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Casey Harison, *The Stonemasons of Creuse in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008. 331 pp. Maps, graphs, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 978-0-87413-020-1.

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To some younger scholars--and (full disclosure!) I began my work as a "social/labor" historian trained in the "new labor history"--this book might at first seem dated. The labor history I knew best began most fully in the 1960s and was largely supplanted by cultural histories of the 1980s and on. No one doubts the importance and innovative thinking we have gained as a result of the "linguistic turn" and the many splendid cultural histories of Europe. Yet, even the most cutting edge historians' understanding may be challenged by some of the complexity of expression and presentation of themes in this newer work. Thus, Casey Harison's work is a welcome and skillful blend of old and new--there is certainly solid social history of the era of Charles Tilly and others, but, there is also much more to this book. Covering an era that is in need of a new and detailed history, Harison begins in the late eighteenth century and ends in the early twentieth century. He is able to master this "long nineteenth century study" largely because of his focus on one trade--the stonemasons who migrated to Paris from the Creuse in search of seasonal labor. The centrality of this trade does not mean Harison ignores other trades or concerns; he realizes that his work would be too narrow if its research and sources were not extensive. Yet, he frankly and swiftly poses the same question we might all ask when we first pick up this book, "why the stonemasons?"

Harison is generally quite successful in answering this question and the vexing issue of why Paris in the nineteenth century was seen as "the capital of Revolution" Stonemasons were arrested and sentenced, particularly in 1832, 1834, 1839, 1848, and 1871, in larger numbers than other building workers (or workers in general). They were not rebels or violent men *per se*, yet to the authorities, the police, and the people of France the stonemasons seemed to represent what Louis Chevalier would famously call "the dangerous classes" who had a particularly link in the public mind with Paris. Harison explains this perception and resulting repression in terms of at least *four* major conjunctures of that era. First were shifts in urban geography of Paris, in which the stonemasons were closely involved. These workers voyaged from central France, the Creuse, to the Place de Grève and its daily, but generally considered "suspect" (e.g. criminal), hiring "fair." This sense of potential "criminality" was linked to an area that was considered frequently "unruly"--the Hôtel de Ville. And, in the Second Empire, during the "rebuilding of Paris" and the project of "Haussmannization" stonemasons and other construction workers faced another, eventually negative turning point; (2) The stonemasons' patterns of migration, their living in crowded Parisian boarding houses near the Place once they arrived in the capital and their return to the Creuse in the off season fueled Parisians' perceptions of their "nomadism" and even "barbarism"; (3) The growing hatred of the practice of *marchandage*--the highly competitive sub-contracting and hiring handled by *tâcherons* (sub-contractors) who sought workers who would take a job for the lowest price; and, finally, (4) A changing economic world proclaiming the "liberty of work," a phrase that soon became a sardonic one for workers and a mantra for entrepreneurs and men seeking their fortune. In sum Harison finds strong parallels between *marchandage*, the laissez-faire economy that

gained force after the radical phase of the Revolution of 1789, and the general social ills of disorder and the “social question.” (p. 23).

In his introduction Harison raises key points about the organization of labor and its mobilization, practices that were part of what Tilly called the “repertoire of contention,” and he discusses that works of Marx, Rudé, and others on labor organizing and tactics used in attempts to find a way to oppose the police and other authorities.[1] Harison acknowledges his connection to these earlier theorists and especially notes the nuanced views of Tilly; but, Harison also discusses what he calls a “repertoire of repression” (p. 22) as well as the extremely important spatial dimension that the Place de Grève played in the ideas of many late twentieth-century writers (including cultural historians) who recognized the great revolutionary potential of the layout of Paris, particularly its center, as a sort of “natural” venue for revolution. Among other issues these “fears” included a greater shift in laws that asserted the protection of private property. Also, there was the demographic factor of the large number of building workers and especially stonemasons; finally, there was a growing dissonance and confrontation between the police and the stoneworkers, even when there were no open rebellions (pp. 24-25).

Harison provides some much needed insight into both labor and political issues and crises. The first chapter, on the stonemasons from old regime to new, discusses the extremely important issue of the way in which labor was organized—legally and illegally in eighteenth century Paris.[2] The second chapter examines the relationship between the stonemasons and the central Parisian neighborhoods where they lived in crowded boarding houses and from there trudged to seek work at the daily hiring fair at the Place de Grève. This conflation of overcrowding and rabid competition helped create a sense (for the Parisian public) of the “barbarity” of these “nomadic” workers. Chapter three is something of an interlude, for it is a close reading of one of the few comprehensive autobiographies of a worker and his life, Martin Nadaud. Nadaud knew his trade well and wrote about it with passion; he also succumbed to the role of the “successful man,” the “subcontractor.” Troubled by his decision, he soon denounced *marchandage* and worked to reform the practice. Nonetheless, Nadaud’s later life was one of honor: he became an active and respected politician. While the later part of his life is very important in this book, Harison also demonstrates the importance of Nadaud’s early writings on a life that revealed a deep understanding of the craft of masonry and its practitioners as well for the daily lives of other workers. Harison places much focus on the first half of Nadaud’s famous autobiography and the reader emerges with a much better understanding of the continuing importance of artisanal skill and the changes it underwent in the increasingly laissez-faire economy of the nineteenth century.[3] Chapter four delves more deeply into an analysis of the issues of “contention”—its “repertoires” as well as the repertoires of repression and how they were played out in the 1830s and 1840s. Having established this groundwork, Harison, near the end of his argument in two crucial chapters—five and six—on the migrant stonemasons in the June Days of the revolution of 1848 with the repression that followed,[4] and then by the massive or (as David Harvey calls it “creative destruction” of the urban restructuring of Paris in the Second Empire ending with the explosion of the Commune of 1871.[5] In Harison’s views the “Bloody Week” of the Commune led to an even more severe repression of the working classes and particularly the stonemasons.[6] The Commune’s end also marked the beginning of the migratory work and life of the Creusois stonemasons, who now, no longer able to live and work in the center of Paris, moved (or were forced to move) to the periphery. Thus began their gradual assimilation into Parisian life as detailed in chapter seven.

The book’s conclusion ties together many of the themes first raised in the introduction as well as the creation of “places” of historical memory of the stonemasons’ migratory past. Harison summarizes the tensions between people and place as well as between the official desire for laissez-faire economic practice and its apparent inability to foster social order. Indeed, as Harison points out, in the nineteenth century a free economic policy seemed largely in conflict with the concept of order—particularly to the authorities, the police, and middle class Parisians. Yet, this new regime called for free trade and, many thought that while this was a good policy, it led to the rebellious nature of workers in Paris. Yet,

Harison also sees this time, place, people, and new economic conditions as the fulcrum for the “social question” and the way in which it was addressed. While these are not entirely new ideas, *The Stonemasons of Creuse* puts them together in a cogent and compelling way. Even Harison admits that without these other forces—the nature of the often raucous and bustling Place de Grève, the teeming boarding houses at the city’s center, the new economic order, etc.—his would have been a very different story. Perhaps the generally less violent, non-revolutionary labor movement would have developed sooner had the “hiring fair been re-organized or “wound-down” (p. 246).

Nonetheless, while many of his points are well taken, and the role of the stonemasons and the perceptions of them often seem valid, the quantitative role Harison grants them in terms of arrests and repression, leave the reader with some doubts. For example, despite the generally very helpful maps and graphs, Tables 10 and 11 in chapter six (the first from the Maitron Database, and the second from the Rapport Appert) give convincingly large *totals* in terms of sentences meted out against stonemasons after the end of the Commune (pp. 199–200).^[7] The *percentages* of deportations, incarcerations, or other punishments received by this trade (given its already large demographic presence in Paris), are not as startling as one’s initial perception may be. Rather, it seems in many ways it is the building workers as a whole that should be counted as those who were most severely repressed after the Commune. Of course, Harison’s is the history of the complexities and lives of a very important trade, stonemasonry. One does as times wish, however, that there were more emphasis on the records of the various building trades as a whole in this “long nineteenth century.”

In conclusion the strengths of this book are evident in Harison’s clarity and ability to remake a subject—the working class contention and its repression—in both social and cultural terms. This is an approach that has sometimes been lacking in recent works. Harison understands the role the urban space of the city itself played in “making” the stonemasons important to our understanding of perceptions and places of rebellion at the same time that we are enlightened by his ability to see the irony and of the change that Haussmannization brought to workers like the stonemasons and other building workers. As these changes were accepted (however willingly or unwillingly) we understand the integration of the stonemasons into Paris. Thus, they were no longer truly migrants by the early twentieth century. Yet, Harison adds an important “preview” of first, the Portuguese and Italian stonemasons who took the place of the Creusois and, more recently, North and West African stonemasons—groups that were/are viewed today much like the stonemasons of the Creuse in the nineteenth century. While the Portuguese and Italian workers seem to have integrated and/or returned to their native countries, will the North and West Africans, wish to be or be able or allowed to assimilate into Parisian and French society? One hopes that Harison will continue such a study into the later twentieth century and even to the present day to answer these critical questions that may be even more pressing than the “century of revolution” wrought.

NOTES

[1] On the issues related to the “repertoire of contention,” Harison cites Charles Tilly’s many works—among the most important: Charles Tilly and Lynn Lees, “The People of June 1848” in Roger Price, ed., *Revolution and Reaction* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 196; Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Chichester, UK: Blackwell, 1993). Regarding the issue of contention examined by other historians and sociologists, some of the most important works cited by the author are by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *The Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Mark Traugott, “The Crowd in the French Revolution of February 1848,” *American Historical Review* 93 (1988): 638–652. Also reviewing the work of Karl Marx and George Rudé, Harison analyses their contributions and ways in which their work has been engaged with, employed, expanded, and challenged by recent works.

[2] As in his work on “contention,” Harison uses a wide range of sources that deal with economic and urban configuration in this era. Among many others, he draws on the important works of Alain Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin au XIX^{ème} siècle, 1845-1880* (Paris: Rivière, 1975); Marie- Anne Moulin, “Les Migrants Creusois à Paris pendant la Révolution,” *Bulletin de la société d’histoire moderne* 16 (1982): 15-18; Allan Potofsky, “The Construction of Paris and the Crises of the Ancien Régime: The Police and the People of the Parisian Building Sites, 1750-1789,” *French Historical Studies* 27 (Winter 2002):75-86; Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Richard Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Victoria Thompson, “Telling ‘Spatial Stories’: Urban Space and Bourgeois Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of Modern History* 75 (Sept. 2003): 87-109; David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[3] Martin Nadaud, *Les Mémoires de Léonard garçon maçon* (Paris: Maspéro, 1976); *Histoire des classes ouvrières en Angleterre*, (Paris: Lachaud, 1872); *Les Sociétés ouvriers* (Paris: Librairie de la Bibliothèque Démocratique, 1873). On Nadaud’s views of the trade of masonry (and his extensive knowledge of the Parisian building trades), see Harison, pp. 118-121.

[4] For major studies of the events and repercussions of 1848 Harison focuses on many important works, in particular: Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité*; Traugottt, “The Crowd in the French Revolution of February 1848”; and Rémi Gossez, *Les Ouvriers de Paris: l’organisation (1848-1851)* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Imprimerie Central de l’Ouest, 1967). One must also mention Harison’s deep knowledge and use of works such as Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment*, Janet Lloyd trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); John Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848-51* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); and Jill Harsin, *The War of the Streets in Revolutionary Paris, 1830-1848* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[5] Harison, p. 224, footnote 28, citing David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 1. In chapter six Harison blends a discussion and analysis of the rebuilding of Paris with the impact of the Commune of 1871. This approach works well and his notes and bibliography for this section are particularly useful to historians of the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic. It is important to mention several of the works used in this chapter: (in addition to the work by David Harvey cited above); David Jordan’s *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Annie Fourcault, ed., *La Ville divisé: la ségrégations urbaines en question* (Paris: Créaphis, 1996); Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Adrian Rifkin and Roger Thomas, eds., *Voices of the People: The Social Life of “La Sublime” at the end of the Second Empire* (London: Routledge, 1988) and Gay Gullickson, *The Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[6] Harison, *The Stonemasons of the Creuse*, pp. 170-201.

[7] Maitron, Jean. ed., *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français* (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1964); and “Rapport Appert.” *Archives parlementaires (1875)* (Paris: Librairies Administrative Paul Dupont, 1913).

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