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Rupert Christiansen, *City of Light: The Making of Modern Paris*. New York: Basic Books, 2018. vii + 206 pp. Figures, notes, further reading, and index. \$25.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9781541673397.

Review by Sun-Young Park, George Mason University.

Despite the efforts of various scholars to expand our understanding of Paris's urban modernity beyond the Second Empire moment, the phrase "modern Paris" still inevitably conjures up images of Haussmannian boulevards, public parks, infrastructure, and secular cultural centers from the opera house to the *grands magasins*.^[1] A fertile area of research for architectural, urban, medical, cultural, and social historians, the glittering capital that emerged through those developments also continues to loom large in the public imagination, now tinged with historical nostalgia, enticing generations of tourists and Francophiles to experience its charms. With *City of Light: The Making of Modern Paris*, Rupert Christiansen makes a modest contribution to the substantial historiography on this capital of modernity, speaking more to the latter group of non-specialists.

At a brisk 172 pages, *City of Light* is clearly written for a popular audience interested in a pithy overview rather than for historians looking for new theoretical frameworks or archival discoveries on Second Empire Paris. Scholars of urban history will miss a range of publications in both the brief notes and list of "Further Reading," from other popularly oriented books such as Stephane Kirkland's *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City* to Patrice Higonnet's *Paris, Capital of the World*, David Van Zanten's *Building Paris: Architectural Institutions and the Transformation of the French Capital, 1830-1870*, and Richard Hopkins's *Planning the Greenspaces of Nineteenth-Century Paris*--all of which intersect with key themes raised in Christiansen's compendium.^[2] Given the author's use of Charles Garnier's Opéra as the keynote of this narrative, Van Zanten's elegant analysis of this structure and its surrounding district would have added welcome depth.

Yet even in its brevity, *City of Light* manages to weave a compelling tale that touches on state building, public health, cultural decadence, and rising social tensions. The first two chapters set the political stage, summarizing Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's rise to power and his appointment of Georges-Eugène Haussmann to address the problem of a Paris beset by epidemics, crime, crumbling house stock, and traffic congestion. The following two chapters on the marvels and pleasures of the modernized capital are largely Haussmann's story and concisely capture the range of his portfolio, including his involvement in Victor Baltard's redesign of Les Halles, the renovation of public parks, the expansion of sewage and water distribution infrastructure, and the management of the Second Empire World's Fairs (held in 1855 and 1867). The last three chapters cover the political denouement of this urban narrative, detailing Haussmann's fall from

power, the collapse of the Empire during the Franco-Prussian War, and concluding with the Paris Commune of 1871.

The author's analyses of these developments can be at times both evocative, in rising beyond the material dimensions to address their social and cultural significance, and dissatisfying in their limitations. For example, some of the more eloquent passages in the central chapters interrogate the sense of ennui accompanying the decadence and splendor pervading Second Empire culture (pp. 99-107). This sentiment of nostalgic melancholy could have been tied to their iterations in both the earlier Romantic era and the later Belle Époque to enrich the discussion of their political and social dimensions.[3] Images and brief mentions of "innovations" such as public urinals (p.114) and *vélocipèdes* (p.127), or early bicycles, add enlivening details of material culture to the grand urban projects. Yet these might have been related to a longer history of public health and hygiene, which gave rise to earlier versions of both developments—the *pissotières* of the 1840s, installed by one of Haussmann's predecessors, the Comte de Rambuteau; and *vélocipède* experiments and races in Parisian gardens as early as the 1810s.

As in David Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity* [4], which culminates with the 1871 Commune when the dispossessed and displaced sought to seize back the capital, Christiansen concludes his book with this same event to call out the tensions accompanying the new social geography emerging during the Second Empire. Given ongoing debates over the center/periphery problem of the greater Paris region, the epilogue's assessment of Haussmannization in relation to the contemporary moment could have made more out of this material and the various twentieth-century planning proposals intended to knit city and suburbs.

A book of this variety, intended to introduce a non-specialist audience to the making of an iconic capital, would have been well served by a richer visual program. A single diagrammatic map in the opening pages, which indicates some key landmarks and Haussmannian boulevards, fails to capture the breadth of urban transformations discussed, from the destruction of working-class neighborhoods to the 1860 annexation of the suburbs. The illustrations accompanying the two central chapters on this "New Babylon" tend to zoom in on individual features of larger developments, whereas it is the unprecedented scale and networked urbanism of Haussmann's endeavors that have captivated flâneurs, students, and scholars of Paris since the nineteenth century. Illustrations and maps produced by architects and engineers of the period such as César Daly, Adolphe Alphand, and Eugène Belgrand would have done much toward capturing this aggrandized scope of urban planning.

Despite the various points raised in this review, *City of Light* succeeds as a stimulating and concise introduction to the history of a complex moment and place—one that relates larger political and social narratives to the more intimate scale of lived experiences. Historians will not encounter much that is new, but this is a book that should appeal to general readers who wish to gain a richer knowledge of this emblematic metropolis.

NOTES

[1] For example, see Karen Bowie, ed., *La modernité avant Haussmann: Formes de l'espace urbain à Paris, 1801-1853* (Paris: Editions Recherches, 2001); H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Michael

Marrinan, *Romantic Paris: Histories of a Cultural Landscape, 1800-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[2] Stephane Kirkland, *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013); Patrice Higonnet, *Paris, Capital of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); David Van Zanten, *Building Paris: Architectural Institutions and the Transformation of the French Capital, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Richard Hopkins, *Planning the Greenspaces of Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

[3] Koenraad Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1964).

[4] David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003).

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