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978-0-521-00974-4 - The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670

Vanessa Harding

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## The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670

This book is an innovative exploration in social history, showing how the practices surrounding death and burial can illuminate urban culture and experience. Vanessa Harding focuses on the crowded and turbulent worlds of early modern London and Paris, and makes use of rich contemporary documentation to compare and contrast their experience of dealing with the dead. The two cities shared many of the problems and pressures of urban life, including high mortality rates, and a tradition of Christian burial, and there are many similarities in their responses to death. The treatment of the dead reveals the communities' preoccupation with the use of space, control of the physical environment, and the ordering of society and social behaviour. But the impact of Reformation called into question many traditional attitudes, and although London was fairly successful in establishing a new consensus, burial of the dead became a serious point of conflict in Paris.

*The Dead and the Living* is as much about London and Paris as about death rituals, and Vanessa Harding emphasises the importance of the demographic, physical and social context within which burial and funerary practices evolve. She looks at actual churchyards, cemeteries and churches, and at the responses of specific communities to burial. Vividly illustrated, this work is a major contribution to the history of the early modern city, and to our understanding of social and cultural change in an urban environment.

VANESSA HARDING is Senior Lecturer in London History at Birkbeck, University of London, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

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*In memory of  
Jill Harding*

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## Acknowledgements

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This study had a very precise and identifiable starting-point, recounted in Chapter 1. After that, it ramified into a number of different enquiries, some of which I have written up elsewhere, before returning to the first questions. The book, therefore, has taken longer to make than the human body allegedly takes to unmake: 'Faith, if he be not rotten before he die . . . he will last you some eight year, or nine year' (*Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 1). Without taking an unsavoury metaphor too far, I can at least claim to have been involved in an equally lengthy process of transformation of material, and ultimately, I hope, the constitution of new meaning.

Over that period I have incurred many debts which I now have pleasure in acknowledging. The book could not have been written without the two periods of study leave granted by Birkbeck College, the first of which was spent in archives in London and Paris and the second, some years later, in writing up in New York. In between came a stint of administration, demanding but not thankless, which certainly delayed progress, but it is fair to add that the book would not have been written without the stimulus of working in such a lively and intellectually productive department, with colleagues and students whose enthusiasm for the study of history never flags. I thank Birkbeck also for the research grants that supported my periods of study leave, and for conference grants to give papers on death and burial to new audiences. I thank the Maison Suger, of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris, for offering me accommodation and facilities during my first study leave, and the Center for Medieval Studies at Fordham University, New York, and especially its director, Maryanne Kowaleski, for giving me an Honorary Visiting Fellowship and much-valued privileges and facilities during the second. A grant from the British Council (Canada) enabled me to give papers in Toronto and Montreal in 1997, where Sandy Johnston and Bob and Anne Tittler were my kind hosts and sponsors.

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## Note

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### *Dates*

New-style dates are used throughout. London and Paris were following the Gregorian and Julian calendars respectively for most of the period covered here, but this has no significant impact on the discussion.

### *Spelling*

Although this book is written primarily with an English-speaking reader in mind, there is inevitably much quotation from French writings. On the whole these are straightforward and have not been translated, after the first appearance of common terms, except where problems in translation contribute to the discussion. In quotations from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French sources I have followed the original spelling but added an accent to distinguish the tonic from the atonic ‘e’ at the end of a word.

### *Money*

Both England and France used a similar currency structure, with the measure of value being the pound (£) or *livre*, made up of 20 shillings (s.) or *sous* (occasionally *sols*), each of which contained 12 pence (d.) or *deniers*. In France this is slightly complicated by the existence of two currencies, the *livre tournois* and *livre paris*, the latter really a relic currency, exchanged against *tournois* at the rate of 16 *sous paris* to the *livre tournois*. In the contemporary sources used for this book, the kind of money in which transactions were made is not always specified, but it may be assumed to be the *livre tournois* unless otherwise stated (see P. Spufford, *Handbook of medieval exchange* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1986), p. 167).

The pound and *livre* were moneys of account, and both countries used gold and silver coins with a range of face values. Their effective monetary

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value varied according to the bullion content and the currency practices of governments. The face value of the English gold noble was 6s. 8d., while the French *écu d'or* was approximately 2 *livres*. The English mark was a notional sum or money of account worth two-thirds of a pound or 13s. 4d.

It is difficult to find any reliable way of establishing equivalents between French and English money for this period. At the end of the fifteenth century, the pound sterling's exchange value was 8 *livres tournois* (based on Spufford, *Handbook of medieval exchange*, pp. 179, 201). For purposes of comparison, however, it is the purchasing value rather than the exchange rate between sterling and the *livre tournois* that matters. Given serious inflation during the period (see S. Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. p. 155; J.-P. Babelon, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris. Paris au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1986), pp. 295–314), this is particularly hard to assess. In 1572, a French royal edict set the daily wage of a master mason and carpenter at 12 *sols tournois*, and that of a labourer at 6 *sols*, but these rates were probably unrealistically lower than the wages really offered (Babelon, *Paris au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 299). The mayor and aldermen set London wages in 1586 at 13d. a day for a mason, tiler, or plaisterer, and 14d. for a joiner. 'Common labourers' were to have 9d. a day (R. H. Tawney and E. Power (eds.), *Tudor economic documents*, 3 vols. (London, 1924), vol. I: *Agriculture and industry*, pp. 369–70). These too may be unrealistically low: cf. J. Boulton, 'Wage labour in seventeenth-century London', *Economic History Review* 49 (1996), 268–90. If they do offer a valid base for comparison, the equivalence rate of the pound sterling and the *livre tournois* was between 1 : 8 and 1 : 11. An alternative source for comparison would be the annual cost of an obit or anniversary commemoration. This appears to have been 10s. in London in 1548 (C. Kitching (ed.), *The London and Middlesex chantry certificate of 1548* (London Record Society 16, 1980), passim). Several obits were founded in the church of Saint-Gervais in Paris in the mid-sixteenth century for 10 or 12 *livres* rent (AN, LL 752, ff. 24–34v). Taken together, these would suggest either that ecclesiastical services were relatively more expensive in Paris than in London – perhaps because more was offered – or that an appropriate rate to compare sums in pounds sterling with sums in *livres tournois* for the mid- to late sixteenth century would be well over 1 : 10 and perhaps close to 1 : 20.

### Measurements

Both England and France measured length in feet (*pieds*) and inches (*pouces*), the French foot being slightly longer than the English. I have

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used those units when quoting directly or indirectly from contemporary sources, but have normally expressed my own calculations in metric measures. One acre = 4047 m<sup>2</sup> or 0.405 ha; 1 yard (English) = 0.912 m; 1 ft (English) = 0.3048 m; 1 *pied* (French) = 0.3086 m. The French *toise* of approximately 1 fathom or 6 ft (1.949 m: *OED*) was used as a measure of both area and volume. For the former, it must have been equivalent to about 3.8 m<sup>2</sup>, and for the latter, to 7.4 m<sup>3</sup>. However, it is clear that many measurements were roughly taken or given, and close accuracy should not be expected. See *OED*; Cassell's *French and English Dictionary* (London, 1881); H. Ballon, *The Paris of Henri IV. Architecture and urbanism* (New York and Cambridge, Mass., 1991), p. 258.

# Abbreviations

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AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
BL	British Library, London
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
BR	burial registers
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CA	churchwardens' accounts
CLRO	Corporation of London Records Office, London
<i>Consistory Court Wills</i>	<i>London Consistory Court Wills, 1492–1547</i> , edn I. Darlington (London Record Society 3, 1967)
GL	Guildhall Library, London
Harl Soc.	Harleian Society
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library, London
Machyn, <i>Diary</i>	<i>The diary of Henry Machyn, citizen and merchant-taylor of London, from A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563</i> , edited by J. G. Nichols (Camden Society 42, 1848)
MoLAS	Museum of London Archaeology Service
PRO	Public Record Office, London
RCHM <i>City of London</i>	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, <i>An Inventory of the historical monuments in London</i> , vol. IV: <i>The city</i> (London: HMSO, 1924)
RDBVP	<i>Registres des délibérations du Bureau de la Ville de Paris</i> , edited by F. Bonnardot, A. Tuetey, P. Guérin et al., 20 vols. (Paris: Histoire Général de Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1883–1990)
VCH <i>London</i>	<i>Victoria history of London: including London within the bars, Westminster and Southwark</i> , vol. I, ed. W. Page (London: Constable, 1911)
VM	Vestry minutes
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