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Aaron Freundsuh, *The Courtesan and the Gigolo: The Murders in the Rue Montaigne and the Dark Side of Empire in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. i-viii + 258 pp. Figures, notes, and index. \$85.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-5036-0015-7; \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-5036-0082-9; \$14.49 U.S. (Nook). ISBN 978-1-5036-0097-3; \$14.49 U.S. (Kindle). ISBN 1-5036-0015-7.

Review by Susan A. Ashley, Colorado College.

Something momentous happened in Paris on the rue Montaigne the night of the 16-17 March 1887. Police found the bloody corpses of the courtesan Mme de Montille (Marie Regnault), her servant, and the servant's young daughter in Madame's lavishly-appointed apartment. The latest in a string of unsolved murders of Parisian demimondaines, their deaths attracted international attention.

In what he calls "the first full-scale history of the murders in the rue Montaigne" (p. 7), Aaron Freundsuh provides a probing examination of the confluence of colonialism and crime in the French imaginary. Described as a cosmopolitan criminal, the accused murderer fed the anxieties that generated anti-immigrant feelings and promoted the draconian anti-crime laws of the 1880s (p. 9).

Responding to a tip, the police arrested Enrico Pranzini in Marseille. Born in Alexandria of Italian parents, the stash of love letters and female mementos found in his hotel room signaled that Pranzini lived off his charms. Despite his unrelenting denials, investigators linked him to the whole series of prostitute murders. As he reconstructs the criminal investigation, judicial proceedings, Pranzini's execution, and its macabre aftermath, Freundsuh features the intersecting roles of the police, crime reporters, judges, and forensic experts.

According to Freundsuh, an Assistant Professor at Queens College, the insecurities generated by imperialism and by crime determined Pranzini's fate. When Parisians saw the accused murderer, they merged two stereotypes: the Levantine and the *rastaquouère*. The first evoked an image of the "semi-Orientalized' European" (p. 104) and the second Latin American males given to crime and sexual intrigue. Out of this "unprecedented" (p. 9) mix, Freundsuh emphasizes, came "a new criminal archetype: the male colonial antihero who returns unbidden to wreak havoc in the metropole, in this instance as a violent foreign parasite on the French sexual economy" (p. 11).

Freundsuh reads the 1880s, a period he considers "one of the most enigmatic and transformative decades in modern European history" (p. 10), through Pranzini. His case caused cultural currents and careers to intersect in ways that both reflected and reinforced the political turmoil and social tensions of the time. Freundsuh's adept use of microhistory succeeds in exposing the decade's complexities through one galvanizing *cause célèbre*.

The Pranzini case captivated the press for months, and it promoted the reputation of the intrepid and enterprising crime reporter, Freundsuh tells us. To support his view, he provides the first detailed account of the career of Georges Grison, who edited the *faits divers* section of *Le Figaro*. Grison, he

argues, shaped the modern version of the genre. He and his like fed the public pieces of the Pranzini affair a bit at a time. What Freunds Schuh describes as the “jigsaw format” of the *faits divers* juxtaposed alien elements. In the Pranzini case, that meant bringing colonial space into Parisian space (p. 130).

The story Freunds Schuh tells reads like the *faits divers* he examines. A resolute investigator, he follows multiple leads. Explaining what happened to the victim’s property, for example, takes him to the Hotel Drouot, an auction house, and to a description of its operation and clientele. There, he observes, high society women and wealthy courtesans crossed paths as they bid for art and jewelry. Or, as he recounts Pranzini’s life, Freunds Schuh describes Alexandria’s transformation from backwater to boom town.

He fits these pieces around a gradual unfolding of the case itself. The first chapter introduces the location of the crime. Freunds Schuh traces the gentrification of the lower Champs-Élysées neighborhood and the avenue Montaigne. Chapter two describes the discovery of the crime and the crime scene. Here he introduces the main investigators: the chief and the deputy chief of Security, Ernest Taylor and François Goron; the investigating magistrate, Adophe Guillot; and the most assiduous of reporters, Grison. His review of the crime scene also turns his attention to Marie Regnault and the organization of the demimonde. Judging from the decor, the contents of her safe, and her private papers, she lived, Freunds Schuh explains, the discrete and comfortable life of an elite prostitute.

The third chapter addresses the press’s role in the case. Focusing on “the small-time reporter,” specifically Grison, he describes the “piecemeal evolution of investigative reporting” (p. 47). Like Dominique Kalifa he sees innovations in the way the press collected and distributed information, and he uses the Pranzini case to illustrate and to explain those changes (p. 48).

The funeral of the three victims initiates a discussion of Regnault’s life in the next chapter. Freunds Schuh recounts how she and her sister got involved in prostitution and how they managed to move up in the business. His account of the Regnault sisters opens into a broader analysis of the courtesan, “a near mythological figure who recalled eras of splendor and sensuality” (p. 72). Usually elite prostitutes avoided registering with the police, and their connections and discretion kept the vice squad at bay, he reports. However, the police kept secret files on courtesans, and Freunds Schuh, like other researchers, profits from these efforts. Regnault’s funeral coincides with Taylor and Goron’s departure for Marseille to interrogate the recently arrested Pranzini.

Chapter five shifts the focus away from Paris and to the main suspect, Enrico Pranzini. His many jobs in far-flung locations took investigators on what became a precedent for transnational searches. Growing up in the Italian settler community in Alexandria, Pranzini abandoned a job at the Egyptian Post to try his hand as an entrepreneur, trader, and interpreter. Pranzini, Freunds Schuh contends, challenged the nationally-based distinctions Parisians wanted to make between colonizer and colonized. He was, “*simultaneously* the product of the Ottoman, British, and French empires, as well as of course, of the Italian colonial settler community” (p. 106). To Parisian eyes, he conjured up the worsening stereotypes of the Levantine: “venal, fond of cheap novels, dubious in business relations, and maddeningly difficult to identify racially” (p. 105).

Investigators established that Pranzini was not a serial killer, having arrived in Paris after the murders of the other prostitutes. What else they discovered encouraged continued speculation. Pranzini had expensive tastes; he gambled; suspected of stealing, he lost jobs. But he loved his mother, and the people who knew him judged him incapable of killing anyone. Freunds Schuh summarizes: “He was warm, sweet, and engaging. He had friends. If anything, it was his vanity that caused problems. Pranzini was a scamp who often succumbed to garish impulses” (p. 100).

Lacking strong material evidence against Pranzini, deputy Chief of Security Goron followed another lead and Guillot, the investigating magistrate, pressed Pranzini for a confession. Neither route nailed

the case. Goron accepted the other suspect's alibi, and Pranzini did not bend to Guillot's clever and insistent questioning. Nonetheless, the investigators and the public became increasingly convinced that Pranzini must have done it, because, Freundschuh asserts, he conformed to the well-known criminal *rastaquouère* type.

Freundschuh focuses chapter six, "Criminal Detection as Colonial War by Other Means," on the image of the *rastaquouère* and its role in the Pranzini case. Initially a racial slur aimed at Latin American males in Paris, the label widened to include "gender and forms of criminal and sexual danger" (p. 127). Edouard Drumont, for example, applied the term to foreigners and Jews who consorted with high-class French women (p. 129). Public anxieties about migrants and about sex trafficking contributed to the potency of the *rasta* stereotype, and Pranzini both fit and defined the category.

Enough evidence existed to indict Pranzini, and chapter seven follows the trial, using press reports and Grison's account. The occasion allows Freundschuh to explain the French judicial process and to describe the spectacle that surrounded notorious trials. Opened July 9, 1887, it lasted four days. The details of the trial make fascinating, and disconcerting, reading. Throughout the trial, head judge Georges Onfroy de Bréville undermined Pranzini's claim that honor kept him from naming the woman with whom he spent the night of the murder. "Bréville's strategy meant painting Pranzini simultaneously as dangerous and ridiculous, as a social and criminal threat and a laughably effeminate gigolo" (p. 152).

Explaining the dynamics of the proceedings leads the author to take a closer look at the circumstantial evidence, at definitions of the gigolo, and at ideas of gender and the ways they affected reactions to Pranzini's lover, Antoinette Sabatier, who testified at the trial. Freundschuh also explores the possible connections between the trial and Boulangism. Historians have not connected Pranzini and Boulanger, he says, but the trial "which became a platform for the public ridicule of deviant sexual and ethnic identities, may have helped galvanize the disparate forces of the New Right" (p. 148). Bréville's biased conduct of the trial "surely delighted" Boulangist sympathizers," he concludes (p. 150).

In his closing argument, Edgar Demange, the celebrated defense lawyer, dismantled the prosecution's argument point by point. Then he pulled a sudden and unexpected switch. He entered a new plea for Pranzini. He did not kill Marie Regnault, but he did fence the stolen jewelry. The last ditch effort to rescue Pranzini did not work. The jury declared Pranzini guilty of premeditated murder and the court imposed the death sentence. Pranzini proclaimed his innocence as he exited the courtroom.

Did he really murder the three women? Freundschuh does not speculate.

Neither the appeal process nor Sabatier's personal effort to convince the President, Jules Grévy, to pardon Pranzini saved him. Freundschuh details the execution and recounts his own efforts to track down Pranzini's corpse. Reports at the time claimed that pieces of it went missing even before it arrived at the Medical School of Paris for the usual autopsy and study. Somehow, Grison reported, Taylor and Goron procured some of Pranzini's skin and had souvenirs made. This announcement provoked an outcry. Skinning the corpse imposed an additional punishment on the dead man's body, an intolerable offense to civilized sensibilities (pp. 186-88).

Freundschuh clarifies what happened next. Anxious to divert attention from himself, Goron leaked news of the trafficking in decorations at the highest level of the government to a journalist friend. The ensuing scandal implicated Grévy's son-in-law, Daniel Wilson, and despite his efforts, Grévy could not cover for Wilson or salvage his own presidency. "During the summer and fall of 1887," Freundschuh writes, "the battle over the symbolic control of the Pranzini investigation evolved into a struggle over the fate of the condemned man's body, coded at once as criminal and colonial" (p. 176).

The Courtesan and the Gigolo adds another to the list of studies of infamous crimes. [1] A general reader will find a richer and more far-reaching story than the catchy title indicates. Freundschuh weaves the case into its context, deftly showing how individuals, institutions, and practices determined its outcome. Thus, we learn that the murder occurred against the backdrop of the noisy Festival of the Laundresses. A snowstorm, he tells us, turned it into a catastrophe that year. As he analyzes the case, he informs us about the emerging popular press, crime investigations gone global, the latest trends in criminology, and the turbulent confrontation of the metropole and the colonies. Even for those familiar with the Third Republic, these multiple and precise vignettes add some unexpected details to the larger picture of the epoch that the author draws.

Although forgotten now, the Pranzini affair exercised an outsized influence in its day. Freundschuh lays out its effects, and here he claims to break new ground. Historians, he reminds us, have not recognized its role in Boulangism, Grévy's fall, in changing media culture, and especially in shaping attitudes toward the colonial other. While he details its impact on individual careers and on institutional practices, Freundschuh mainly explores Pranzini's cultural significance, his imprint on perception or, admitting his debt to Dominique Kalifa's work, on the Parisian social imaginary.

Pranzini brought imperialism to the metropole and tightened connections between the colonial and the criminal, producing what Freundschuh calls "imperial insecurity" (p. 13). That feeling prefigured the sharper anxieties that immigration later generated, he argues. The affair, "a transformative episode in the history of foreignness in France, offers a case study in the ways that xenophobia racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered its object" (p. 14). Freundschuh's careful reconstruction of the Pranzini affair both achieves and justifies its rescue from historical oblivion.

NOTES

[1] See for example, Steven Levingston, *Little Demon in the City of Light: A True Story of Murder in Belle Époque Paris* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014) and Douglas Starr, *The Killer of Little Shepherds: A True Crime Story and the Birth of Forensic Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

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