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Pierre Claude Reynard, *Ambitions Tamed: Urban Expansion in Pre-revolutionary Lyon*, (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. xxii, 264 pp. \$85.00 Cdn (cloth). ISBN 978-0-7735-3492 6.

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Not even ancient Athens was born fully formed out of the head of an unknown urban planner. Cities were no doubt always affected more by the grubby world of commerce than by the lofty ideals of *urbanistes*. Yet, the gritty details of building are often marginalized while centralized planning enjoys pride of place in most urban histories. Simply, real estate speculation, labor and materials contracting, promotion and development schemes, make for a less than glamorous historical narrative. Also, outsize figures often dominate the center stage of urban histories—think of the history of Paris without a mention of Henry IV, the Baron Haussmann, or François Mitterrand. But anonymous contractors, developers, promoters, and entrepreneurs are worthy of footnotes at best. Construction is indeed a deeply “underappreciated” factor in urban history. [1]

Pierre Claude Reynard's *Ambitions Tamed: Urban Expansion in Pre-revolutionary Lyon* helps to rectify the excessive focus on aesthetic, statist, and Paris-centered dimensions of French urban history. His is a study of an architect, speculator, promoter, and developer, Jean-Antoine Morand (1727 - 1794), a key figure in planning the expansion of the city of Lyon. Morand's demise on the guillotine in January 1794, condemned for having aided counter-revolutionaries resist the Convention's siege of Lyon, represented the abrupt end of a lengthy career as urban planner and master builder. Above all, his story is that of an entrepreneur at the end of the ancien régime whose career was marked by great expectations, partial successes, and compromised creations. It is a lesson in how the best laid urban plans often confront insurmountable obstacles in moving from draughtsman's sketches to bricks and mortar.

The book's core argument is that urban geography is determined less by natural features than by economics, politics, institutions, and *mentalités*. Eighteenth-century Lyon was one of the most congested cities of the ancien régime. France's second city was, by the mid-eighteenth-century, teeming with an impoverished population eking out a precarious existence in often cramped housing with a very low living standard. Nevertheless, ambitions to expand the city's surface area, beginning in the 1730s, confronted a natural, practical, and mental frontier (p. 40). The particular challenge to develop the city's suburbs was not only incarnated by city walls but imposed by its second river, the mighty Alpine Rhône. Lyon encompassed the area from the Saone's right bank to the Presqu'île, nestled between the Saone and the Rhône. Despite demographic and economic pressures to expand eastward—to breach not only the city walls but the Rhône itself—the weight of tradition embodied by many local interests repeatedly blocked Lyon's growth and renovation. Morand experienced first-hand the cumulative pressures brought by intransigent municipal officers, *propriétaires* demanding seigneurial dues, and ecclesiastical institutions asserting fiscal privileges, all of which succeeded in keeping the city enclosed within a constricted geographic compass well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

Reynard carefully reconstructs the career of Jean-Antoine Morand as a prism of the broader struggle between movement and stasis in Lyon at the end of the ancien régime. The historian, a true connoisseur of the world of construction, accomplishes quite a feat in infusing what might have been a *terre-à-terre* story of an entrepreneur whose career was characterized neither by complete triumph nor failure with freshness and intelligibility. Morand's experiences tell how the profession of

architect evolved from a highly qualified and privileged office to one resembling much more that of a modern promoter and developer. The founding of the Ecole national des ponts et chaussées in 1747, Reynard argues, created a socio-professional space for officially-trained engineers, which in turn wreaked havoc for older and less-precisely defined professions like that of architect. As this was the Enlightenment, the inspectors and administrators of the Ponts et chaussées became prized allies for Morand (p. 59, 70) against Lyon's entrenched and parochial elites. Finally, as Morand was self-taught as an architect, with origins in the far-away Briançon from a family of middling jurists, his story is also one of an *étranger* in corporate- and tradition-bound Lyon (p. 153-155). This status would handicap him through much of his career. Numerous baroque intrigues to sink the newcomer compel the sympathetic reader—as they did Morand himself—to pine for the relative openness of Parisian society.

Arriving in Lyon in the 1740s, the young Morand made a quick foray in a dazzling array of activities, including theatre decoration and painting, but he found his “vocation” as a private entrepreneur in the lucrative world of public construction. A full partnership was forged with one of the foremost architects of his day, Jacques-Germain Soufflot, the future architect of the Eglise de Sainte-Geneviève transformed by the Revolution into the Panthéon. Association with Soufflot assured Morand's arrival in the *cour des grands* by mid-century. Morand's first large-scale project was to decorate the interior of Lyon's municipal theatre in the 1750s, and this achievement led to an invitation to the Bourbon Court of Parma (p. 29, 36-37). By the time he returned to Lyon in 1760, Morand adopted the slippery but prestigious mantle of “architect.” Several years later he was listed in the city almanac as one of only seventeen architects in Lyon (p. 48). Morand's rapid social ascension led directly to his first speculative real-estate venture after which he became wealthy, demonstrating great technical, business, and administrative acumen.

In collaboration with Soufflot, Morand participated in a company that developed a burgeoning residential neighborhood in the 1760s, the wealthy St-Clair quarter. Shrewd property investments, attractively well-designed houses, and sound construction methods netted handsome profits for Morand and his wife, Antoinette Levet. Reynard underscores the full economic partnership involved in his marriage to this daughter of a notary, who enjoyed power of attorney over the flourishing business. Their correspondence furnishes the historian with a lively account of the private side of entrepreneurship (p. 6-7). She was a most vigilant bookkeeper as well, and her double-entry ledger of the investments, the profits, and the intricate business dealings—down to the types of quarry stone, the salaries of laborers, and tools (p. 29)—are meticulously reconstructed by Reynard. Also, four helpful appendixes detail such thorny issues as personal and business accounts and the price of Lyonnais real estate (p. 169-180). The author marshals an impressive amount of research in the form of extraneous material, including a clearly organized table on key institutions in eighteenth-century Lyon and reproductions of historical maps.

In the 1770s, the St-Clair quarter's success emboldened Morand and Antoinette Levet to form another company and to pursue another project—that of a wooden bridge spanning the Rhône connecting the city center, Terreaux, and the new St-Clair quarter. While completed in a tidy three years, the innovative seventeen-arch bridge nevertheless attracted entrenched corporate resistance to this “new man” and his wife. Opposition from an abbey which demanded revenue from land touching the bridge road; lawsuits brought by the Hôtel-Dieu, the charitable hospital which largely depended on a lucrative ferry across the river for revenues; as well as petitions from several individual *propriétaires* of the quays abutting the bridge, led to exasperating years of litigation (p. 80-84). Morand spent much time lobbying the Crown's ministers at Versailles for dispensation against a slew of local interests. He found welcome support with those connected to the brave new world of engineering at the Ponts et chaussées (p. 60). He triumphantly returned to Lyon in early 1771 with a royal decree authorizing the bridge's construction. But the letter-patent to build and hold monopoly privileges on the bridge became ensnared in the “Maupeou coup,” the dismissal of the Paris Parlement by the Chancellor (p. 70). The controversy temporarily rendered impossible the proper registration of the decree and delayed work for another few months. Despite auspicious beginnings, nothing came easy to this ambitious architect and master builder.

Certain but shrinking returns off the tolls charged to cross the bridge were quickly deemed insufficient. In his final twenty years, Morand dedicated heart and soul (and much capital) to a visionary project to aid the city's growth, whose urgency was evident to many Lyonnais during the period of the Enlightenment—the age of many abortive dreams of urban transformation, as Reynard reminds us. Morand's celebrated *Plan circulaire*, first sketched out in 1764 but republished as a lavishly engraved map in 1775, incorporated manufactures and warehouses, residential quarters, parks, promenades, and squares. It was a model of integrated urban planning for future centuries. The *Plan circulaire* also re-imagined the city of Lyon as an orderly and coherent whole. It sought, above all, to rehabilitate a neglected, outlying suburb, which a century later became Les Brotteaux, also called the Quartier Morand (p. 118-119). Morand's agenda was, in fact, that of many a future urban planner: the annexation and development of a city's suburbs to alleviate congestion, enlarge the tax base, and generally renovate by allowing freer circulation of people and goods.

Risky investments made by Morand in his own plan, however, ultimately played a role in assuring its failure. His development strategies looked too much like a real estate scheme rather than a pristine emanation of the Enlightenment. Payback by the Hôtel-Dieu, still smarting from the loss of revenues from a now-irrelevant ferry, came in the form of a denunciation of Morand's intention "to despoil the poor" (p. 75). Then as now, such a stinging critique of a relatively well-to-do developer by a struggling charitable hospital was deeply effective. Reynard portrays Morand's fruitless rounds of energetic lobbying in Versailles, Paris, and Lyon as reflecting the struggles between reformers and conservatives, centralizers and local interests, civic and ecclesiastic institutions. These multi-layered clashes, suggests Reynard, summarize the contradictions, but also the sheer vitality, of an ancien régime society that offered "opportunity" as well as "obstacles" to entrepreneurship (p. 162). For, in the end, Morand's career was "half success and half failure, reflecting the ambivalence of the age toward urban expansion" (p. 123). In the end, Les Brotteaux's development was delayed for nearly another century.

The history of the wheeling and dealing of Morand provides a deeply telling narrative about the erecting, expansion, and embellishment of cities at the end of the ancien régime. Among other contributions, Reynard demonstrates how a new type of urban reform came into being. As the construction of extravagant monuments reflecting the Crown's or a municipality's *civisme* became financially less sustainable, a more pragmatic approach emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century (p. 40). This movement often wielded a circulatory discourse to emphasize the need to remake neighborhoods with greater attention to the health and well-being of urban inhabitants. I have also found this discourse evoked in Parisian circles during the same period. Architectural critics Marc-Antoine Laugier, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, and Antoine-Babuty Desgodetz, among others, virulently denounced urban decay in the capital in calling for the reform of the construction process.^[2] Also, Reynard sheds light on how ancien-régime business strategies "straddled the fertile border between private and public interests (p. 7)." Indeed, despite official policy strictly separating private and public functions of construction—for example, in forbidding some building inspectors and engineers to engage in private entrepreneurship—in fact, the two spheres of ancien-régime construction were deeply enmeshed. More than sheer political will, Reynard demonstrates how business ventures and commercial opportunities born of profitable developmental schemes were often determinant in implementing nominally public urban reform schemes—or in assuring their collapse.

The very *rocambolique* features of Morand's struggles with men and institutions are relayed by Reynard in great detail. What emerges most vividly is a faithful account of the tremendous difficulties of entrepreneurship in the ancien régime. As in the classic studies of Robert Forster, in particular the collective biography of the noble Saulx-Tavanes family of Burgundy, the most absorbing pages in Reynard's book deal with the finances and the *gestion* of Morand's development and construction enterprises. ^[3] Reynard emphasizes the exceptional nature of Morand's tidily-kept credit and debt balance, thanks to his wife's meticulous handling of the books, as well as the timely manner with which he delivered projects to private or public sponsors, and his astute gambling on the profitability of his enterprises, such as the bridge which first netted a handsome 10-

15% yearly profit (p. 99). Yet Jean-Antoine Morand's and Antoinette Levet's outstanding business sense was undeservingly crowned with an ambiguous legacy. A materially "comfortable" life for the couple and their children (p. 137) was insufficient compensation for two full decades of futility, marked by a sense of disappointment and professional failure because of their powerlessness to move ahead with broader development plans and vain ambition to gain a noble title. Ancien-régime Lyon was far from being a meritocracy.

Reynard renders the mercurial career of the architect-entrepreneur Morand as a case study addressed to early modern specialists of urban history and French eighteenth-century socio-economic history. But the opportunity to speak to a wider audience is not fully seized. The city of Lyon, for one, is not fully fleshed out, and the reader who does not have an intricate knowledge of its nooks and crannies may get lost trying to follow the tricky urban geography of various projects. There is much lingering over many of the nitty-gritty details of Morand's biography, and, at times, these details threaten to overwhelm the narrative. While the epilogue and conclusion (p. 147-165) discuss broader overarching themes, the book is somewhat less persuasive on what this case-study tells us, if anything, about why the ancien régime collapsed—or why it lasted as long as it did. Absent too is the larger context of France in the second half of the eighteenth-century. The key events which transformed French urban construction include the post-Seven Year's War building boom in the wake of easing fiscal pressures; Turgot's suppression and reorganization of the guilds in 1776; and the deep credit crunch that began with the 1787 near bankruptcy of the French state leading to a short-term collapse of the construction market. Yet, these events appear fleetingly, if at all, and are all but incidental to the narrative. Rather, the book embraces a fine-grained circumstantial view of Morand's life and times, often leaving the reader to wonder about the broader economic and political context.

Finally, one arguable point: a story that ends on the guillotine might also have placed greater emphasis on the French Revolution (arguable, because the book's title clearly announces its focus on prerevolutionary Lyon.) Morand's alienation of many factions within the Lyonnais elite, provoked by rash appeals over their heads to Versailles, scarcely endeared him to local interests, to say the least. Few voices called for clemency once he was accused and imprisoned by the Jacobins. Yet, after boldly rendering the intricacies of Lyonnais municipal politics, the author does not venture deeply into revolutionary waters. And this, despite the fact that the 1790s were largely promising for urban development throughout France—and the *cas Morand* tells us much about why. Clearly, the revolutionaries' attention to urban matters flowed directly from many a dynamic architect-entrepreneur's similarly frustrating experiences. [4] Many reforms directly targeted the arbitrary and corrupt world of Lyon's municipal elites and other, similarly entrenched and parochial urban governments. [5] Starting in late 1789, the decree of the seizure and sale of ecclesiastical *biens nationaux* opened fresh opportunities for investment in land and stones. Then, the creation of a new currency, the *assignats*, and above all the refounding of municipal institutions, were surely as interesting to Morand as they were to many bourgeois Lyonnais. Yet, such transformations are not touched on and the Revolution's fleeting and fragmentary irruption in the narrative leaves the reader with the impression of a truncated—so to speak—view of the hapless hero's guillotining.

With these caveats aside, however, the student of prerevolutionary France will learn much of how things were done in ancien régime urban construction. She or he will be deeply immersed in a world of stones, mortar, and scaffolding, but also one of sordid political patronage, credit networks, lobbying, factional rivalries, and commercial dealing. Reynard does well to remind us that a city's very heterogeneity and clutter were often the unintended fruit of years of haggling. As witnessed today by blocks of pre-modern sprawl and incongruous construction within even the orderly European city, the difference between a quarter's tidy planning and its haphazard construction was a fine line indeed.

NOTES

[1] William Baer, "Is speculative building underappreciated in urban history?" *Urban History* 34, Number 2, (August 2007), 296–316.

[2] Allan Potofsky, *Constructing Paris in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.46-56, and *passim*.

[3] Robert Forster. *The House of Saubx-Tavanex: Versailles and Burgundy, 1700-1830*. (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

[4] Potofsky, *Construction*, pp. 96-98.

[5] Ted W. Margadant, *Urban Rivalries in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), especially chapter five, "The Politics of Parochialism," pp. 178-219.

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