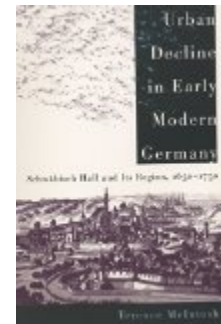


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Terence McIntosh. *Urban Decline in Early Modern Germany: Schwabisch Hall and Its Region, 1650-1750*. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. xix + 317 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5063-3.

Reviewed by Pien Versteegh (Independent Scholar)  
Published on H-Urban (September, 1997)



During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) the formerly flourishing towns in South Germany stagnated or declined. Why these small and medium-sized cities did not recover the contraction of the war and the consequences of their failure are the main questions of *Urban Decline*. To solve these issues Terence McIntosh (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) narrows his research down to a micro-study of one town in South Germany: Schwabisch Hall. In order to present a clearer picture of the different economic and demographic trajectories towns and cities could follow, he compares his findings with those already published about other urban communities in South Germany. In this fashion, he puts his study in a regional context. Additionally, he critically reexamines other urban studies as from Christopher Friedrichs, Mack Walker, Gerd Wunder and Jan de Vries (p. 1).

The author rejects what he calls the "far too simplistic notion that South Germany's economic decline resulted from a shift in Europe's economic center of gravity from the Mediterranean to the North Sea and English Channel" (p. 5). According to him, the stagnation of the cities can also be ascribed to immediate causes such as the expansion of the rural industry elsewhere in Central Europe, mercantilistic policies of territorial states and wars. Still, according to McIntosh, there is another reason why towns in South Germany declined. He claims that changes in intraregional town-country relations are a major factor in urban stagnation. His argument is that towns in South Germany produced mainly for local markets and did not depend on supra-regional market forces. Therefore, intraregional town country relations are incorporated into a more general account of the factors contributing to the decline of small and medium-sized

cities. In this way, his study is put in the framework of urbanization processes across Europe. McIntosh describes the interaction between urban and rural sectors, and inter- and intraregional forces.

This book is a detailed micro-study and based on a large amount of quantitative material. As this type of research is very labor intensive and time-consuming, McIntosh limits his study to the following issues: competition between urban and rural producers, marriage patterns and migration to the town. Unfortunately, he does not explain why he chose these topics and not others, as he himself suggests when he sets out to examine, "the provision of the town with food and raw materials, the ownership of rural property by burghers, the web of credit relations between town and country, cultural exchanges between peasant and burgher, and urban political authority over rural subjects" (p. 8) and migration from Schwabisch Hall to the country.

The book starts with an introduction in which the author explains his goals. Chapter One deals with the framework: the economic, political and religious history of Schwabisch Hall. This section continues with a detailed description of the book's principal source, the *Beet* payments. These are the annual records of wealth tax paid by the burgher in Schwabisch Hall and form the main source of his analysis of the town's social and occupational structures. McIntosh also discusses the development and pitfalls of using these records. He criticizes Gerd Wunder who has been studying the decline of Schwabisch Hall as well and, according to McIntosh, has overestimated the wealth of its burgher because he overlooked certain changes in the *Beet*. Chapter Two deals with the structure of the urban economy, followed

by Chapter Three about the ruralization of craft production. In these chapters, long-term developments in population size, and occupational and wealth structures of Schwabisch Hall are portrayed. In Chapter Three, some of the most important findings are addressed. The author argues that increasing competition from the countryside has affected the town's class structure. The competition from rural craftsmen weakened mostly the position of the urban artisans who were already at the lowest level of the wealth hierarchy. The ones at the top were spared as they did not suffer so much from rural competition. This resulted in an intensification of class differences and the formation of an urban lower middle class.

The book continues with a chapter on wealth mobility, the patterns of wealth accumulation and decumulation. Almost all households accumulated wealth in the course of the life-cycle, only the poorer ones less than the wealthier. So class differences therefore were intensified even more. Class is defined here as wealth. The reason that McIntosh limits class to wealth lies in his choice of sources and research group, the burgher. In Chapter Five, marriages are discussed, and in Chapter Six migration patterns. Both sections deal with aspects of demographic behavior that affected urban population growth and form a pair. Here he examines marriages between people from the country and the town and migration patterns from the country to the town. These topics are part of the interaction between country and town. The author claims that late marriage patterns and slow migration streams to town account for the sluggish demographic recovery of Schwabisch Hall. The migration stream to Schwabisch Hall changed in size, course and composition after the Thirty Years' War. Rural artisans started to move to the town, which increased competition with urban artisans. Protective measures by the town and guilds could not stop this. As these migrants could obtain citizenship through marriage, McIntosh suggests that their marriage has been a strategy to acquire citizenship. He ends his book with the conclusion that for Schwabisch Hall, as for most towns in South Germany, the distinction between town and country was declining. Competing rural artisans, a major cause of the town's economic difficulties, obtained citizenship and the town was invaded "by the enemy" (p. 192). In the detailed appendixes he describes meticulously his methods and technique of research.

One of this work's virtues is the research and the sources on which the study is based. The principal source, the *Beet*, is fascinating for its dimension and information. McIntosh uses the *Beet* records to measure

the development of household wealth and to reconstruct occupational structures. The way he assembles his data sets is described at great length in Chapter One and the appendix. With this material he constructs three cohorts of complete tax histories of households established from 1672 through 1681 and whose first *Beet* payment observation is in 1682, households established from 1682 through 1691 and whose first *Beet* payment observation is in 1692, and households established from 1692 through 1701 and whose first *Beet* payment observation is in 1702. He examines the development in wealth of these households over a period of fifty-three years. In this fashion he tracks accumulation and decumulation of wealth over a life-cycle. Unfortunately this source limits his study group since only tax payers are included. Those who could not pay taxes and non-citizens are not included, which narrows the scope of this investigation. He supplements the data from the *Beet* with information from church and guild records, obituaries in parish death registers, and town protocols. As this research is mostly quantitative, its scope is limited. The author admits that with the sources he has been using not all questions can be answered (p. 154). I wonder if non-quantitative material such as diaries or travel stories are available so his study would have become more comprehensive. Another virtue of this book is that he adds another component to urbanization processes: the interaction between country and town. In *Urban Decline* he convinces the reader that fading borders between town and country count for the stagnation of Schwabisch Hall and adds another component to the list of causes of urban decline. Since he includes studies of neighboring towns, his case study rises to a regional level. I do not always agree with the way he processes his data, as he includes some data that make the results unnecessarily confusing. In the introduction he claims "By detailing the changing social and occupational composition of the migrants who settled in Schwabisch Hall, it radically overturns the accepted interpretation of urban stagnation's supposed effects on migration patterns" (p. 9), which is, in my opinion, slightly exaggerated.

Nonetheless, *Urban Decline* is an engaging micro-study that adds an interesting viewpoint to urbanization processes in Germany. Those who want to study early modern urbanization will find it very useful.

#### Bibliography:

Christopher R. Friedrichs. "Capitalism, Mobility and Class Formation in the Early Modern German City." *Past and Present* 69 (November 1975): 24-49.

-. *Urban Society in an Age of War: Nordlingen, 1580-1720*. Princeton, 1979.

Jan de Vries. *The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis, 1600-1750*. Cambridge, 1976.

-. *European Urbanization, 1500-1800*. Harvard Studies in Urban History. Cambridge, Mass., 1984.

Mack Walker. *German Home Towns: Community,*

*State, and General Estate, 1648-1871*. Ithaca, 1971. Gerd Wunder. *Die Burger von Hall: Sozialgeschichte einer Reichsstadt, 1216-1802*. Forschungen aus Wurttembergisch Franken, vol. 16. Sigmaringen, 1980.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-urban>

**Citation:** Pien Versteegh. Review of McIntosh, Terence, *Urban Decline in Early Modern Germany: Schwabisch Hall and Its Region, 1650-1750*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1315>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).