

H-France Review Vol. 10 (October 2010), No. 159

Daniel Vaillancourt, *Les Urbanités parisiennes au XVII^e siècle: le livre du Trottoir*. Quebec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009. pp. 334. \$43.00 (cl). ISBN : 978-2-7637-8874-6.

Review by Orest Ranum, The Johns Hopkins University.

The City of Light is so much more than a historical phenomenon, though it is that as well. It is a presence, a cultural icon, a liberating identity for millions, an erotic magnet, and a warren for criminals, the down-and-out, clothes designers, and students from all over the world. Only poets, musicians, and painters can create images and metaphors about Paris without falling into the trite, and only a very few of them succeed.

In the book under review, Daniel Vaillancourt firms up, by fact, some of the commonplaces about Paris, but he really seeks to engage readers to think and to imagine the French capital in deeper, fuller, more meaningful ways. He pulls together the astute observations about urban life of a Spiro Kostof, a Richard Sennett, and a Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias--to mention only a few who have studied urban living from a social-science perspective--and the classics in literary studies of Eric Auerbach, Paul Hazard, and Michel de Certeau. Elaborating and confirming the more imagined city are quotations from all the major seventeenth-century writers on Paris. Furetière, of course, for precise historical definitions of such words as *trottoir* and *carrosse*, but also Charles Sorel, Jean de La Bruyère, Guez de Balzac, and others. But there is special attention to a genre that was quite new: architectural criticism by Gilles Corrozet, Henri Sauval, and Germain Brice. Nicolas Delamare, the great compiler of public law, is read with the eye of a *littérateur*. Instead of emphasizing the legal-administrative fabric, Delamare's vision and social presuppositions are brought into relief.

The book starts off by recounting Henry IV's and Sully's urban projects: the squares, the straight streets, the uniform façades, the *Grande Galerie* of the Louvre, the Arsenals, La Samaritaine, the completion of the Pont Neuf. The construction of the Hôpital Saint Louis for isolating persons with contagious diseases seems not to have struck a chord for Vaillancourt, but this reviewer sees it as a crucial factor in reducing contagion for pedestrians and in cutting down on the crowding in the Hôtel Dieu.

Historians disagree about Henry's overall achievements. Was he mainly a restorer of what had gone before, or was he the harbinger of a modern social and cultural order through effective administration and effective urban life. Vaillancourt clearly confirms the second interpretation; he makes the best possible case when he stresses the new office of *grand voyer* exercised by Sully. Vaillancourt offers a judicious review of Sully's energetic and immensely successful realization of an urban vision for Paris that became the modern city. It would have been interesting to tease out, by close readings of the *Oeconomies Royales*, Sully's attitudes toward time and space. His Henrichemont is considered successful as a new city, while Richelieu's Richelieu is not (p. 81). This reviewer would prefer to suspend judgment

and to comprehend each as projections of two very different royal ministers. Sully mostly had his eye on France, its prosperity, its religious divisions, and its fiscal soundness; Richelieu's eye was fixed abroad and remained awed and eager to equal the great princely establishments in Italy and Spain (Lerma).

For Vaillancourt, all more theoretical perspectives would seem to be of equal interpretive force. Sully's religion prompts references to Max Weber. Elsewhere it is the Renaissance-Humanist project for the monumental city that assures princely glory that is in play. The centuries-long history of royal urbanism, particularly in chartering and fostering *bastides*, might have been mentioned. See Michael Wolfe's *Walled Towns and the Shaping of France* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

Before turning to Francis I's modest but still important initiatives in the capital, Vaillancourt suggests that the rationalist, indeed semiotic research and reflection in the Age of Descartes are underlies of the preoccupation with creating vistas and the imagined city without gates and walls. Vaillancourt does not press hard to convince the reader that there was more than congruence here; his very tentativeness strengthens the plausibility for this reader, as does the growing passion not only for mapping the capital but literally seeing it differently as neither a bird nor a "lame devil" might. Modernist stirrings are at work here, as Jean-Vincent Blanchard's work on optics and Descartes demonstrates.

The rest of the book consists of chapters on streets and their importance to public life and civility; wheels, principally on *carrosses*; and of course pedestrians going to and fro, and even strolling. In every chapter (except the one on *bourgeois*), there is a rich building up of meanings gleaned from Furetière, Richelet, Sorel, La Bruyère, and there is some twentieth-century philosophical perspective. For example, the chapter on streets presents the work of Dominique Laporte on the mud, garbage, and manure in the Parisian streets that, owing to royal initiative, was finally beginning to be perceived as intolerable. Laporte goes further than the obvious links between civic life and clean aristocratic boots and lower-class shoes, to suggest a parallel with the "clean-up" of the French language in the movement known as Classicism. Vulgar words, dirty words, like *crottes* in the street, had to go. We see this in Corneille's early comedies, where the poet deleted vulgar words, puns, and slapstick, to satisfy theater-goers who were increasingly *bien séants*. While I have never been entirely convinced of Jürgen Habermas's work on the public (cf. Hélène Merlin), he does make an important point when he proposes that publics are social or political constructions; and Vaillancourt is right to focus attention on the true public space in the city: the street.

The social taxonomy of the street begins with the assertion that nobles were never entirely a part of street culture, despite their love of parading in the streets and intimidating passersby as they pushed their horses to go faster. It could be added that their *hôtels* in the Marais, walled and gated, confirmed their need—not only a social need but also a physical one—to be separate from street life. Such was not the case in a southern town, where nobles resided and participated actively (sometimes too actively) in urban political institutions.

In characterizing the *bourgeois* and the streets, Vaillancourt regrettably neglected to begin with Furetière or some other non-literary source. The result is a disappointing resort to the thought of Karl Marx. First, and above all, *bourgeois* was a legal term that granted the holder not only rights but also duties. The *bourgeois* remained more a part of the civic elites, less a class than an electorate and militia. The liberal historiography of the earlier nineteenth century (Guizot, Thierry, Chéruel) could have been relied on to capture this civic and political dimension. Of course the merchants on the Place Maubert and the rue Saint-Denis were *bourgeois*, and their forms of politeness and dress were subject to derision. The very ambiguity surrounding the social rank of men of letters sharpened their eyes and made them

castigate the *bourgeois* as ridiculous. Stay at the rank in which you were born is Furetière's, Sorel's and for that matter Molière's social morality. One could be noble and *bourgeois*: a high robe judge could be a *bourgeois*, and a well-to-do wholesale cloth merchant could be a *bourgeois*; but in his household and *quartier*, each man had political rights and duties. The enormous literature that Vaillancourt has mastered and effectively used in this book--the works of Robert Descimon are the exception--ignore the political institutions. The ceremonial muster of the militia for the *entrée* of young Louis XIV and his queen, Marie-Thérèse on August 23, 1660, testifies to their existence, if not their vitality. Commanded by wealthy *bourgeois* who were *parlementaires*, the *colonnes* of the militia provided some assurance of public order--and occasionally disorder, when they drank too much. The National Guard would be a re-creation, not a creation.

The construction of sidewalks on the Pont Neuf, the covered walkways under the galleries of the Place Royale (not stressed enough; Corneille's play, *La Place Royale*, confirms the author's point), the Tuileries Gardens, and the Marché Saint Germain encouraged strolling in order to see and be seen in relative safety. *Carrosses* (and sedan chairs) permitted the wealthy to be in the street, if not setting foot on it. There were as yet no rules for driving either on the right or the left; footmen and *palefreniers* eagerly and passionately shouted that their master, by reason of his rank, had the right to pass before the more humble and the carts and giant-wheeled timber carriers. Vaillancourt mentions the *noïse* of the *cris de Paris*, but he might also have noted shopkeepers' surveillance of what went on in the street, even at night when an unfamiliar sound caused them to peer through cracks in the shutters.

It is not easy to contribute in an original way to the history and vitality of Paris and its urban culture. Vaillancourt has pulled together a truly remarkable congeries of philosophical, social-scientific, and historical sources, to enrich the experience of the capital for anyone who wishes to escape to the seventeenth century and become involved in improving the quality of life in our cities of the twenty-first century.

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