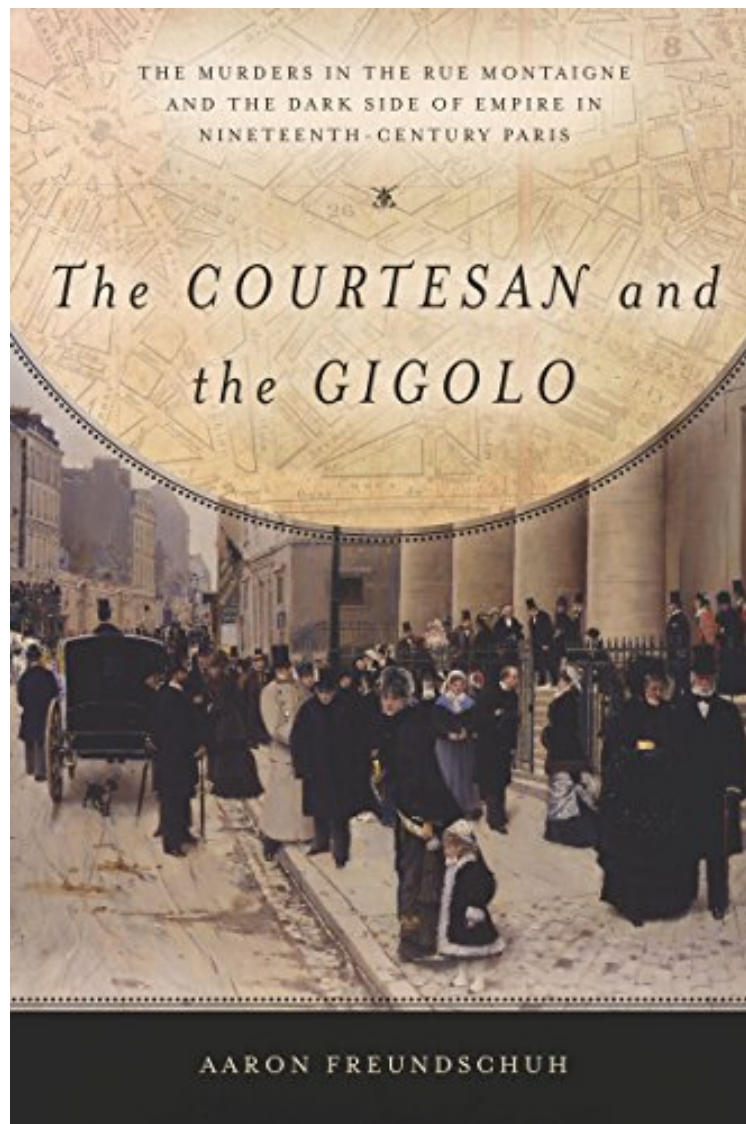


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## The Courtesan and the Gigolo: The Murders in the Rue Montaigne and the Dark Side of Empire in Nineteenth-Century Paris

Aaron Freundschuh

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**Aaron Freundschuh : The Courtesan and the Gigolo: The Murders in the Rue Montaigne and the Dark Side of Empire in Nineteenth-Century Paris** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Courtesan and the Gigolo: The Murders in the Rue Montaigne and the Dark Side of Empire in Nineteenth-Century Paris:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. This is an important and highly entertaining book on many ...By J. C. Marrero  
This is an important and highly entertaining book on many levels. It recounts a triple murder in Paris, close in time to those in taking place in London, now known as the Whitechapel killings by Jack the Ripper. Ironically, the London killer, whoever he was, has kept his notoriety intact by apparently never being caught and punished. By contrast, the Paris murders of a high class courtesan, her maid and the maid's child quickly yielded an arrest, much to the satisfaction of the high and low-brow French and international press. The arrested man was Henri Pranzini, a dashing, multi-lingual sophisticate, born in Egypt to Italian parents. People saw in Pranzini what they wanted. To many ladies of his acquaintance, he was handsome, charming and apparently very desirable company. To the French public, he represented a mysterious and dangerous product of their new Near East colonies. Although wholly of Italian origin, Pranzini was soon cast as a sort of "empire strikes back" character. To the press, the gruesome murders were an opportunity to feed the public's appetite for the sexual and sensational that has not yet been sated. Pranzini's end was predictable but the macabre abuse of his corpse elicited cries for reform in how the remains of the guillotined could be used in medical schools and police laboratories. The author presents the evidence against Pranzini and invites the reader to decide whether he committed the murders or simply had fenced the stolen jewels that had been removed from the victims' apartment. Prior to his arrest, to those who knew him, Pranzini was an amiable bon vivant with highly sticky fingers. The violence of the crimes (shades of O.J.) suggests a crime of passion but without evidence that Pranzini had any emotional investment in the victims. My tentative conclusion is that Pranzini was a male version of Madame Bovary; someone who believed that he was born beneath his station and took lots of dangerous short-cuts to rise within the ranks of demi-monde society. If so, he paid dearly for his days as a kept man. Although the author does not mention it, Pranzini is remembered today mostly for a connection with the young St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897). In what became her best-selling autobiography Therese described how she set out, through prayer, to petition Heaven for Pranzini's last minute conversion. To the surprise of many, the defiant Pranzini asked for a cross to kiss just before he was guillotined. Ironically, for many, Pranzini has become a footnote to the story of a saint, rather than just the plausible murderer of a courtesan and her household. It's up to the reader to decide whether Henri Pranzini was "Jacques the Ripper" or "the Fall Guy."

The intrigue began with a triple homicide in a luxury apartment building just steps from the Champs-Élysées, in March 1887. A high-class prostitute and two others, one of them a child, had been stabbed to death—the latest in a string of unsolved murders targeting women of the Parisian demimonde. Newspapers eagerly reported the lurid details, and when the police arrested Enrico Pranzini, a charismatic and handsome Egyptian migrant, the story became an international sensation. As the case descended into scandal and papers fanned the flames of anti-immigrant politics, the investigation became thoroughly enmeshed with the crisis-driven political climate of the French Third Republic and the rise of xenophobic right-wing movements. Aaron Freundschuh's account of the "Pranzini Affair" recreates not just the intricacies of the investigation and the raucous courtroom trial, but also the jockeying for status among rival players—reporters, police detectives, doctors, and magistrates—who all stood to gain professional advantage and prestige. Freundschuh deftly weaves together the sensational details of the case with the social and political undercurrents of the time, arguing that the racially charged portrayal of Pranzini reflects a mounting anxiety about the colonial "Other" within France's own borders. Pranzini's case provides a window into a transformational decade for the history of immigration, nationalism, and empire in France.

2017 Gold Medal Winner in True Crime, Independent Publisher Book Awards  
From The New York Times Book Review: "Aaron Freundschuh rings the graveyard church bells for a refined, if corrupt fin de siècle world that passed away with a sigh. When the Paris police prefect got word in March 1887 of a triple homicide on the Rue Montaigne, he knew what he had -- yet another senseless murder of women from the Parisian demimonde. But this time attention had to be paid, because one of the victims, Madame de Montille, was a courtesan belonging to "an ethereal rank" of kept women known for their professional skills and fabulous wealth. The level of butchery linked the killings to a series of unsolved homicides that began eight years earlier. Had Jack the Ripper not made his dramatic appearance a year later, Freundschuh convincingly argues, the courtesan killings would have entered into the historical annals." "Reading like a thriller novel, this meticulously researched account goes beyond the fait divers by bringing to the fore a complex interplay of political and social forces in a changing city at a time when national identity was challenged." (EuropeNow--Editor's Pick)  
About the Author: Aaron Freundschuh is Assistant Professor of History at Queens College, City University of New York.