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Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xvi + 343 pp. Maps, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-81126-0.

Review by Moshe Sluhovsky, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Vanessa Harding explains that her book is not about death but about the dead themselves and the interactions between them and the living. Burial practices and funerary rites in Paris and London, she suggests, can shed light on urban cultures and experiences, while the cities' different attitudes toward the dead illuminate the different social and political experiences of the two cities in the early modern period. Harding mentions the fact that in traditional Catholic culture prior to the Reformation, the dead served as mediators between the living and the beyond and that spiritual relations of mutual obligations and reciprocity continued after a person's death. It is therefore intriguing to know what was left of these norms after the Reformation. But these spiritual and religious aspects are not analyzed in the book. Nor does Harding address the important medieval and early modern distinctions between bad and good deaths, between death in bed and deaths in other places (and their symbolic meanings), or among the different types of dead in the populations of Paris and London (children and old people, men and women, lay and religious, diseased and healthy, voluntary and involuntary, criminal and honorable, etc.)

In fact, Harding's book is not about the dead; it is a book about corpses. As such, it has a lot to tell about burial guilds and confraternities; burial grounds and spaces; funerary processions and rites; and methods of disposing of corpses and bones. But I am not sure dry bones are the best witnesses to the social and cultural dynamics between the living and the dead in the two largest cities in Western Europe in the early modern period. The living, after all, had much more interest in the souls of their departing relatives than in their bones. They prayed for their souls to rest in peace, not the bones; and they dreaded the return of the souls, not the bones.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the different spaces occupied by the dead in Paris and London—parochial and non-parochial churchyards and cemeteries, churches, tombs and family vaults. Harding documents and analyzes the differences among these sites, people's preferences, and the economic and legal issues that different burial grounds indicated. The second section (chapters seven to nine) addresses funerals, and their liturgical, social, ritualistic, and performative dimensions. Harding's discussion of these issues in early modern London is especially impressive. Reviving the dead past, Harding presents detailed descriptions of the churchyards in different parish churches in the city, of tombstones, their owners, and their usages. Using a vast array of primary sources, she discusses the geographical issues relating to the pits and single graves, the financial aspects that determined the choice between these two options, the churches' need for additional land and the inauguration of new churchyards, and the specific burial grounds of religious dissidents, immigrants, and Jews. Harding's London parochial sources also enable her to analyze superbly the specific expenses that each burial entailed. In her discussion of the same topics in Paris, Harding is right to emphasize the unique position of the Cemetery of the Innocents in the city center as a cemetery that processed thousands of dead a year, known for its ability to consume corpses buried there within nine days or even twenty-four hours. Harding also documents the existence of *charniers* in this and other

cemeteries in Paris. *Charniers*, she points out, were not necessarily charnel houses but rather arcaded galleries, which served to store bones but were also used for private and family grave sites and epitaphs.

Not surprisingly, Harding finds that burial inside a church was more expensive and more prestigious than burial in the churchyard and that a hierarchy of space existed even within the church itself. In her discussion of funerals, Harding finds that both Catholic Parisians and Protestant Londoners continued to prefer elaborate funerary rituals in the early modern period. In fact, post-Reformation funerals became a means of exhibiting wealth and translating it into status. This, too, was true for both Catholics and Protestants. In both cities, people left in their wills very precise requests concerning their own funerals and put aside money to make sure their relatives followed their last wishes.

As impressive in its scope and its minute attention to detail as *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London* is in its discussion of London, as a historian of Paris I found Harding's book disappointing. Partly this is a result of Harding's avoidance of using Parisian wills as one of her primary sources. Harding is well aware of the crucial importance of wills as a major source for histories of the dead. And indeed, she has utilized a large number of Londoners' wills, which allowed her to present a nuanced view of people's expectations, aspirations, and fears concerning their own nearing death. In Paris, she even states, "willmaking may have been even more widespread." These wills are deposited in the Archives Nationales and are accessible to the public. Harding, however, does not use this resource, explaining that "the sheer bulk of the collections is such that it would be impossible for a single researcher to get far with sampling these, even as the main focus of study" (p. 301). Harding, therefore, did not sample Parisians' wills and instead used a few examples from Pierre Chaunu's immensely important project of the 1970s, which led to the publication of his *La mort à Paris: XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles*.<sup>[1]</sup> Sampling many thousands of Parisian wills, however, is exactly what historian Ann W. Ramsey has done in her magisterial *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630*.<sup>[2]</sup> The book, published three years prior to the publication of *The Dead and the Living*, is not mentioned in Harding's bibliography. Admittedly, Ramsey deals with a shorter time period. But she sampled wills, created a database, and attempted to develop a way to quantify symbolic behavior. The result is that Ramsey's discussion of the interactions between the living and the dead and of the social and religious experiences of death in Paris offers historians a much more detailed and nuanced view of these topics than does Harding's. Furthermore, Harding bases significant parts of her discussion of parochial church and churchyard burials in Paris on the records of the parish records of Saint-André-des-Arts (B.N. mss. 32838, 32588, 32589). But these are eighteenth-century compilations by antiquarians, who, as Harding herself realizes, "skewed" the picture (p. 138). In other words, Harding's research in Parisian archives could have been more systematic. Such an enterprise, I assume, might have led to as nuanced a reading of the place of the dead in early modern Paris as she provides for London.

A case in point is Harding's anthropological and sociological conclusions concerning the symbolic meanings of the burial sites and funerary processions she describes. What exactly was the symbolic meaning of the different burial sites in the city? What was the unique characteristic of burial in the vicinity of, say, Sainte Geneviève (the patron saint of the city), as opposed to Saint Germain l'Auxerrois (the royal parish)? Was there a difference in Parisians' perceptions of being buried in the Cité, the Left Bank, or the Right Bank? Given the fact that Parisian corpses had "less loyalty to the parish of residence" (p. 136), what was the spiritual map of the city within which they circulated? What was the symbolic or spiritual meaning of the fact that the *Innocents* was a cemetery, a *Cour des miracles*, and a meeting place for prostitutes, vagabonds, and idlers? Or that children played among the tombs, the pits, and the piles of skulls and bones? And what does it tell us about the relations between the living and the dead, the bodies and the corpses in early modern Paris?

A more attentive reading of the spiritual and transcendent aspects of burials and funerals might have prevented Harding from asserting that in seventeenth-century funerals, "a rite that was once a complex

ensemble of different values was being reduced in the direction of a more one-dimensional occasion, all the elements of which could in practice be measured against a single scale of valuation, that of price" (p. 232). Such a statement ignores Harding's own finding concerning people's attentiveness not only (and not even mostly) to the pomp and circumstance of their own funerals, but rather to sincere concerns with piety, charity, and honorability. Furthermore, Harding's use of anthropological vocabulary and insights is too general. Is there really no difference among "performance," "ritual," "ceremony," and "observance" all used by Harding in the same page (p. 234)? Another example of the anthropological confusion is Harding's assertion that funerals created "a collective urban consciousness" (p. 234). But, as Harding herself documents, most funerals were familial and parochial events. More often than not, funeral processions marched from the deathbed to the local church, and the deceased person was escorted by his or her immediate family, neighbors, and fellow-members of devotional or professional confraternities. Obviously, funerals were more likely to reaffirm or recreate parochial, class, and professional identities than urban collective identities (and Harding herself seems to indicate that on p. 266). In early twentieth-century Paris, native-born Parisians still talked about *passer l'eau*—crossing from one bank of the Seine to the other—as a dangerous and arduous expedition to a savage and unfamiliar land, inhabited by strange people (something like the way residents of New York discuss New Jersey). As David Garrioch and other historians have documented, Paris remained a city of neighborhoods well into the modern period, and people's sense of identity and community focused on their immediate surroundings. It seems much more likely that a local event such as a neighbor's funeral would cement and strengthen parochial attachments rather than an abstract urban one.

Equally, paying more attention to nuances would address the growing importance of the funerary sermon in seventeenth-century Paris and the changes in funerary and burial styles that were shaped by new modes of Counter-Reformation spirituality. While the conflict between Protestants and Catholics was, of course, important, and Harding does a good job analyzing it, intra-Catholic spiritual disagreements among Leaguers and *Politiques* and, later on, Jesuits and Jansenists played an increasingly important role in shaping Parisian rituals of death. Looking from London, these Catholic in-fights may seem insignificant. Looking from Paris, they determined not only the size and shape of a person's funeral and burial place, but also the relations between the living and the dead, the parish and the parishioners, the lay believers and their priests and curés, and finally the relations between the laity and the entire belief system that gave shape to their funerary and burial rites.

Harding's book is of considerable interest for historians pursuing issues related to death and burial in early modern London. Scholars interested in the history of these topics in Paris would be better served by Chaunu's and Ramsey's books.

## NOTES

[1] Pierre Chaunu, *La mort à Paris: XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).

[2] Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999).

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