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Gaël Rideau, *Une société en marche: les processions en France au XVIIIe siècle*. Ceyzérieu : Champ Vallon, 2021. 542 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. €30.00 (pb). ISBN 9791026710103.

Review by Taylor Van Doorne, University of California, Santa Barbara.

This monumental and insightful study examines how eighteenth-century French processional culture mediated social dynamics between ecclesiastical authorities, urban powers, the crown, and the public. Much of existing scholarship on processions characterizes them as either tools of religion to control public order or events in which the sacred and secular spheres come into contact. Rideau seeks to complicate these views with an objective to “travailler à une histoire religieuse réinsérée dans la société ou, plus précisément, étudier la société globale dans sa dimension religieuse” (p. 10). In this reconceptualization, religion becomes the object of public order, and processions become an extension of everyday norms and devotional customs. Processions thus exist in the liminal space of sacred and secular, negotiating boundaries between the divine and the familiar in lived urban space. Considered are a broad range of processions, including those commemorating the Christian calendar, patron saints, jubilees, royal dynastic celebrations, memorials, and climatic appeals to the divine, in several urban centers including Amiens, Angers, Beauvais, Orléans, Paris, and Troyes, among others. Using a breadth of archives, including *procès-verbaux*, episcopal mandates, papal bulls, police ordonnances and reports, *mémoires*, newspapers, and pamphlets, Rideau examines processional practices and discourse from what he terms a global framework. Rather than employ a diachronic approach to explain the transformation of seventeenth century baroque processions to the somber affairs preceding the Revolution, he devises a thematic approach that considers dimensions of processional culture from varying vantage points, e.g. ecclesiastical, philosophical, civic, political, personal, etc. Each layer is then refitted together and compounded through a socio-religious lens to offer a total framework for understanding eighteenth-century processions.

The book’s twelve chapters are divided in four parts. Part one focuses on the rhetoric of processional culture in religious treatises and mandates amid secularization efforts, increased politicization, religious reforms against perceived moral laxity, and other societal transformations. Close attention is paid to debates between Catholic apologists and Protestant critics; theologians and Enlightenment *philosophes*; divergent episcopal authorities; and Jesuits and Jansenists. Chapter one examines how Catholic apologists argued that processions served as devotional tools deriving from early Christian practices that not only materialized reenactments of Biblical and saintly narratives but also acted as public prayers that affirmed collective faith. Rideau arrives at this interpretation by consulting two clerical treatises by Vatar in 1705 and

Collin in 1779, both of which serve henceforth in the study as lodestars for how French Catholic theologians understood the social role and pious character of processions at either end of the century. Rideau then examines how the arguments of apologists in favor of processional culture were critiqued by *philosophes*, who argued against contemporary religious displays of excess and superstition in favor of the more naturalistic pagan precedents.

Following this discursive analysis, Chapter two compares episcopal mandates and liturgical treatises from various dioceses vis-à-vis the translation of reform policies into practical processional regulations. Echoing some of the critiques leveled by parties antagonistic to processional culture, reformers censured excessive pomp and spectacle as abuses against piety which effectively eroded the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Rideau's discussion of episcopal mandates positions the 1770s as an inflection point in the ecclesiastical rhetoric that recenters the practice, at least in principle, squarely in the realm of the sacred.

Chapter three considers Jansenist critiques published in *Nouvelle ecclésiastiques* of Jesuit processional practices that often followed several waves of broader interest in reforming missionary culture. Some Jansenist authors asserted that the pagan, theatrical quality of Jesuit processions signaled a simulacrum of religious piety and that such an act of false devotion was metonymic of a false religion. They championed instead processions that celebrated Jansenist-affirming miracles and positioned the public as witnesses to the sect's veracity. Together, these first three chapters establish a discursive foundation for the practices and personal experiences explored in later sections. At times, the author's meticulous attention to granular textual details in these early chapters obfuscates the broader historical context that informs the debates. Though demonstrating a masterful handling of the material, part one lacks some historical contextualization. Thus, it may appear slightly opaque to readers not well versed in either seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French theological debates or the tensions between religious denominations of the period.

In part two, Rideau shifts focus to the urban and identitarian scale emphasizing how processions constituted and reaffirmed the spiritual, local, institutional, and historical identity of a given community. Chapter four continues the discursive thread from the previous section in its assessment of how municipal and clerical authorities negotiated civic priorities and represented identities on the urban stage. As Rideau demonstrates, the nature of administrative duties for city officials and religious authorities differed in each town, but each procession was planned to bridge the secular and sacred realms, toeing the line between piety and politics, as well as ritual and festival. It is here that the urban environment emerges as a central character in the drama of eighteenth-century processions, a throughline in the remainder of Rideau's analysis.

The following two chapters position processions within time and space. Chapter five concerns *le temps*, both as an atmospheric reality (weather) and as a temporal abstraction (time). In the ontological practice of universal time, processions both ordered the Christian world around a common moment and gave form to local urban time. In an observation undoubtedly indebted to Mona Ozouf, memorial marches in particular served as loci in the unification of past, present, and future temporalities, as communities would reflect on a historic foundational event in the present with some assuredness of its continued commemoration in the future.^[1] Over the course of the eighteenth century, such histories would be increasingly reoriented toward the crown, thus eventually sublating the local into a shared experience of national time. Chapter six spatializes processions, offering a typology of parade routes by comparing different urban practices. While

the pattern of a given city's procession was contingent on surrounding geography, distribution of urban space, variety of local devotional sites, and availability of public spaces, there existed commonalities in the types of stations and neighborhoods selected. An appendix at the end of the text maps some of these *cartes des parcours* and is indispensable in visualizing the impressive scale and spatial impact of marchers on the urban stage.

Chapter seven dovetails the preceding disparate chapters in its consideration of the social constitution and performance of collective identity with respect to methods of representation. Over the century, processions became increasingly concerned with delimiting and displaying social rank. *Procès-verbaux* and visual representations suggested, on the one hand, that communities were carefully controlled and generally contented in the social hierarchy. Other accounts, however, including police *ordonnances* and records, hinted at a growing tension in the merchant and impoverished classes against such restrictions. Rideau's portrayal of these social tensions on the eve of the Revolution speaks to one of the strengths of this section, if not the whole book. He prudently positions the eighteenth century as a critical period of transition and transformation in French religious history, weaving into his narrative its connection to precedents dating from the Middle Ages and subsequent processions in post-revolutionary France.

In the penultimate section, Rideau triangulates his analyses of religious debates and collective urban identity with the public culture of processions. Chapter eight probes further into the social hierarchies and internal tensions represented in processional culture by contrasting the propriety and honor of distinguishing social rank on the urban stage with scandals that challenged public order. Scandal not only undermined the social order by putting into question the collective unanimity impressed by authorities, but threatened the efficacy of group prayer and, by extension, the public good. This virtual analysis of the tensions of social order is followed by consideration of its practical and visible structurization in chapter nine. Rideau identifies royal ceremonies, in which the king's power was ritualistically reaffirmed on a public stage through the religious practice of the *Te Deum*, as well as police *ordonnances* for the community to clean the streets and hang decorations from their buildings, among other demands, as powerful mechanisms of enforcing order. Public order was not, however, unilaterally determined. It is evident in laic discourse on religious practices, an innovation of the eighteenth century, that the city was transformed during processions into a "théâtre de l'affrontement" where social actors constructed and negotiated their identities in the public arena (p. 330). The claims on such visibility were particularly poignant in the conflict between feuding confessionals.

The emergent laic discourse on religion included philosophical treatises and *Encyclopedié* entries critiquing processions as an "inanité religieuse et spirituelle" that mobilized fanatics (p. 373). Chapter ten is concerned with these Enlightenment attacks on religious processions, with particular focus on Voltaire's call for the neutralization of public space in his writings on the Calas and La Barre affairs. The author's treatment of Voltaire foiled against the proposals of apologists and practices of a devout laity recalls the discursive matrix of critiques by theologians and philosophers in the book's first section. In this later chapter, however, Rideau's discussion of Voltaire benefits from a more complete historical contextualization.

Part four concludes the study with individual accounts of processions. There is a tonal shift in which the social, practical, and structural conditions articulated in earlier sections provide a framework for the affective, personal perspectives of the final chapters. Using travelogs, chapter

eleven recounts the impressions of French travelers who witnessed processions in Italy and Spain. Travelers frequently commented on decorations, cultural institutions, and differing religious practices that they witnessed at *fêtes*. Rideau notes an increasingly political and secular rhetoric in these travelogs after 1760, correlating to trends in contemporaneous writings on French processions, with writers deemphasizing the role of relics and piety to focus on the social and cultural aspects of foreign institutions. The author returns to France in the final chapter, with an examination of *livres de raison* and other family records to provide individual examples of public opinion of processions. Rideau examines several different accounts of a range of procession types: for patron saints, Jansenist miracles, canonizations, and beyond. Like the travelogues, the family records that the author presents in chapter twelve corroborate observations from the laic writings from earlier chapters. Indeed, these final chapters do not necessarily provide surprising insight. Rather, their function is to show eighteenth-century processions from yet other angle, achieving the holistic approach promised by the author.

The strength of this book lies in Rideau's masterful handling of archival and printed primary sources. He is careful to distinguish the scale of information that certain documents may show, as well as each type's limitations. Particularly laudable is his thorough engagement with contemporary writers, particularly in chapters one and ten, and how their views corresponded to public and official opinion. This methodological success is perhaps only superseded by the way in which he presents several conceptual binaries—e.g. secular/religious, profane/sacred, laic/ecclesiastical, local/national, individual/collective, ritual/festival, honor/scandal—and complicates them. To give one example, Paris, which was positioned in the nineteenth century as the center of the modern French nation-state around which the provinces were oriented, is relativized as one of many urban centers in Rideau's text without losing its historical particularity as one of the few privileged sites in which the king processed. Thus, the dichotomy of urban center/provincial periphery is disrupted.

While careful attention is given to period texts, there are several theoretical analytics that are glossed over by comparison. Rich historical concepts like *lieu de mémoire*, universal time, and the public sphere are mentioned, but never mobilized. In particular, the analysis of time suffers from many missed opportunities to engage with the literature on changing temporal ontologies and modalities by Reinhart Koselleck, Johannes Fabian, and Lynn Hunt, among others.[1] Conversely, Rideau's light treatment of these concepts may be indicative of how foundational they have become for historians of the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, *Une société en marche* is a successful and comprehensive text that accomplishes the author's objective to provide a global framework for understanding French processional culture in a period of social and religious transformation. Given the strength of the extensive framework that Rideau constructs, the book should serve as a keystone text for those working on eighteenth-century religious and festival culture. It will also be of interest to scholars of revolutionary and postrevolutionary France, as the germinated seeds of nineteenth century social unrest were sowed in this period's public sphere.

NOTES

[1] Mona Ozouf, *La Fête Révolutionnaire 1789-1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

[2] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008).

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