

**Diefendorf, Barbara. *Paris City Councillors in the Sixteenth Century: The Politics of Patrimony*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. 351. \$27.20**

**Donald A. Bailey**

Volume 13, numéro 2, octobre 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018140ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018140ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Bailey, D. A. (1984). Compte rendu de [Diefendorf, Barbara. *Paris City Councillors in the Sixteenth Century: The Politics of Patrimony*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. 351. \$27.20]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 13(2), 187–188. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018140ar>

Polish life far outstripping its rivals from pre-partition days, Cracow and Poznan.

The city also had social, political, and ethnic problems which Wynot acknowledges but understates. Large numbers of inhabitants were destitute, particularly in the early 1920s and during the Depression. Western travellers, hardened by the miseries of the Depression in the West, were struck by the pitiful hordes of beggars, and peddlers and indigent children, crowding the streets. The city lacked the resources to cope with so massive a problem, although it tried. Poverty was aggravated by ethnic conflict between Catholics, who made up 70 per cent of Warsaw's population, and Jews, the remaining 30 per cent. The Catholics tended to be somewhat underrepresented in business and the professions while the Jews were substantially underrepresented among both blue-collar and white-collar employee groups, but Wynot's statistics hide wretchedly impoverished Jewish artisans and peddlers under the rubric "small businessman" or "middle-class." He also overlooks the gratuitous impoverishment of Jews in Warsaw due to discriminatory hiring by state-owned enterprises and state-regulated cartels (which were driving the inefficient, small Jewish entrepreneur out of business) and due to discriminatory licensing of artisans. Wynot fails to discuss the violence perpetrated by nationalist gangs against Jews in the schools and, in the later 1930s, in the streets as well.

Urban tensions rose higher with the split in the city council between a majority of nationalist politicians and a large minority of socialists. The Pilsudski coup of 1926 installed a centrist "non-party bloc" nationally which attracted little support from the two extremes. As a result, the national government intervened increasingly into the affairs of the city until, in 1934, it established a "caretaker" government under the direction of Stefan Starzynski, who had an impressive record in the finance ministry.

Although Starzynski failed to solve Warsaw's budgetary problem, he gained additional national financing for civic improvements which were designed by a new Bureau of Urban Planning integrating suburban expansion, industrial growth, mass transit and housing construction; jurisdictional conflicts and financial problems limited the success of the bureau. Wynot's topical organization splits this interesting episode into several chapters but he is well aware of its importance.

On the whole, Professor Wynot ably, if somewhat dryly, recounts Warsaw's growing modernity as an urban centre and makes a useful contribution to the literature on urban history. His ambitious claims of examining Warsaw as an early example of a "third world" or "developing" primate city and as a focus of national integration, must be discounted since Wynot provides no supporting evidence. In addition to criticisms which pertain to the author, readers

will find the book sloppily edited, deficient in maps and lacking an adequate index.

Daniel Stone  
Department of History  
University of Winnipeg

---

Diefendorf, Barbara. *Paris City Councillors in the Sixteenth Century: The Politics of Patrimony*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. 351. \$27.20.

In our virtually unlettered age, the connection between "city" and "civilization" is too often lost. Nor is this merely an etymological matter, for it was the interaction of market, theatre, and governance, often paying obeisance to altar, that created the socio-cultural world we now inhabit and formerly celebrated in the liberal-arts education of yore. The city *is* civilization, but while television effectively spreads *aperçus* of urban life and culture to the hinterland, the passivity of television viewing, together with the death of the inner city and the cultural morbidity of the suburb, presages the downturn of our present cycle of civilization. It is therefore instructive for any modern student of the city to read a good book about cities in the past. It should be especially illuminating to read about the nascent phase of modern Paris, one of the principal generative cities of Western civilization.

Sixteenth-century Paris was governed by a *prévôt des marchands* (the merchants' provost), four *échevins* (or aldermen), and twenty-four councillors. While the administration of the city was provided by the various bureaucrats directed by the provost and aldermen, general advice without formal legislative power and deliberation about policy directions were provided by the councillors. Diefendorf has studied the ninety men who held councillorial office between 1535 and 1575. Although she briefly introduces the reader to the structure of Paris government, its relations with royal authority (unfortunately, not also with diocesan authority), and some of the major political issues, the focus of her study is the politics of patrimony. She is interested less in what the councillors did in office than in how they got there, stayed in office, and helped their relations' advancement. How long a potential councillor has lived in the city or what ties to its patriciate facilitate acquiring citizenship, what professional and social attributes qualify one for urban service, and what personal connections promote urban political careers are questions not without interest to students of modern city government.

Diefendorf also examines the Paris city councillors' professional associations, marriage alliances, and family wealth. A 1554 edict of Henry II specified the council's composition: ten royal officers, seven bourgeois, and seven

merchants. Apart from setting interesting problems for both contemporaries and historians about how to define a "bourgeois," the more breached than honoured edict witnessed councillor careers which passed through all three designations and often held more than one transitionally. One of the main conclusions of the book argues that the Paris City Council was more open in the early part of the century than it was in the third quarter and than the French governing elite in general seems to have been in the seventeenth century. Since studies such as Michael Hayden's, of the French episcopacy, suggest, however, that the reign of Henry IV was more open to men of roturier background than were those of his successors, Diefendorf's perceived trend may well be found to suffer at least a brief interruption very soon after her study closes in 1575.

Each section of the book opens with a presentation of literary and legal expectations, and then examines how Diefendorf's ninety councillors and their families matched them. The study admirably survives the dangers which quantitative material bodes for works aspiring to fall within the canons of historical literature. The scholarship is soundly based in marriage contracts, wills and testaments, notarial records, and private papers; the organizational pattern is consistent without being tedious; and the prose is lucid and varied. In a field rapidly leaving behind the interest and easy comprehension not only of the lay reader, but also of the undergraduate, it is reassuring to find another book which can be confidently assigned to students majoring in history, urban or family studies, or government. It is the applied social scientist and the member of a liberal profession who most need to know about the past and who are often ignored in monographs aimed at graduate students and fellow scholars.

The position of city councillor in sixteenth-century Paris was more prestigious than either laborious or powerful. It served as a link between the business and government of Paris and the royal governing of France, and it was held by men who participated in the culture and social-welfare

agencies of the city. Diefendorf has served us well in her study, but we need to know more about the political views of this group, what the actual governing challenges of Paris were (Diefendorf gives us only glimpses into the problems of contemporary religious controversy and of resistance to royal financial demands), and how the Parisian base of such prominent royal officers as Chancellors Michel L'Hôpital contributed to the advice proffered the monarch on national questions. These are, however, the tasks of another book, not fairly a part of Diefendorf's, which has done well to establish the professional and financial bases of the families of the men who as city councillors presided over the politics of Paris.

Donald A. Bailey  
Department of History  
University of Winnipeg

---

#### Correction

John C. Weaver, Book Review Editor, wishes to make a correction to the October 1983 issue (Volume XII, No. 2) of the *Review*.

"In Olaf Janzen's review of W.J. Reader's *Bowater: A History* an editorial insertion alleged that Bowater's was "significant . . . as the founding . . . agent in Corner Brook." In fact, the original mill came on stream in 1925 and was not purchased by Bowaters' until 1938. While Bowaters' has had an undeniable influence on the subsequent development of the area, the company's appearance was relatively recent.

The book review editor regrets the inaccuracy of the published remark and any embarrassment to Professor Janzen."

---