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Arlette Farge, *Vies oubliées: Au cœur du XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2019. 299 pp. €18.00 (pb). ISBN 9782348045738; €11.99 (eb). ISBN 9782348046513.

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Arlette Farge is known to scholars and students of history over the world for sharing her passion for the archives and for giving a voice to the ordinary Parisians of the eighteenth century. [1] Her new book, *Vies oubliées*, is yet another tribute to these “forgotten lives” of individuals lost in the hassle and noise of ancien régime society running its course.

If *Fragile lives* was born of the archives, the same should be said to an even higher degree of *Vies oubliées*. This is not a traditional monograph, but rather a collection of testimonies. Inaugurating the publisher’s new series “À la source,” the volume is, indeed, entirely based on archival fragments, short documents formally unrelated to each other and each provided with explanations and with a brief, contextualizing introduction. In the footnotes, the reader will find suggestions for further reading, including both of Farge’s other works and writings by other scholars on the specific subject of the document in question. The book is thus much more than just a collection of documents once found and once put aside for later use; it also has a pedagogical purpose to inspire new research on unexplored subjects.

In the general introduction, Farge explains her approach, which originates in her fascination for the scraps, the “leftovers” or the *reliquats*, the French term for administrative miscellanea impossible to classify (p. 1). These include documents collected but dismissed as unfit for the researcher’s purpose as well as the unclassifiable and, apparently, unusable materials relegated by archivists into separate boxes. What if, instead of starting with a given question and an appropriate corpus of sources supposed to provide the answers, history writing began with such remnants? From the point of view of source criticism and historical epistemology, the demarche is sensible, since every source is but a fragment. Every document presented in the book is a vivid snapshot of an ephemeral past and most striking for its authenticity and immediacy. Each offers a deep dive into everyday life in eighteenth-century France, mostly Paris, with its worries, sorrows, passions, and joys.

To the reader familiar with Farge’s work, it will come as no surprise that the “leftovers” presented here are, with only a few exceptions, from the records of the French police. There is no list of sources at the end of the book. Instead, the references are provided in footnotes throughout the text. The major part of the sources comes from the archives of the Bastille, but numerous documents from the *greffe criminel* of the Châtelet and other jurisdictions are also used [2], along

with some from the *chansonnier* Clairambault-Maurepas, a collection of eighteenth-century popular songs in ten volumes. Although the records used are mainly those of the police and the judicial authorities, what interests us here are not criminal matters as such, but the light shed by these modest pieces of paper on life and its adversities in the eighteenth century.

The over one hundred stories presented in *Vies oubliées* form a heterogeneous mass, all reflecting specific aspects of life. The book is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to those ephemeral moments in human life we willingly tend to forget as they pass but that have occasionally been recorded for judicial purposes. Here, we meet the demoiselle du Bruls, fabricating conspiracies and writing fiction during her incarceration at the Bastille before being exiled in 1762 (pp. 32-33), and a thief cutting fabric from the dresses of well-to-do ladies while they enter their carriages (p. 34). We also find lists of personal items having belonged to prisoners or to persons found dead in the river, on the road or in the forest (pp. 51-52). Among the more surprising documents is a catalogue compiled by Jean-Paul Focard de Château, first secretary of the *intendance du roi et de sa famille*, of approximately 150 women with whom this Don Juan of the administration had had intercourse in France, England, and Italy (pp. 60-64).

In the second and more extensive part, which deals with intimacy, emotions, and the body, the stories have been grouped according to the following themes: love, womanhood, abandoned newborns, filiation, servants and masters, compassion, health and medicine, public order and troubles, sexual violence, labor and corporations. Again, numerous stories recovered from the archives of the police take the reader directly into the realities of life. The love letters we read here are not rhetorical artifices copied on the epistolary handbooks of the elites, but candid confessions of the heart, with their original errors in spelling and grammar (pp. 103-110, 116). Among the other testimonies, complaints, and denunciations in this part of the book, we find medical prescriptions (pp. 188, 204), anatomical details (pp. 183, 206), and a prisoner's notes of things he has tried to remember in order not to lose his mind (pp. 226-227). We also encounter priests pleading in favor of their parishioners in trouble (pp. 168-171), and we are presented with some of the 20,000 newborns abandoned each year in eighteenth-century Paris by parents unable to care for them. Particularly touching are the scraps of paper attached to these children by their mothers and fathers, who hoped that they might be able to identify their abandoned offspring one day. Such reunions could only happen if the children survived their first years, as infant mortality lingered around thirty per cent for all social classes (pp. 131-143).

Another fascinating dossier concerns healthcare, and it may be of particular interest to historians of medicine and bodily cultures (pp. 181-207). Even more stunning in its brutality is the dossier on sexual violence, rape, and pedophilia; it serves a reminder of the omnipresent threat to innocence even in familiar and supposedly safe surroundings. In 1775, Catherine Chadart, aged ten, was sexually abused by a neighbor when going to the amenities. Five years later, Alexandrine Prévost, seven and a half, was raped by a servant while staying at her grandmother's house (pp. 247-249). In a context where life, health and honor were so easily violated, the struggles of women defending their rights even when they had none are, as noted by Farge (pp. 241-243), particularly impressive.

As an epilogue to the social and economic tensions that constitute the last theme of the enquiry, the volume ends with a letter describing the fall of the Bastille, dated July 17, 1789. This document, quoted in its entirety and needing no further commentary, has a strong symbolical

function given the iniquities and sufferings endured by so many of the individuals with whom the reader has become rapidly acquainted over the nearly three hundred pages of the book.

In *Vies oubliées*, readers familiar with Farge's research will recognize her interest in the everyday preoccupations, sorrows, and intimate concerns of working people, families, caregivers, and lovers. Many of the cases are, if not identical, similar to the ones explored by Farge in her previous books, and for a particularly rewarding experience, *Vies oubliées* can be read in parallel with *Fragile lives*. The cases presented in the new book are, nonetheless, extremely powerful. The expressions of loyalty and devotion between children and parents, servants and their masters, and lovers long separated appeal to our emotions because of their immediacy and universalism, across centuries and physical distance. This type of history of everyday life, discreetly narrated but efficiently brought to life with the help of crude sources quoted directly, serves as a reminder of how much of the past is lost to history as we have been accustomed to writing and reading it. A historian interested in material culture, family life, sexuality, medicine, or emotions will clearly find an abundance of new sources and viewpoints in this book. As an epistemological overture, however, it should be stimulating to any scholar of history.

NOTES

[1] E.g. Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979); Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le désordre des familles: Lettres de cachet au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982); Arlette Farge, *La vie fragile: Violence, pouvoir et solidarité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), trans. *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power, and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *Les logiques de la foule: L'affaire des enlèvements d'enfants en juillet 1750* (Paris: Hachette, 1988); Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1989, trans. *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Arlette Farge, *Le bracelet de parchemin: L'écrit sur soi au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

[2] For a more comprehensive overview of these administrative archives, see Arlette Farge, *La vie fragile. Violence, pouvoir et solidarité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), pp. 344–347.

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