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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Christopher R. Friedrichs. *The Early Modern City, 1450-1750 (A History of Urban Society in Europe).* London: Longman, 1995. $96.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-01321-6; $49.60 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-582-01320-9.

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Published on H-Urban (July, 1995)

Tracing the history of the early modern city from 1450 to 1750 in western, central and eastern Europe is the subject of this book. But more than a survey of European urban society it is a comprehensive overview of the way countless people in early modern cities actually lived. It is a book about the social history of the early modern city, where the city in its physical form, its institutions and the forces that threatened it are treated as a framework for living. "Of the living of a dozen generations of human beings [...] who struggled to survive [...] within the limited confines of a world not yet affected by the dazzling technological transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (p.15). This book, as the author puts it, "hopes to recapture something of the collective experience of men, women and children who lived in the European city of the early modern era [...] It will try to tell their story" (p.7).

Given this premise, the author's direct and involving writing style is a welcome surprise: "The holiest person in the Spanish town of Avilla in the mid-sixteenth century was an illiterate woman named Mari Diaz. Originally from a nearby village, Mari Diaz had moved to Avilla..." (p.61); "One day in June of the year 1613, the old German town of Worms on the Rhine received two most distinguished visitors. The 16-year-old Prince-Elector of the Palatinate, Frederick V, and his new bride..." (p.43); "Lienhard Romig was a tanner in the German city of Schwabisch Hall. Born in Ansbach in 1504, Romig..." (p.114); "The ducal procession in Venice was one of the great spectacles of early modern Europe. Travellers to Venice always hoped to witness a procession, and those who stayed a few weeks were bound to be rewarded..." (p.182); Christina Bobingerin was desperate. She was 19 years old in the summer of 1601, a peasant girl from the village of Goggingen just outside the walls of Augsburg..."(p.214). The chapters on "City and Church", "City and State", "Life and Death", "Power and Pride" and "Poverty and Marginality" respectively begin this way, thus encapsulating in stories taken from communal records the subject that will be treated. The use of vivid local detail enriches the whole book. The text flows as a chronicle, where major topics are intermingled with details from everyday life. Such a discursive method plunges the reader directly into the historical reality of the period and lets him or her experience the atmosphere of early modern city life.

But if the subject matter and style combine perfectly to make for a fascinating read, the rigorous social analysis is by no means ignored or put aside.

The five chapters of Part One define the framework, "The City in Context", and outline the general parameters which distinctively mark urban society: physical, political, religious, economic, demographic. Urban life and the city's inhabitants are the principal actors of the rest of the book. The themes around which their story will be narrated are taken from the microstories of modern historiography: gender, famine, patterns of family life, pestilence, civil ritual, prostitution, clocks and time, vagrancy, etc.

Part Two, "The City as a Social Arena", examines the social organization of early modern cities. Emphasis is put not only on groups identified according to their economic and political function (such as in the chapters "Work and Status" or "Power and Pride"), but also on those emerging out of networks of kinship or emargination (such as in the chapters "Family and Household", "Poverty and Marginality"). Yet there are categories like gender or age which are introduced in order to offer a transversal reading of social structure. In fact, Friedrichs privileges a transversal understanding of urban society more than a rigid, orthodox, social division into rich and poor, patricians and commoners, citizens and outsiders. It is the multiplicity of social identities - "age, gender, family, neighbourhood, occupation, civic status and religion" (p.14) - to which each individual belongs that interests him most. And it is on this basis that he describes the cities as a social arena in Part Two.

Part Three, "The City in Calm and Crisis", follows this line. The first chapter describes the functioning,

organization and everyday routine of the early modern cities, addressing a number of diverse issues such as time-cycles, public festivities and executions, grain prices or water consumption and urban administration. The other two chapters describe urban life challenged by external forces - famine, disease and natural disasters, "warfare or the assumed machinations of the community's secret enemies" (p.303) - and by internal conflicts.

Once more, these chapters are not intended to offer an understanding of urban life, in times of tranquillity or crisis and conflict, along a vertical line of interpretation; that is an arena of participation or control and domination. On the contrary, Friedrichs' account of urban routine and its eruption is based on the interaction of the key concepts of community and power; that is on "how the exercise of power and the pursuit of collective goals interacted in shaping" (p.15) everyday rhythms of activity or urban conflicts in the early modern city.

The concluding chapter, in the same way as the opening one, draws the lines of argument together and does so in an evocative way. It takes us on a walk through the streets of an early modern city, not as travellers but as the inhabitants experienced their city, "stepping across the threshold of his or her home right into the bustling street" (p.5).

Friedrichs' book is an outstanding survey of the character of early modern cities, of the way they functioned and of their inhabitants' lifestyles: aspects which, as the author shows, remained remarkably unchanged during the three centuries of the early modern era, The book's wealth of material drawn from dozens of European communities is completed by a guide to suggested readings.

The author's scope - his investigation of the countless variations of the way people acted or interacted, of the way urban space was used, urban administration organized or local customs differed, stressing, despite all these differences and national diversities, that "the towns of early modern Europe all belonged to a common urban civilization" (p.331) - is fully convincing. Such a book can not be omitted from the reading list of history students and will be a fascinating reading even for non specialists.

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Citation: Heleni Porfyriou. Review of Friedrichs, Christopher R., *The Early Modern City, 1450-1750 (A History of Urban Society in Europe).* H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. July, 1995.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=108

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