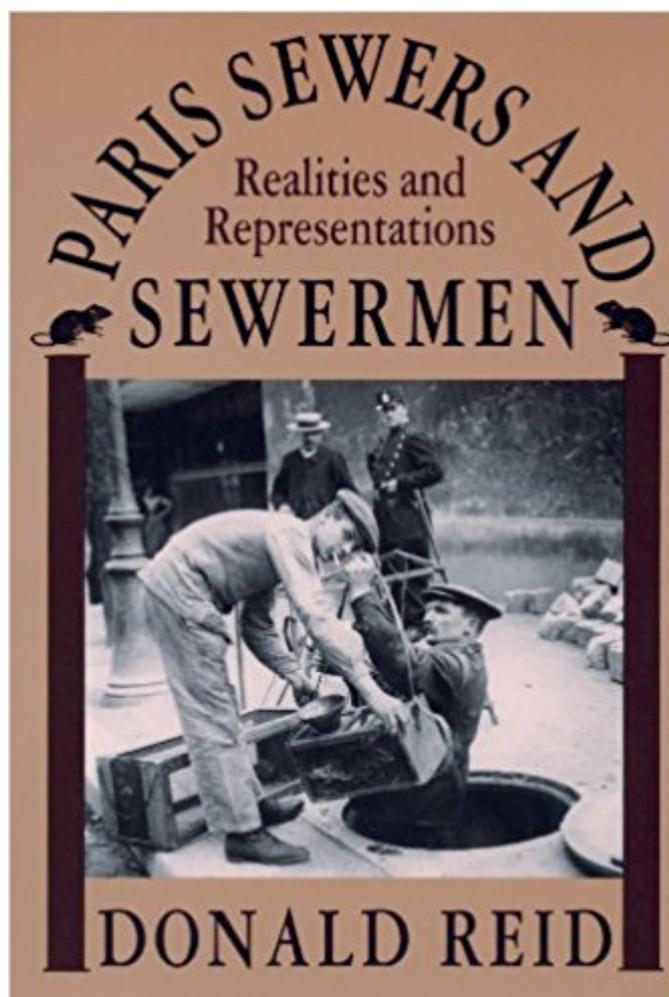


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# Paris Sewers And Sewermen: Realities And Representations



## Synopsis

The expansion of the Paris sewer system during the Second Empire and Third Republic was both a technological and a political triumph. The sewers themselves were an important cultural phenomenon, and the men who worked in them a source of fascination. Donald Reid shows that observing how such labourers as cesspool cleaners and sewer men present themselves and are represented by others is a way to reflect on the material and cultural foundations of everyday life. The author has been awarded the Dexter Prize of the Society for the History of Technology, and has also been accorded an Honourable Mention by the 1992 Abel Wolman Award Committee of the Public Works Historical Society.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is a history of the Paris sewer system, replete with the symbolism entailed by the sewer through the ages. It is divided into 3 parts: the sewers and their development, sewer men, and the sewer men's union. Reid traces the development of the sewer system from the times when waste collected in open pools, through the draining of the pools into the Seine and the eventual laws requiring private buildings to connect to the sewers. From almost the very beginning, the sewers needed workers to clear the sediment away and keep the sewage flowing, and Reid explains how the work of the sewer men, as the laborers in the sewer are called, changed over the course of time. Reid also discusses the sewer men's union and the efforts they made not only to assure the security

and well-being of the workers, but also to take care of the workers' family members. The book is illustrated throughout with black-and-white photographs and drawings. Sources are referenced through extensive end notes. There is also an index. For Reid, the history of the sewer is found not only in the tunnels themselves and their dates of construction, but also in literature, particularly Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and other similar works where the sewer has powerful symbolic meanings. While the book is quite interesting from the point of view of public health and city planning, it can be hard to follow at times for those who are not fluent in French, or not thoroughly familiar with Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century French literature and history. Reid leaves many quotes and key terms untranslated from French, assuming that the reader will be able to understand their meanings precisely.

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