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Robert W. Berger, ed., *Paris. An Electronic Tour of the Old City*. New York: Italica Press, 2007. 414 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography. \$30.00 U.S. (electronic). ISBN 1-59910-009-6; ISBN 978-1-59910-009-8.

Review by David Garrioch, Monash University.

This is not, as the publisher's blurb proclaims, "an interactive tour of Paris before the French Revolution". It is an electronically published anthology of texts and illustrations of Paris, with commentary. Robert Berger is more modest and more accurate in his introduction: "This electronic book is intended as an informal album of written and visual descriptions of old Paris and its inhabitants . . . The primary aim is to provide pleasure for lovers of that great city. Each of the entries has a short introduction but no attempt has been made to write a history of Paris" (p. 6). Indeed, the collection is fun and makes interesting reading, but it is not history.

*Paris: an electronic tour* comes in the form of a downloadable book for which readers will need Adobe Digital Editions software, free from Adobe. It consists of some thirty-six written texts—prose and poetry—and forty-six illustrations. The selection is organized chronologically, beginning with Julian the Apostate's account of his stay in Lutetia in 358 C.E. That is followed by a very short reference to Paris in an account of the Viking invasions written by a monk of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, then by several texts from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. After that the material is divided by century and goes as far as the late eighteenth century, concluding with a 1796 description of Paris by the English diplomat Henry Swinburne. The chronological coverage is uneven: for the fifteenth century there are three written texts and four illustrations; for the sixteenth, five documents and six illustrations, one of them a map. The chapter on the seventeenth century, the period that clearly interests Berger most, offers twelve written texts and twelve illustrations and contains thematic subdivisions: "views up and down the Seine"; "the people of Paris as subjects of art"; "popular religion"; "the Parisian underworld"; "Paris satirized"; "Paris and London compared"; and "the faubourgs". For the eighteenth century Berger has chosen three written descriptions and fourteen illustrations (including one map) prior to 1789, three revolutionary documents, and the text by Swinburne from 1796. All this is accompanied by three rather schematic modern maps showing the city in 1400, in 1600 and in 1800, which give the main landmarks but serve primarily to situate the illustrations.

Robert Berger is mainly interested in the topographical accuracy of each source and the choice of texts and illustrations seems largely dictated by this. Each written document has a brief introduction that gives its date and the identity of the author, though regrettably we are rarely given the kind of information on the writer's social origins, interests, or purpose in writing that would enable an uninitiated reader to interpret the document. The treatment of the medieval texts is a little better, perhaps because they appear more foreign, and occasionally we are told something about the influences upon them or the genre within which they are situated. Thus Berger situates Jean de Jandun's *Treatise of the Praises of Paris* in "the category of the *laudes* (praises) tradition of cities, which can be traced back to classical antiquity and which was revived in the Middle Ages". "Examples concerning Paris", he adds, "have already been seen in the writings of Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Gui de Bazoches"

(p. 36). Unfortunately this was not mentioned in the introductions to either of those earlier extracts and there is no discussion of how this tradition might influence the text or the way we interpret it.

Most of the written texts are presented as unmediated accounts of the city and its people. Thus the introduction to Henri Sauval's famous depiction of the Cour des Miracles makes no attempt to set it in the context of seventeenth-century urban society and takes no account of urban mythologies and stereotypes, or of absolutist propaganda. Instead it expresses admiration at Sauval's "success in visiting the Cour des Miracles . . . , given the dangers of approaching these thieves and beggars . . . Did Sauval disguise himself and penetrate the secretive lair of these vagabonds to observe their habits and learn their jargon? . . . However obtained, his long description has an absolutely authentic ring, and opens a window onto an otherwise closed underclass--its history, customs, and remarkable social organization" (p. 203). All this disappeared, we are told, with Louis XIV's reform of the police.

An observation about Restif de la Bretonne's *Nuits de Paris* of the late 1780s is equally revealing. "Like Mercier [in the *Tableau de Paris*], Restif gives us sketches of daily Parisian life, but he is more subjective, and interlards his chapters with dramatic incidents which, for the most part, are probably invented. Nevertheless, he provides invaluable pictures of Paris just before and during the Revolution" (p. 374). Those who know something of Mercier may be surprised to learn that he was less subjective than Restif de la Bretonne, but as this quotation illustrates, the genre to which these texts belonged, and even the author's agenda and reason for writing, are not considered relevant. A number of the other texts are taken from travel accounts, whose shifting conventions dictated certain elements of their descriptions of Paris, but the editor does not comment on this at all.

The treatment of the illustrations is more satisfying. The introductions are much longer and they include details on each artist's style and sometimes on other artistic influences and on the iconography of the paintings. Berger's discussion of the altarpiece of the Parlement of Paris, dating from the mid fifteenth century, displays his customary preoccupation with topography, explaining that the Louvre in the background on the left and the Palais on the right could not both have been seen from this angle. But he goes on to note that the Louvre is behind an image of Saint Louis, as befits its royal status, and that the sword of Charlemagne touches the Palais and thus suggests the sword of justice since that was where the courts sat. This is helpful, hinting at the conventions surrounding the inclusion of urban scenes in such paintings.

Similarly, in introducing a mid-sixteenth-century engraving showing a procession of the reliquary of Saint Genevieve, Berger explains that "urban processions offered an opportunity for artists to portray a large group of persons against a cityscape background" and points to Gentile Bellini's 1496 innovative painting of the Piazza San Marco in Venice. It would have helped further if he had explained why artists might have wished to show the scene in this way, and similar explanations would greatly facilitate the reader's understanding of many of the other illustrations. The discussion of a few of the artists is more comprehensive: that of Etienne Jeurat, for instance, not only contains much information about this mid-eighteenth-century painter but explains beautifully how his work differed from earlier depictions of the city both in style and in purpose. Berger points to the influence of William Hogarth (and reproduces one of Hogarth's engravings). The section on Jean-Baptiste Nicolas Ragueneau is also very good, and it is a pity that this kind of critical presentation and analysis does not accompany all the illustrations.

The electronic format allows the reader to use a variety of navigation techniques. There is basic scrolling, but as with most e-books, only the most patient or captivated reader will scroll through all 400 pages. There is a table of contents that lists the author and title of each work and that provides easy hotlinks to each of them. The list of illustrations offers thumbnails for the same purpose. In the text itself one finds a limited number of hotlinks: to the endnotes (which are primarily bibliographical), to the illustrations when they are first referred to in the text, and also to the names of artists and of

authors who are discussed in the introductions to individual documents. This all works quite well, although it does assume that the reader is working through the pages in order: thus later references to a work or to an artist are not systematically hotlinked, so one is forced to use the search tool on the toolbar to find an earlier reference. There is no hotlink, for example, from Etienne Jaurat's painting of *Les Trois Pucelles* to the discussion of the author several pages earlier.

The quality of the reproductions is quite good and it is possible to zoom in and out, though the resolution is not always adequate to examine small details closely. The sources are very varied and while specialists will recognise many of the documents and illustrations, every user of this e-book will discover previously unknown material. A few little-known paintings come from French provincial art galleries and Berger has obviously spent a lot of time tracking down diverse kinds of representations. The translations are excellent: it appears the editor has relied on existing translations of the older Latin and medieval texts, usually into modern French, but he has done most of the translation into English. The factual information provided on each author and artist and on each work, though in general fairly limited, seems very accurate.

It is not quite clear whom the work is aimed at. Specialists may be prepared to purchase it in order to gain access to some of the less common illustrations and texts but will be disappointed with the analysis. The price is excellent by comparison with printed art books and general readers may wish to dip in and particularly to browse through the rich illustrations, though I'm not sure many will want to read lots of text on the screen. The book can be printed, but that would defeat the purpose of the electronic format. In survey courses on the history of Paris the illustrations would be useful for classroom teaching, though since limited copies can be made, an instructor would probably need to use his or her own computer. For students, *Paris: an electronic tour* may be useful as a collection of sources, though the teacher will need to provide a lot of supplementary material on the texts and their authors.

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