Les Bonnes adresses: Mapping the Urban Elites in Revolutionary Paris

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In his *Tableau de Paris*, published between 1781 and 1788, Louis-Sébastien Mercier wrote that the quartier du Palais Royal was one of the most "brilliant" in Paris; it attracted the rich and powerful to its "opulent neighborhood which poverty never comes near."[1] Along with the quartiers du Louvre, Saint-Honoré, and the faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the newer Chausée d'Antin, this section on the right bank of Paris had seen a growing population of aristocratic elites throughout the eighteenth century.[2] Impressive *hôtels*, wide streets where fountains kept the dust at bay, the pleasures of the boulevards, and the palaces and gardens of the Tuileries and the Palais-Royal, as well as the Louvre palace, made this area one of the most popular with nobles on the eve of the Revolution. For residents and observers alike, this part of Paris elicited a sense of pleasure and well-being that more populous parts of the city could not replicate.

Two decades after Mercier penned his description of the streets surrounding the Palais Royal, these right bank neighborhoods were still associated with wealth and privilege. Their wide streets and many fine *hôtels* were still pleasing to the eye. Contemporary scholars have also emphasized this sense of continuity. In volume three of *L'Histoire de la France urbaine*, Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, for example, wrote that after 1800, "urban France, from which the revolutionary tumults had been erased, found once again the peaceful physiognomy of the Old Regime."[3] For most historians of Paris the Revolution marked a lull in urban transformation. The development of new aristocratic neighborhoods in the western part of Paris in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

reconfigured the urban landscape in dramatic ways, and created a city increasingly divided into a wealthy west and a more populous east. The nineteenth century continued these trends, with the development of new neighborhoods in the northwestern part of the city in the 1820s and, most dramatically, the extensive renovations of the Second Empire, under the leadership of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann. During the Revolution, however, most argue that politics, war, and insufficient funds put projects for urban renovation on the back burner.

While the period from 1789 – 1800 was not, in fact, marked by major transformations of the capital's topography, this was a period during which peoples' experience of urban spaces nonetheless changed dramatically. Both those who remained in the city during the Revolution and those who left were faced, by the turn of the century, with a city whose meanings had radically changed. New ways of living in and moving through the city emerged during the Revolution at the same time as urban spaces were used for new political purposes. These practices, and the meanings associated with them, resulted in a reconfiguration of the cultural geography of the city. Three central right bank neighborhoods in particular – the quartiers of the Louvre, Saint-Honoré and the Palais-Royal – illustrate the dramatic transformation of an elite enclave during the Revolution. These neighborhoods were closely identified by revolutionaries with the abuses of the Old Regime. They became, during the Revolution, a preferred site for revolutionary acts of vandalism, political execution and patriotic procession. The sequestration of Church, royal, and émigré property by the Revolutionary state changed the socio-economic make-up of these neighborhoods and facilitated radical physical transformations under Napoleon. After the Revolution, although many aristocrats

continued to reside in these neighborhoods, they were no longer associated with the aristocracy of the Old Regime. Aristocrats and non-aristocrats re-imagined the geography of elite Paris, emphasizing a division between left bank, the symbol of pre-revolutionary elites, and right bank, associated with elites born of the Revolution.

The transformation of the elite neighborhoods of the right bank during the Revolution illustrates the complex ways in which the built environment of the city, patterns of use and residence based on socio-economic status, and cultural meanings associated with urban spaces intersected to produce "mental maps" of the neighborhoods of Paris. As visions of the urban landscape which privileged buildings, public spaces and streets that had significance for inhabitants of the city, these mental maps conferred meaning upon the city. The concept of a mental map is often assumed to be highly personal and rooted in individual memories of specific urban sites.[4] Yet, as this paper will argue, it is possible to discern collective mental maps that emerged from the shared experiences of certain areas of the city. During the Revolution, such mental maps underwent a dramatic transformation due to the influence of political events on the organization, use, and understanding of specific urban spaces. While this transformation had multiple effects on the way in which Parisians understood their city, my focus today is on the impact of the Revolution on the mapping of elite, and specifically aristocratic, neighborhoods.

Like its counterpart the faubourg Saint-Germain, the right bank neighborhoods of the Palais-Royal, Louvre, Saint-Honoré, the Chaussée d'Antin and the faubourg Saint-Honoré were closely associated with the institutions of the Old Regime. In the eighteenth century, the perceived overcrowding of the Marais and the desire to be closer to

Versailles led aristocrats to migrate westward. The oldest aristocratic families favored the faubourg Saint-Germain, while the right bank "welcomed more generally than its counterpart on the left bank moneyed elites, whether they were of aristocratic or financial origin."[5] The right bank housed a mix of newer nobles, many of them associated with finance, and older aristocratic families. In 1790, the rue Saint-Honoré alone was inhabited by tax farmers, noble officers of the court and the ducs de Noailles and d'Ayen.[6] Both neighborhoods also contained a significant amount of property owned by the Catholic Church. On the right bank, no fewer than six convents and monasteries were located in the area bordered by the Tuileries to the south, the boulevards to the west and north, and the rue Neuve Saint Roch to the east. All of these institutions included within their walls several buildings as well as significant green spaces. And, while the faubourg Saint-Germain was slightly more convenient for aristocrats traveling between their townhouses in the city and the court at Versailles, the Palais-Royal, residence of the duc d'Orléans, and the Tuileries Palace were both located on the right bank.

These associations with the institutions of the Old Regime generated particular animosity against the elite neighborhoods of the right bank in the years leading up to the Revolution. While Mercier noted that the faubourg Saint-Germain was known for its charity toward the poor, he called the elites of the right bank "men who work against their *concitoyens*, and who feel not the slightest remorse about it."[7] He characterized the many religious institutions of the area as "deplorable monuments of an antique superstition […] in the middle of a city where philosophy has spread its light."[8] To emphasize his critique of the inhabitants and institutions of this neighborhood, Mercier drew attention to the physical means by which individuals separated themselves from the

rest of the city. The high convent walls, he wrote, separated those inside from "all the reigning ideas."[9] Mercier evoked a similar metaphor of spatial separation in discussing the wealthy residences of these neighborhoods, writing, "These *hôtels*, so brilliant on the outside, hide beings separated from the multitude as much by their cold insensibility as by their opulence."[10] Mercier criticized the elites who rushed from one exclusive space to another, crushing any who got in their way under the wheels of their carriages.

Without sharing Mercier's critical perspective, memoirs of aristocrats who lived in Paris before the Revolution largely bear out his vision of an aristocratic elite separated physically and culturally from the majority of the population. While Mercier's description of Paris draws attention to a large numbers of streets and public spaces in the city, memoirs of elites focus almost exclusively on interior spaces. Visits to the *hôtels* of friends and acquaintances in the same social circle predominate. While street names are sometimes given for these residences, authors very rarely describe the route taken from one residence to another or sights seen along the way. Outside of private residences, urban spaces regularly appearing in memoirs are the Tuileries gardens, the theater, the Palais-Royal and certain churches. However, even in areas open to the limited strata of the public, such as the Tuileries, servants and retainers, as well as the attitudes of the elites themselves, ensure that their experience of urban life is one that is protected from inconvenience or challenge. The "mental map" of pre-revolutionary Paris that emerges from elite memoirs is one of a restricted circuit of spaces in which the elites feel "at home." This circuit was divorced from the larger urban landscape; its organizing structure was that of relationships among aristocrats and between the aristocracy and the crown or the Church rather than on the relationship of aristocratic residences to the larger

city and its inhabitants. Furthermore, aristocrats made no distinctions in their memoirs between the right and the left bank. Of far greater importance was the distinction between Paris and Versailles, where the easy pleasures of Parisian sociability gave way to the pressures and politicking of court society.

While Mercier associated aristocratic interiors with a "cold insensibility," authors of memoirs described these spaces as sites of pleasure and comfort. The countess de Boigne spoke of the "intimacy" of the Palais Royal, where her father spent his winters as a child in the early eighteenth century.[11] The Marquise de la Tour du Pin wrote of the dinners and dancing, music and conversation enjoyed among members of the aristocracy in their Parisian homes, while the duchess of Valentinois wrote letters to her husband in which she described warm scenes of domestic intimacy with her children in the Hôtel de Matignon.[12] The inward-looking character of this vision of the city is reinforced even in descriptions of views from residences. In 1715 the young Renée Caroline de Froulay, future Marquise de Créquy, was sent to Paris to live with her aunt and uncle so that she could make her entry into *le monde*. She described her delight in her relatives' home, the Hôtel de Breteuil, located alongside the Tuileries. The views from this residence, she wrote, "appeared so ravishing to me that I exploded with joy."[13] As only those who resided in the palace or the *hotels* alongside it would be able to enjoy such views, even looking outward reinforced the privileged world of the aristocracy.

This privileged and pleasurable world came under attack during the Revolution. The dramatic events of this period broke down the boundary between aristocratic Paris and revolutionary Paris as aristocratic spaces were physically or psychologically opened up to the activities of the revolutionary crowd. For example, the views that residents

prized before the Revolution became increasingly horrible to them as the political situation intensified. The countess de Boigne related how after the flight of the royal family in 1791, her father, “from the window of the pavillon de Marsan [in the Tuileries palace] saw arrive the horrible escort that returned to the palace, across the gardens, the illustrious prisoners.”[14] Residents of the area around the place de la Révolution (former place Louis XV; current place de la Concorde) were subjected, from 1792 to 1794 to the ceaseless spectacle of executions. After the execution of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, the Girondins, the duc d’Orléans, Madame du Barry and Madame Roland, those who lived in the area surrounding the place de la Révolution complained that they could no longer stand their proximity to the violence. Even those who had fled to the outskirts of the city, like the Marquise de la Tour du Pin, were affected by the events taking place in this neighborhood. On the morning of the king’s execution, she wrote, “my husband and I, leaning out of the window of our house, which overlooked Paris, listened for the sound of musketry which would bring to us the hope that so great a crime would not be committed without opposition.”[15] As silence gave way to the bustle of city life following the execution, they set off for the city on foot, taking special care not to cross what she still called the place Louis XV.

Their decision to walk into the city indicates another change in the relationship between elites and the city. Forced to walk on foot either due to financial difficulties, or because traveling in their opulent carriages, marked with prominent coats of arms, became too dangerous, elites experienced the city as Mercier had recommended, on foot. Unlike Mercier, however, this experience was not pleasant, nor was it associated with a sense of ownership of urban space. For elites, movement through the city during the

Revolution was associated with secrecy, fear and loss. The émigré duc de Falaiseau, for example, returned repeatedly to Paris in an attempt to keep his sequestered property from being sold off. While in the city, he was hidden by friends in the Marais.[16] After the events of 10 August 1792, the duc de Chansenet was left for dead on a pile of bodies that had broken his leap from a window of the Tuileries palace, as he sought to escape the invading mobs. When he finally left the Tuileries, he moved from hiding place to hiding place, including one under the roof of a royalist homeowner.[17] After the Terror, returning émigrés were warned to present a humble demeanor when moving through the city.

Revisiting areas of the city that had once been strongholds of aristocracy and royalty brought great pain. This was especially true of the former place Louis XV. The construction of the Place Louis XV between 1750 and 1762 was one of the surest signs that this part of the city had become a recognized site of aristocratic and royal power. During the Revolution, the statue of the king that had previously been placed in the center of the plaza was torn down. A plaster statue of Liberty was put in its place, not far from the guillotine. Even before the 1793 execution of the king, this plaza, due to its placement at the western end of the Tuileries garden, was avoided by aristocrats who feared assault by the popular classes whose growing presence in the area posed a threat to their safety. After his death, this plaza became a site of painful memories. Returning émigrés found it extremely difficult to pass through the plaza. Pauline de Noinville wrote that upon her return to Paris, "One of our first visits was to the faubourg Saint-Honoré. We had to cross the place Louis XV, which had become the place de la Révolution … Oh ! how our hearts broke ! How much French blood had bathed [this plaza] ! And the tricolor flag which flew above the Tuileries, and this republican language ! For we were

still addressed as citizen … Everything was astonishing and heart-rending."[18] Royalist sympathizers shared their emotions. The site of Adrien Lezay's meditation on a city wracked by Revolution was the Tuileries garden. From under its trees, he contemplated the former place Louis XV, and rememberd, "how much unhappiness I have seen, how many crimes greater than this unhappiness, an entire generation in dust or in ruin."[19]

The metaphoric ruin of elite right bank neighborhoods prompted a discussion, following the Terror, about what changes should be made to the physical landscape. The notion that the topography of the city should be transformed is in itself interesting, since it implies a belief that the changed cultural meanings associated with this part of Paris required a physical transformation. Contemporaries thus debated the meanings of the urban ruins – sacked palaces and churches, abandoned aristocratic *hotels* – that they saw around them. Most, whether their sympathies lay with the former king or not, argued that Paris should, as one contemporary put it, "put on a new face, […] be founded a second time."[20] While some argued that in order to make Paris more beautiful, "one must but destroy," others indicated that it was less a desire for beautification, and more a wish to forget, that prompted calls for renovation.[21] In 1816, for example, the author of one of the growing number of guidebooks to the capital argued that any project of creating an expiatory monument in the place Louis XV should be abandoned, because of the painful memories that it would evoke. Instead, he argued, "let us build useful monuments in our public plazas, imposing [monuments], but those which always bring to mind a pleasant memory."[22]

In the years following Napoleon's coup d'état, the elite right bank neighborhoods that were the site of such painful memories were remade in dramatic fashion. A decree

issued 9 October 1801 called for the creation of a major east-west thoroughfare (the rue de Rivoli) and ordered the division and sale of lots on the north side of this street to create a pleasing series of arcade-covered shops and residences. This new street, and the iron grill that was built on the edges of the Tuileries garden, would open up this formerly privileged site to the view of the general public of passers-by. Several smaller north-south streets were also envisioned. To carry out this plan, several religious institutions, as well as royal and aristocratic properties were demolished. To create the rue de Rivoli the monasteries of the Feuillants and the Assomption were destroyed. The Jabobins complex, a bit further north, was demolished in 1807 to create the place du Marché Saint-Honoré.[23]

These renovations were made possible by the sequestration of properties in this neighborhood during the Revolution. While the seizure and sale of *biens* nationaux, as these sequestered properties were called, was not as pronounced in Paris as in the provinces, it was still considerable. Beginning in 1790, over 4,000 properties were put up for sale in Paris; many others were used by the government or the municipality and several were destroyed.[24] The greatest percentage of properties sold in the capital – 39% - were in the western sections of the right bank, in the revolutionary sections du Roule, de la place Vendôme, des Champs-Elysées, des Buttes-des-Moulins, du Mail, and de la Halle au blé, an area that roughly corresponds to the elite right bank neighborhoods discussed in this paper.[25] While not all segments of the Parisian population could afford to buy these properties, even after the larger items, like the religious institutions, were divided into smaller lots beginning in the year III, the elite neighborhoods of the right bank experienced a not inconsiderable transfer of property ownership. Through the

nationalization of property, revolutionary leaders sought to fundamentally alter the balance of urban power by transferring property ownership from a small group of ecclesiastical and aristocratic owners to a larger group of middle-class owners. In opening the real estate market, as one expert on the topic put it, "to a diverse population," the sale of nationalized property "democratized […] property."[26] It also facilitated renovation, since the government could simply condemn unsold properties. Nowhere was this more evident than in the elite right bank neighborhoods.

The many changes – cultural, physical and socio-economic – that these neighborhoods experienced during the Revolution altered the way in which contemporaries imagined the distribution of elites in post-revolutionary Paris. Emigrés did return to the right bank. The boulevard de Coblentz was associated with returning émigrés, not only because of its name but also because of the large numbers of émigrés who congregated there.[27] Emigré societies were established in the Palais-Royal. And those who were lucky enough to reclaim unsold property once again set up their households on the right bank. However, for most contemporaries, the central elite right-bank neighborhoods of the quartiers Saint-Honoré, Palais-Royal and Louvre were no longer associated with the aristocracy, or at least not the pre-revolutionary aristocracy. Instead, the faubourg Saint-Germain took on this identity. In his 1835 history of Paris, Dulaure spoke of the re-emergence of the aristocracy in the faubourg Saint-Germain after 1795.[28] More recently, Philip Mansel has also situated what he calls the "re-aristocratization" of Paris in the faubourg Saint-Germain, citing the large number of unsold *hôtels* returned to their former owners during the Empire and the Restoration.[29]

It is clear that the faubourg Saint-Germain experienced fewer changes during the Revolution than the elite neighborhoods of the right bank. In 1790, this neighborhood housed two-thirds of the Parisian aristocracy along its wide and regularly-spaced rues Saint-Dominique, de Grenelle, de Bourbon, de l'Université and de Varenne. The physical layout of this area remains – to this day -- virtually unchanged from what it had been before 1789.[30] And while exact statistics on reversion of property are extremely difficult to come by, due to the destruction of the much of the relevant archival material during the Paris Commune, it would appear that more properties were returned to their original owners in the faubourg Saint-Germain than in right bank neighborhoods.

Greater continuity in the urban landscape as well as in the socio-economic patterns of residence may have combined with an absence of the sort of painful memories evoked by the former place Louis XV to make the faubourg Saint-Germain more appealing to the aristocracy after the Revolution. While it is difficult to determine whether a shift in residential patterns occurred following the Revolution, it is clear that the faubourg Saint-Germain became associated, in the minds of both aristocrat and non-aristocrat alike, with the pre-revolutionary aristocracy. By the July Monarchy, if not before, the faubourg Saint-Germain had become, "the symbol of faithfulness" to the Bourbon monarchy and to "traditional values."[31] It was not even necessary to reside on the left bank to be considered part of what came to be known as "le Faubourg;" it was only necessary to belong, by family or by sympathy, to an elite society who desired a return to the pre-revolutionary order. Following the Revolution, then, the mental map of aristocrats took on a more pronounced geographic dimension; instead of the abstract

network of relationships that marked pre-revolutionary visions of Paris, we see an identity rooted in the physical separation between right and left banks.

If the faubourg Saint-Germain was associated with tradition, right-bank neighborhoods were associated with change. On the right bank, the geographic area associated with the highest elites, whether aristocratic or bourgeois, became restricted in comparison to the period before the Revolution, as contemporaries focused increasingly on the Chaussée d'Antin, believed to be the favored neighborhood of speculators enriched during the Revolution. According to one author, "the most lively neighborhood today is that of the Chaussée-d'Antin. Businessmen who lived there during the period of the Revolution, had, by a speculation that became widespread, attracted many people to this area, where familiarity and relationships kept them"[32] Associated with speculation, increasingly seen as the exclusive territory of a new elite of bankers and financiers, the Chaussée d'Antin experienced a rapid growth during the Empire and Restoration. As it grew, it increasingly typified, for Parisians, a certain segment of the elite: more liberal, more open to change and with closer ties to the world of high finance. This was, for Parisians, the elite of the future; the faubourg Saint-Germain was the elite of the past. In between the two, the neighborhoods of the Palais-Royal, the Louvre, and the Tuileries, became the haunt of wealthy tourists, seeking pleasure and instruction amidst the monuments of central Paris.

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[1] Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Tableau de Paris*. 2 volumes. Edited by Jean-Claude Bonnet. (Paris : Mercure de France, 1994 ; originally published 1781-1788) vol. 1, p. 220 ; vol. 2, p. 731.
[2] Mathieu Marraud, La Noblesse de Paris au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Seuil, 2000) ; Natacha Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique : Le Marché du luxe à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998).
[3] Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, "La ville jacobine et balzacienne, » in Roger Chartier et al, *La Ville des temps modernes, de la Renaissance aux Révolutions*, volume 3 of *L'Histoire de la France urbaine*, edited by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1980), p. 551.
[4] Richard Rodger associates mental maps with childhood memories in "Theory, practice and European urban history," in Richard Rodger, ed., *European Urban History: Prospect and Retrospect* (Leicester:

Leicester University Press, 1993), p. 2. Michel de Certeau also emphasizes the importance of personal memories and experiences in conferring meaning to urban spaces in *The Practice of Everyday Life* Trans. Steve Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[5] Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique*, p. 203.
[6] Emile Ducoudray et al, *Atlas de la Révolution Française : Paris* (Paris : Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2000), p. 30.
[7] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 1, pp. 864, 868 ; vol. 2, p. 731.
[8] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 2, p. 74.
[9] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 2, p. 74.
[10] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* vol. 2, p. 73.
[11] Boigne, Comtesse de, *Mémoires de la Comtesse de Boigne, née d'Osmond. Récits d'une tante* 2 volumes (Paris : Mercure de France, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 30-31.
[12] La Marquise de la Tour du Pin, *Recollections of the Revolution and the Empire*, edited and translated by Walter Geer (London : Jonathan Cape, 1921), chapter one ; Nina Lewallen, "The Eighteenth-Century Town House as Domestic Space," unpublished paper, presented at the annual meeting of the Western Society for French History, October 2004, Lubbock, Texas.
[13] Renée Caroline de Froulay, Marquise de Créquy, *Souvenirs de la marquise de Créquy de 1710 à 1803.* 5 volumes (Paris : Garnier frères, 1873), vol. 1, p. 93.
[14] Boigne, *Mémoires de la Comtesse de Boigne*, vol. 1, p. 79.
[15] La Marquise de la Tour du Pin, *Recollections of the Revolution*, p. 140.
[16] Hervé, vicomte de Broc, *Dix ans de la vie d'une femme pendant l'émigration. Adélaïde de Kerjean Marquise de Falaiseau* (Paris : Plon, 1893), p. 153.
[17] Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), pp. 71-8.
[18] Quoted in Broc, *Dix ans de la vie d'une femme*, pp. 290-291.
[19] Adrien Lezay, *Les Ruines ou Voyage en France, pour servir de suite à celui de la Grèce.* 4th edition (Paris : Migneret, an iv), p. 71.
[20] Cointeraux, *Paris tel qu'il étoit à son origine, Paris tel qu'il est aujourd'hui* (Paris : chez l'auteur, an vii), p. 12.
[21] Anon., *Almanach des Embellissemens de Paris, ou Exposé des travaux au moyen desquelles la capitale supassera les villes les plus célèbres* (Paris : Debray, 1808), p. 102.
[22] Bazot, *Nouveau Guide, ou Conducteur des étrangers dans Paris depuis la Restauration* (Paris : Lécrivain, 1816), p. 256.
[23] Danielle Chadych and Dominique Leborgne, *Atlas de Paris: Evolution d'un paysage urbain* (Paris : Parigramme, 1999), pp. 120-21 ; Alfred Fierro, *Dictionnaire du Paris disparu* (Paris : Parigramme, 1998), pp. 42, 122, 159.
[24] André Vaquier, *Table alphabétique du Sommier des Biens Nationaux de la Ville de Paris conservé aux Archives de la Seine* (Paris : Ville de Paris, 1976), pp. 8-9.
[25] Ducoudray et al, *Atlas de la Révolution française*, p. 33.
[26] AmédéeVialay, *La Vente des Biens Nationaux pendant la Révolution française* (Paris : Librairie académique, 1908), p. 303.
[27] M. Gallais, *Moeurs et caractères du dix-neuvième siècle* 2 volumes (Paris. Belin-le Prieur, 1817), vol. 1, p. 130.
[28] T. A. Dulaure, *Histoire physique, civile et morale de Paris depuis 1821 jusqu'à nos jours* 2 volumes (Paris : Librarie des écoles, 1835), vol. 1, p. 124.
[29] Philip Mansel, *Paris between Empires: Monarchy and Revolution, 1814 – 1852* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 209.
[30] Chadych and Leborgne, *Atlas de Paris*, p. 105.
[31] Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Vie élégante ou la formation du Tout Paris, 1815-1848* (Paris : Fayard, 1990), 110.
[32] J-F-C Blainvillain, *Le Pariséum, ou Tableau actuel de Paris* (Paris : P. Mongie, n.d.), 13-14.