific rooms for specific purposes. On mundane details such as sleeping arrangements, Roux draws on a criminal case describing a theft committed by a servant in the home of a Parisian grocer. The *Mesnagier de Paris* is also a major source for Roux as she discusses French cuisine, household chores, and clothing.

Roux's book is well-written and informative and represents an important contribution to the study of medieval Paris, particularly because it has made Roux's significant research on Parisian social history available to English readers for the first time. Indeed, accessibility to the educated reader seems to have been one of the goals of Roux's book. Roux's research is based on a meticulous analysis of difficult, sometimes dry documents of practice, yet the presentation is engaging and, for the most part, easy to follow. Roux also seems to have intended for her book to serve as an introduction to new avenues of research on Parisian social history. At several points in the book, Roux explains the possibilities and limitations of her sources or the need to await further research on a particular topic. Yet those who might wish to follow up on these leads may be frustrated by the occasional omission of specific references to archival sources in the footnotes. Moreover, too often Roux does not reference important studies on Parisian social history—both French and English—relevant to her conclusions. This is most glaring in the chapters on immigration, in which Roux argues that Paris drew most of its immigrants from the surrounding countryside and northern cities—an argument echoed in other studies.[6] Similarly, Roux does not reference studies on working women or artisanal families in Paris, several of which draw on the same sources and came to similar conclusions.[7] Despite these criticisms, Roux's *Paris in the Middle Ages* is a much-needed and welcome contribution to the study of urban life in Medieval Paris.

## NOTES

[1] Boris Bove, "Dominer la ville: Prévôts des marchands et échevins parisiens 1260- 1350," Thèse defended at the Université de Poitiers in 2000, now published. See *Dominer la ville: Prévôts des marchands et échevins parisiens 1260- 1350*, (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2004).

[2] Bronislaw Geremek, *Les Marginaux parisiens aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, (Paris : Flammarion, 1976) and Michel Mollat, *Les Pauvres au Moyen Âge. Étude sociale*, (Paris: Hachette, 1978).

[3] Sharon Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris: Gender, Ideology, and the Daily Lives of the Poor*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[4] Simone Roux, *La Rive Gauche des escoliers, (XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, (Paris: Éditions Christian, 1992).

[5] Simone Roux, "Les femmes dans les métiers parisiens: XIIIe-XVe siècle," *Clio* 3 (1996): 13-30.

[6] For example, Karl Michaëlsson, *Études sur les noms de personnes français d'après les rôles de taille parisiens* (Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri: Uppsala, 1927) and "Les noms d'origine dans le rôle de la taille parisien de 1313," *Symbolae Philologicae Gotoburgenses, Acta universitatis Gotoburgensis* 56, no.3 (1950): 357-400. Raymond Cazelles also argues that immigrants to Paris primarily came from Northern Europe. See *Nouvelle histoire de Paris de la fin du règne de Philippe Auguste à la mort de Charles V, 1223-1380* (Paris: Hachette, 1972).

[7] For example, Diane Frappier-Bigras, "La famille dans l'artisanat parisien du XIIIe siècle," *Le moyen âge* 95 (1989): 47-74 ; David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990); and Kouky Fianu, "Familles et solidarités dans les métiers du livre parisiens au XIVe siècle," *Médiévales* 9 (1992): 83-90.

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