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Diane Roussel, *Violences et passions dans le Paris de la Renaissance*. Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2012. 386 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes and appendix. 28€ (pb) ISBN 978-2-87673-603-0.

Review by Malcolm Greenshields, University of Lethbridge.

Diane Roussel supports the refreshing notion that the largest city in the West was also a uniquely creative center of civilization. Paris was a huge, precocious experiment in the improvement of means to preserve public order, temper violence, and civilize the behavior, morals, and customs of citizens. With this civility a very large population could live peacefully in a relatively confined space. In her analysis of the human ecology of the city, Roussel sees no reason to assume that it was a criminogenic environment. Instead she argues that Parisians more often showed the desire and the capacity to reduce dangerous tensions and limit violent behavior among a diverse population living cheek by jowl in many quarters. While their ideal may have been the artisanal “good city” of medieval Northwestern Europe, the size and living arrangements of Paris made it a matrix of civilization.

In arguing thus, the author has to contend with two powerful ideas. One is the contention that the city was a chaotic and dangerous place until the absolutist triumph of Louis XIV, who reformed the police of Paris and transformed the city. This notion is based partly on the idea that the reform of an institution proves its previous inadequacy. Much of the long-accepted evidentiary basis for the dark view of the Parisian past is also some of the most enjoyable reading about the city, that is the gossip, memoirs and other impressions left by early-modern chroniclers of “Parisian insecurity.” To their work Roussel devotes the entire second chapter, paying particular attention to Pierre de L'Estoile (1546-1611), a member of the Parisian haute bourgeoisie who lived through both the Wars of Religion and the assassination of Henry IV, and whose journals have given him a prominent place among historians. Traditionally, such chroniclers or diarists were particularly interested in executions described with some license. But gradually crime, especially violent and sexual crime, became a staple of such reporting, along with arsons, epidemic diseases and other catastrophes, often based on rumor as much as fact. Sensational, titillating, frightening, and morbid stories were always the preferred fare in such works.

The other idea contributing to a belief in urban evil was a romantic one that persists in western culture, that of the peaceful and healthy countryside in contrast to the corrupt, violent, and insalubrious city. In Western Europe during the sixteenth century, this was not generally the case. The traditions of powerful kinship ties and blood vengeance characterized much of rural Western Europe and contributed to higher rates of violence than could be found in cities. But the vision of a rural Arcadia, strengthened by Romantics and mediated to a broad middle-class audience in the mid- to late- twentieth century, is a stubborn intellectual inheritance. Nonetheless, the urban peace of late medieval “good cities” is well enough known, although early modern peasants often saw cities as voracious parasites, gluttons of everything produced by the toil of honest country folk.

The urban peace extended to Paris as well, but Paris was not a city like the others. It amazed visitors with its size, the profusion of fine things made and sold there, the dense mass of citizens, its traffic of carts and herds, and its famous mud. While early modern statistics are a perilous enterprise, the population of Paris probably grew to about 300,000 in the sixteenth century. Although the siege of 1590

may have reduced it to 200,000, it rebounded quickly thereafter. While other towns may have been proud of their artisan population, there was no other like Paris whose craftsmen worked in every conceivable medium. It was said that the city had 523 shoemakers near the end of the sixteenth century (pp. 35-37).

The great value in Roussel's work lies in her exploration of the nature of Parisian society and Parisian justice to find the mechanisms by which Paris kept the peace at the beginning of the modern age. Her account runs from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the assassination of Henry IV in 1610, by which time repeated crises over the preceding century, the pressure of a rapidly growing population, and the encroachment of royal power changed the nature of the city and its essential self-regulation.

Some of the most eloquent evidence of ordinary life is in the documents left by early-modern criminal justice systems, which give voice to those who have left no other evidence of their lives. In this "history from below," or perhaps, from the middle, Roussel uses 100 criminal trials from the Parlement of Paris, 229 letters of remission or pardons (mostly for homicide), and 554 cases from the seigneurial justice of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, then a growing suburb at the gates of Paris (pp. 107-123). The ordinary cases of the latter, far from the scaffolds of the higher courts, are particularly eloquent about the vagaries of day-to-day existence. Despite the lacunae and some difficulties of comparison, her work shows clearly that the capital of France was not the capital of crime. Moreover, Roussel uses these records to show how that Parisian peace was maintained.

The society Roussel describes was in many ways a most modern one in which individuals shared a number of functional relationships outside the family. In Paris, extensive kinship was not the predominant relationship, and blood vengeance was disapproved. In contrast to the inhabitants of rural communities, Parisians were primarily loyal to a profession, an immediate neighborhood, and a quarter of the city. Just as these loyalties were not familial, the figures of authority who replaced parents were the master craftsmen and craft mistresses who controlled young apprentices, the principal renters, who ruled the access and behavior of other tenants of Paris's large buildings, and the constantly vigilant neighbors, who were quick to point out the misbehavior of others in their vicinity. The most visible official authorities were the *sergents*, who moved among the citizens and responded to their appeals for help or their illegal or disruptive activities, made arrests, and used such constraint as they could. These officers were few but influential, and were effective because they were immersed in the crowd. They could only act, however, with the approval of the citizenry, and were essentially channeled by the preferences and mores of respectable folk.

If everyone decides to disobey the police, they are no longer police. Those who favored a vertically repressive system often later dismissed the supple authority that characterized the "police before the police" in Paris as inadequate. In fact, according to this author, this sort of policing was part of the peace of Parisians who were developing means of coexistence and active cooperation that reduced tensions. The police themselves were more conciliatory than confrontational and at times retreated when the authority of the street disapproved their actions. They could not control citizens or apply policies that were against Parisians' will. Just as the respectable citizenry were expected to keep and take up arms in defense of the city until the 1560s, so too were they to help in the pacification and regulation of their city. The success of this cooperative civility was evident in the rates of homicide that were between 2.1 and 3.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, quite low for the period (pp. 111-113). It could be seen in the taverns too, which tended to be places of sociability rather than mayhem.

The character of crime shows significant differences between Paris and Saint-Germain-des-Prés. In both places the most violent and dangerous creatures were young men between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. But while Parisians tended to fight and kill in the spring and fall, the population of the *faubourg* fought on the hot days of summer, the latter conforming to the pattern of rural violence. Parisians also fought later at night, the peak hour of homicide being 10:00 o'clock. The fighters of Saint-

Germain-des-Prés, and some Parisian artisans fought at the end of the work day, with the highest number of violent incidents occurring at 4:00 p.m. (pp. 173-176). The rage of dueling in Paris meant many fights to the death and 72 percent of victims in pardoned homicides died by the sword. Despite condemnations of dueling, there was a tacit permission in the letters of remission for those who had defended their lives or honor.

The jail registers of Saint-Germain-des-Prés are interesting in that the greatest proportion of prisoners (48 percent) were accused of attacks on property, followed by those accused of sexual immorality and blasphemy. Attacks on persons were lower on the scale. But the criminal investigations in the seigneurial court were in the main activated by accusations of attacks on the person (pp. 122-124).

Roussel interestingly points out that the means of control by the citizenry could include gossip and rumor that limited the behavior of those who feared for their reputations. The denial or refutation of insults and gossip was often difficult to achieve, and some victims tried to counterattack with the same means. Women were often insulted for sexual immorality, while men were accused of dishonesty or incompetence in their work (pp. 223-232).

For those who wished to shame and intimidate their opponents, there were also the magistrates to whom one could make an official complaint. Only 8 percent of the cases in Saint-Germain-des-Prés ended in sentences. The complaint and investigation were often weapons to bring an opponent to settle, through an agreement outside the courtroom overseen by a solicitor, or another respected figure, or they might simply cow an opponent with the possibility of public disgrace. To pursue a court action took money, and so the majority of accused in both Parisian letters of pardon and court accusations in Saint-Germain-des-Prés were artisans. Paris was still a city with an important population of craftsmen as in the medieval ideal. Gradually, the complaint and initial stages of a case were integrated into the system of social control.

For their part, the magistrates of Saint-Germain-des-Prés tried to be conciliatory and resolve tensions rather than punish if the accused were not hardened criminals. Rather than condemning a local woman who had strayed into adultery, the magistrate, along with other intermediaries might try to reunite the couple and restore the torn fabric of the community. If some young people stole a few grapes from a vineyard, the issue could be resolved without anguish, so the justice system functioned as a tool of the community rather than as its oppressor. Parisians learned to live with close neighbors (pp. 325-340), to tolerate strangers and to restrain their passions, until they were overtaken by powerful forces they could not control. Diane Roussel has done historians a great service in attempting to recognize and explain the principles and relations that gave birth to the "Peace of Paris."

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