

Élise Boillet, Gaël Rideau (dir.), La visibilité du religieux dans l'espace urbain de l'Europe moderne, Rennes (Presses universitaires de Rennes) 2021, 383 p., ISBN 978-2-7535-8200-2, EUR 26,00.

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In May 2022, a heated political and legal debate erupted in France when the municipal council of Grenoble passed regulations that made wearing a burkini permissible in the city's public swimming pools. *Laïcité* is once again at stake, and the specter of *communautarisme* is haunting the Fifth Republic. This controversy arguably forms a small link in the long chain of struggles over how much public visibility religious groups, whether minoritized or not, can claim in secular societies. In other words, current events corroborate the timeliness of the volume under review. It documents several research workshops held in 2018 and dealing with the visibility of »the religious« (*le religieux*, probably best conceived of in English analogically to the more established expression »the political«) in the urban spaces of early modern Europe. The co-editors, Élise Boillet and Gaël Rideau, have assembled a team of twenty-six contributors, mostly historians but also a few art historians, legal historians, and literary critics. They focus on Catholicism and the major Protestant churches and geographically on France, to a lesser extent on Switzerland and Italy, with a bit of Portuguese and English history sprinkled in as well. Due to the large number of chapters, this review can neither mention nor, a fortiori, do justice to all of them and instead offers merely a few reflections on central premises and recurring themes.

A preface by Boillet as well as an introduction and a conclusion by Rideau frame the collective scholarly undertaking quite impressively. Boillet clarifies that the volume's underlying method consists in interrogating the intertwined logics of religious visibility and invisibility, rather than simply cataloguing the many ways religious presence became visible (as well as audible) in early modern Europe. Rideau, for his part, draws on a wide range of theoretical approaches, ranging from the paradigm of confessionalization to the philosophy of representation elaborated by Louis Marin. In particular, Rideau constructs a chronological arc by using secularization theory. At the time of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, he argues, the idea that *le religieux* ought to be strongly visible served as a common assumption, uniting the various groups that fought to assert their visibility and erase that of their respective adversaries. By contrast, the 18th century saw the rise of Enlightenment thought, certain strands of which put the public presence of religion as such into question. Voltaire immediately comes to mind here, but Rideau reminds us that Catholic Enlightenment reformism, too, targeted practices such as processions and pilgrimages not least because of their supposedly scandalous public pomp.



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On the whole, the chapters bear out this general argument. For example, there is an interesting parallel between Sarah Pflug's contribution on Catholic Fribourg and Fabrice Flückiger's on Reformed Bern in the 16th century. In both of these Swiss cities, early modern elites insistently visualized their religious agendas not just on church façades and other »obviously« religious elements of urban space, but even through the iconography of public water fountains. As Paula Almeida Mendes shows, an extremely high degree of visibility also accrued in Lisbon to reception ceremonies for newly arrived relics, canonization festivals, and pilgrimages – far into the 18th century (and perhaps beyond?). In other places, however, most notably Paris, things took a different turn between 1750 and 1800, as demonstrated in four chapters by Monique Cottret, Maxime Hermant, Laurent Cuvelier, and Philippe Martin respectively. For example, travelers increasingly described the masses celebrated in Parisian churches as a mere curiosity, and in the 1790s, Catholics found themselves forced to defend the very notion of public worship against the radical currents of the French Revolution.

Yet aside from the fact that Paris was not France (let alone Europe), the volume as a whole does not place excessive analytical weight on 18th-century transformations. After all, in celebrating the Cult of Reason in 1793/1794, even the most radical revolutionaries adhered firmly to a much older logic of using the law to promote some forms of publicly visible worship (*culte public*) while banning others. In grasping the *longue durée* of that tradition, Corinne Leveux-Teixeira's chapter is especially helpful as it reflects on medieval canon law's treatment of Jews and »heretics«. Another brilliant piece by Jérémie Foa reconstructs how and why members of religious minorities rendered themselves invisible in order to escape death during the French Wars of Religion. By emphasizing how often persecutors searched personal belongings and domestic spaces to make heresy visible and thus combatable, Foa also troubles the public/private binary that many other contributors treat as rather interchangeable with the visible/invisible one.

That said, the heavy focus on public space makes sense for most contributors as they analyze collective urban identities – the specific topic of the volume's first section, but also a red thread running through the entire book. In this context, the usage of the word »repère« by various contributors provides food for thought. Highlighting urban religious »markers« or »points of reference« repeatedly proves fruitful, whether with regard to the heterodox humanist academy of 16th-century Modena (Lucia Felici), the challenges of reconstituting religious landmarks after earthquakes and other catastrophes (Alain Cabantous), or Huguenots' attempts to reassert their visibility in martyrological representations of Paris (Nicolas Lombart). Perhaps it would have been worth theorizing this recurring notion of »repères«, for example, as central nodes in networks of urban space? Within the volume, Pierre-Antoine Fabre comes closest to such theorizing, albeit without drawing on network-related concepts; rather, he uses Michel de Certeau's dualism of place and space to discuss how Jesuit as well as



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urban identities crystallized around newly founded – or even just projected – Jesuit colleges, both strategically and tactically.

In sum, much like any high-quality collective volume, this one appears as an intriguing tapestry, in which numerous admirable miniatures coexist with the occasional, perhaps inevitable loose thread. In his introduction, Rideau formulates the ambition to showcase »a different approach to public space, urban and religious identity, and the spatialized definition of ways of believing« (p. 25). He does not promise too much.

Frühe Neuzeit – Revolution –
Empire (1500–1815)

DOI:
[10.11588/frrec.2022.3.90531](https://doi.org/10.11588/frrec.2022.3.90531)

Seite | page 3



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