

Preface to the American Edition

Paris, 1200 was originally written and published for a French audience. Its immediate reception by the media and eventual sales suggest that it had hit its intended mark. Its success was certainly facilitated by the skill of Béatrice Bonne, who has become my faithful translator and friend. I am now grateful to the Stanford University Press for making it available to an Anglophone audience.

The book was obviously inspired by the millennial celebrations surrounding the year 2000. Amidst a world awash in historical memories, I realized that the Paris I knew best was celebrating an anniversary that would be the closest one to a millennium I would ever experience. For a half-century I had lived in Paris off and on and had immersed myself in the period of French history revolving around the year 1200.

The history of medieval Paris, however, has been written many times and by each generation. The prime obstacle to the enterprise has been the lack of sources for the period preceding 1250. The favored solution to this dilemma has been to select two to three centuries and to fill in the gaps in the early stage from the abundance of sources from the later years. The history of medieval Paris, therefore, has become, invariably, that of the late Middle Ages generally overshadowed by the gloom and miseries in which the medieval period ended, thus confirming the stereotypic conception of a dark Middle Ages. My innovation in this volume is to pick the year 1200 and try not to stray more than ten years before and after the date. This austere optic has the advantages of precision, immediacy and authenticity in exchange for comprehensive and voluminous coverage. Judging by its reception, this strategy has apparently worked for a French audience.

The history of Paris during the reign of King Philip Augustus (1179–1223) retains acknowledged significance to the French today. The year 1200 witnessed the great interdict on Paris (playing out a clash between an assertive

monarchy and an encroaching papacy), an important peace treaty between Philip Augustus and King John of England (which positioned the French monarchy to break out of encircling English domination) and the threat of a master-student strike (that signaled the emergence of the celebrated University of Paris). Although these three events are of interest in themselves and important for French history, they involve broader concerns for an Anglophone audience as well. Here we can also detect the intersection of religious and secular values in medieval culture, the emergence of the centralized, bureaucratic administration that became the modern French state, and the appearance of the University of Paris, which, along with its sister at Bologna in Italy, became the mother of the modern university system as well as the creator of the scholastic method that dominated medieval thinking. Additionally, Paris saw the virtual birth of polyphonic music at Notre-Dame, one of the turning points of musical history, and the creation of the great cathedral itself, which is preeminent among the monuments of Gothic architecture and remains the number one attraction for tourists today. The year 1200 is therefore an occasion to view an important moment in medieval society in which multiple aspects of society come together in concrete, vivid and fascinating detail. Writing *Paris, 1200* for my French friends gave me great pleasure. It is my hope that my native audience will experience some of that pleasure for themselves.

Paris, 15 November 2008