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Diana Rowell, *Paris: The “New Rome” of Napoleon I*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012 (e-book) and 2014 (paperback). 237 pp.; 26 b/w ills. £21.99 (e-book). ISBN 9781441128836. £21.99 (pb). ISBN 9781472525291.

Review by David O'Brien, University of Illinois.

This book argues that Napoleon sought to make Paris a “new Rome,” both by superseding the old Rome and by surpassing all other attempts to recreate Rome, in particular those of Louis XIV. Rowell explores what she calls the “trialectic” between Napoleonic Paris, antique Rome, and intervening attempts to emulate the eternal city. She focuses primarily on city planning and the erection of monuments such as triumphal arches and columns.

That Napoleon and his advisors looked frequently to ancient Rome in order to construct an image of Napoleonic Paris can hardly be doubted. This was an era profoundly enamored with Roman history, and Napoleon himself, as Rowell notes, was much given to reflecting on the classics in relation to his own aspirations and achievements. The very names of the regimes he founded—the Consulate and the Empire—have Roman sources. Much of the value of this book is that it traces the many parallels and analogies between Napoleonic Paris and ancient Rome. Specifically, we learn about the sources of monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe, the Arc du Carroussel, the Vendôme Column, and the *voie triomphale* Napoleon began to construct between the Arc de Triomphe and the environs of the Louvre, which Rowell cleverly likens to an equivalent of the Roman Capitol. The book offers a broad account of the significance of these monuments that usually does not enter into the details of specialized studies.^[1]

One of Rowell’s main contentions is that Napoleon was in competition not simply with ancient Rome, but with subsequent recreations of it. One chapter is devoted to Louis XIV’s appropriations of *Romanitas* and Napoleon’s response to them. The Sun King replaced many of the city’s medieval gates with “*portes de soleil*” that resembled triumphal arches, and Rowell notes the Roman origins of much of the allegorical imagery cultivated by Louis XIV, the many parallels between Versailles and Roman imperial palace architecture, and Louis’s collection and reproduction of Roman art. She argues that Napoleon set out to surpass Louis XIV in his recreations of ancient Rome, but he and his advisors were mindful of the negative associations that Roman-inspired royal monuments had acquired in the Revolutionary period. Moreover, their efforts were directed at a far broader public than those of Louis, and they made more of their benefits to the general populace.

In a final chapter Rowell compares the triumphal entries of the Caesars, royal entries, and similar events under the Revolution and Napoleon. A brief survey of Revolutionary festivals notes how these were democratized, but also how the display of booty gained from Bonaparte’s first Italian campaign revived key aspects of the Roman triumph, contributing significantly to the young general’s glory even as it transported important aspects of Rome’s cultural heritage to Paris.

Most of the book is devoted to establishing the links between ancient Rome, Louis XIV’s Paris, Revolutionary Paris, and Napoleonic Paris, and there are links aplenty. Yet, we hear very little about

the problems Napoleon and his advisors might have encountered in their efforts to enlist the past to support the present. Rowell repeatedly notes that Napoleon could not overtly display admiration for or competition with Louis XIV, as this king was seen to have played a crucial role in founding the despotic form of government and corrupt society that necessitated the Revolution. We might add that Napoleon further had to avoid any appearance that he was usurping a Bourbon throne. Similarly, when Napoleon drew upon the achievements of Caesar, Augustus, or Trajan, these names came with baggage. We hear much about the positive comparisons that might be made between Napoleon and various Roman emperors, but little about, for example, the dangers of associating oneself with Caesar's or Augustus's role in the demise of the Roman Republic. It would be interesting to learn more about both the positive and negative resonance of the various historical figures with whom Napoleon was compared. Might, for example, Trajan and Augustus have trumped Caesar as a referent because of their greater association with peace?

The problem is exacerbated by Rowell's tendency to interpret Napoleon's monuments, city planning, and other actions as successfully communicating favorable ideas about the Emperor and his rule. She proceeds primarily by identifying antique or *ancien régime* precedents that presumably held a certain allure for the Emperor in terms of the image he wished to project of himself, and these interpretations are sometimes confirmed in official publications. One is left wondering, however, to what extent these interpretations were perceived, accepted, or contested by various segments of the public. Napoleonic censorship makes it difficult to recover the full reception of Napoleon's deeds, but one can look at such things as police archives and private writings to recover negative views, or the correspondence of government officials to gauge their fears. Similarly, Rowell is generally convincing when she proposes antique sources, but classical precedents can be found for many things. When were they intentional and when were they not? Who perceived them, and in what ways? For that matter, should so much of the building in Paris and the intention behind it be ascribed to Napoleon, or was it as much a product of his administration?^[2]

Because this book emphasizes the continued use of classical Roman forms and practices, it suggests that the Revolution did not disrupt some very longstanding ways of using monuments and city planning to establish authority and domination from above, yet this is a thesis that could be tested more. Here again, an understanding of the broad reception of Napoleon's urbanism would help. To what extent were old forms seen in new ways, and did Napoleon take public opinion more seriously than past leaders after the experience of the Revolution? Whatever other continuities may exist across the Revolution, the importance of public opinion as a legitimizing force irreversibly changed official attitudes toward the use of the arts. Rowell explicitly recognizes the Napoleonic context as different, and in her discussion of his possible appropriations of Louis XIV's example, she considers how the Revolution changed Napoleon's relationship to the public (96–98; 148–51), but far more often, it is the parallels between the monuments, administrations, and practices of Augustus, Louis XIV, and Napoleon that are emphasized.

None of this is to take away from this book's value as a guide to the rich heritage that lies behind Napoleonic Paris. Given the continued centrality in Paris of the monuments discussed by Rowell, this book should be of interest not just to specialists, but also to general readers wishing to understand more deeply the history and monuments of the city. Rowell does a marvelous job of interpreting the Napoleonic motifs found in the dense historical fabric that is the city of Paris, demonstrating convincingly that these motifs were woven from a myriad of ancient and modern threads.

NOTES

[1] There are, in fact, some significant omissions from the bibliography of work on the monuments in question, most especially the excellent monograph on the Arc de Triomphe by Isabelle Rouge-Ducos, *L'Arc de triomphe de l'Étoile: Panthéon de la France guerrière, art et histoire* (Paris: Éditions Faton, 2008).

Also missing are Thomas Gaehtgens, *Napoleons Arc de Triomphe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974) and Bruno Klein, "Napoleons Triumphbogen in Paris und der Wandel der offiziellen Kunstanschauungen im Premier Empire," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 59:2 (1996): 244-69.

[2] Three recent books not in the bibliography consider these types of questions. On the tendency of Napoleonic art to incorporate large numbers of sources, including from antique art, see Christopher Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting: Antoine-Jean Gros's La Bataille d'Eylau*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). On the role of administrators in Napoleonic arts policy, and on Napoleon's concerns with public opinion, see David O'Brien, *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting and Propaganda under Napoleon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). On the various antique and modern identities Napoleon juggled, see Annie Jourdan, *Napoléon: héros, imperator, mécène* (Paris: Aubier, 1998).

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