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Historical Atlas of European Cities: Iberian Peninsula

This review for H-Urban is part of a three-review project on the publication of the first two volumes of the *Historical Atlas of European Cities*. The characteristics and scope of this international project supported by the Centre de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona (CCCB), has already been the object of considerations in the reviews prepared by P.Y. Saunier,[1] as well as by the comments that F.J. Monclus realized, in the name of the authors, to these reviews. My purpose here is to complete the presentation to the subscribers of H-Urban the results of this project and to impel, once more, to recognize the important task realized by the team of the CCCB and their collaborators in the elaboration of the atlases. The difficulties in the editorial implementation of this project need to be highlighted, and I want to show the confidence in the contribution that the digital and on-line versions of this vast editorial work may offer to the current contemporary research in European urban history.

Let us now examine the contents of the volume devoted to the Iberian Peninsula. The *Atlas* is the result of the joint effort made of thirty scholars from both countries, Spain and Portugal. The disciplinary alignment of the contributors (twelve architects, ten historians, and six geographers, joined by an economist and a sociologist) is also relevant to the state of urban history in these countries. At this point, it is important to underline the fact that in Spain and Portugal, generally geographers and architects—not historians—have been the ones that developed research in urban history mainly for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, proof of the principal attention

devoted to this historical period in the *Atlas*. [2] However the coordination of this team of professionals achieves the task of gathering a systematic account of the current state of the historical knowledge on Iberian cities, from its origins up to the present.

The range of cities covered in this volume is a good sample for representing the scope of historical urbanization in the Iberian countries. The selection of the cities, that an object of important comments in the previous reviews of this project, shows a comprehensive account of the development and transformation of the urban fabric in the history of both countries. The Iberian cities presented in the *Atlas* have significance from capital cities, such as Madrid and Lisbon, important commercial and later industrial centers such as Barcelona, Porto, Sevilla, Valencia or Bilbao, together with other important regional and provincial centers such as Zaragoza, Valladolid, Malaga and Granada.

As the authors say, the problems raised by the selection of cities are important at the lower end of the list, create difficulties, mainly from a lack of historical studies and scholarship available to do the work. If, for Spain the selection of Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, Valencia, and since the second half of the nineteenth century Bilbao, is clear; and the representation of Portuguese cities by Lisbon and Porto is also unproblematic, the selection of the other four cities created some difficulties for the directors of the project. If one goes deeper into the criteria for the selection of the cities represented in the *Atlas*, we can fully realize that it is concerned mainly with nineteenth

century perspectives. In fact each of the cities selected in the project are situated, since 1860, at the highest level in size and population of the peninsula's urban hierarchy. From this point of view, it is easy to feel that one missed something in the way thinking about the different types of Spanish historical urban structure: important cities like Toledo, Salamanca, Santiago de Compostela or Cáceres are not represented at all. This omission is important if one wants to keep an evolutionary picture of historical urban change, and if one wants to present and discuss a more detailed analysis of different urban configurations through time.

Looking backwards, there is only one work available (aside from the great synthesis by Lavedan or Gutkind, and the works of García Bellido et al. in the history of Spanish town planning [3]) to which one can compare the task planned by the CCCB team in the nineties. When Oskar Jürgens published his broad 1926 study of Spanish cities, [4] the situation and urban configuration of Spain seemed, to him, to be valuable not only for its artistic and historical aspects left from the past (the things that he expected to find) but also by the contemporary transformations and modernization carried out since the second half of the nineteenth-century. This fact was recognized by Jürgens in the selection of cities that he wrote about. In this sense it is possible to find one next to one another different typologies of urban configuration, relevant to the Spanish urban history. So, next to the cities represented in the *Atlas* one can find without a rank-size criterion, relevant Spanish cities for the historical understanding of the urban fabric like Salamanca, Burgos, Avila, Segovia, Leon, Santiago de Compostela, Toledo, El Escorial or, later on, San Sebastian; not to speak of Cáceres, missed in both works.

But considering the scope of the *Atlas*, which intends to collect, spread and produce a vast amount of information on cities and help to and make understandable the history of each city and the evolution of the urban fabric, as both too simple and too ambitious, as F.J. Monclus did; the results are quite satisfactory. The presentation and the hierarchical organization of the work denote some of the guidelines that accompanied the selection of these cities. If one attends to the organization of the volume, it is easy to observe that the evolution and characteristics of the Spanish and Portuguese urban system, in a comparative perspective, is fully represented in the *Atlas*.

Before getting involved in the presentation of the different cities there is another important issue to be described on the iconographic composition of the atlases,

something already commented in the previous reviews of this series. The difficulties in the implementation of a coherent graphical apparatus (pictures, graphs, maps, photographs, etc.) for the *Atlas* are at work on this point, yet for a historical and comparative perspective. From this point of view I agree with F.J. Monclus when he said that "the aim of homogeneity has been essential even if some scales of the maps are different. Problems of format and size of the pages explains part of the result, but we have redrawn maps at similar scales when it was necessary in order to make comparisons possible." The result, if one looks at the two printed issues from the series, is quite good: the format of the volumes, the clear presentation of the contents and the organization of the different periods of time analyzed by the different authors are embedded in a highly homogeneous whole.

This is important in an atlas where text and image must enter in a dialogue for a clear understanding of the subject. So, in the *Atlas* texts and images are constantly referring to one another, even if devoted to two different countries the desired homogeneity and comparison has been supplied by excellent drawings of new thematic maps and plans about demography, economic activities, social composition, etc., for the whole urban system, as well as for the different cities. The success in the cartographic elaboration is mainly due to the technical support that, since the beginning of the project, the directors have found in the work of different departments of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.

Another aspect which needs to be highlighted is the use of pictures, drawings and historical photography in the *Atlas*. The availability of collections of drawings varies for every historical period and from country to country. For Spain one can find the views of cities made by Anton van den Wyngaerd in the 16th century, and for the Spanish and French case the beautiful birds-eye views that Alfred Guesdom made from his fire-balloon in the 19th century. However, it has been difficult to find something similar in the illustrations devoted to the two Portuguese cities.[5] In any case, the effort and the imagination devoted to give a wide sample of graphic support to the cartography is very successful, mainly by the vast available material legated by artists and photographs for the graphic history of every city.

To examine the contents of the *Iberian Atlas*, it begins with a general introduction by David-Sven Reher, professor of historical demography at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, on the urban system of the Peninsula which is, as far as I know, the first attempt to develop to-

gether a systematic account on the process of urbanization in both Iberian countries. Following a quantitative perspective, dealing mainly with a demographic and economic approach, the author gives us a picture of the urban growth of Spain and Portugal highly concerned with the different regional and national paths of urbanization. As he says: from Cadiz to Barcelona, that is the Mediterranean side of the Peninsula, we are in front of one of the most populated urban network of Europe by the second half of the 19th century. In short, the text, fully supported on rich cartographic material, provides a good synthesis for Iberian urbanization from the 16th century up to the present.

As one can see in the analysis devoted to the different cities in both countries, in every historical period, there is a number of common elements which need to be highlighted to allow a general framework to go beyond a mere description of the evolution and transformation of the urban fabric. The common trends to be found in the urban development of the Iberian cities ranges from a Roman foundation, Muslim domination and the shaping of the medieval urban system. These facts, presented in every one of the cities analyzed in the *Atlas* give way to a more detailed understanding of the urban fabric in early modern and modern times. That is, the transformation of the urban structures after the constitution of the great monarchies that characterized the history of both countries.

The deep impact of the monarchies in the urbanization process is important in the capital cities. Lisbon and especially Madrid derive all their modern urban configuration from being the capital cities of absolutist regimes. But not only the capital cities, as one can see, but the whole urban system is affected and transformed by this very fact of centralization: the fortune of Muslim Granada, the different role developed by Sevilla, before and after losing the monopoly of the commerce with America, the changes in the municipal statutes of Zaragoza, Valencia or Barcelona after the attempts of territorial homogeneization under Borbonic rule at the beginning of the 18th century, or the leading industrial and regional role played by Malaga or Bilbao in the nineteenth century.

However, its hard to find any reference to the role played by the State in the process of urbanization of each country. If Spain and Portugal are considered to be two of the earliest and most centralized countries of Europe, the urban configuration have some connection to the prerogatives of their centralized administration in modern

times. The study of Portuguese cities seems to be more aware of such political developments. One misses some general reference to the administrative organization of urban growth, or the statutes that each city had within different political configurations. In this view, there are some good sources available as the geographical and statistical work of Pascual Madoz, or the topographical and cadastral efforts made by Francisco Coello, among others in the nineteenth century involved in a process of institution building around the construction of the liberal State for regulating every aspect, even the urban ones, of modernization.[6]

Agreeing with Braudel that a city is not a city in itself, but grows from its economic place within a system of cities, one may ask for a more general understanding of the urbanization process. In this context the models of Pombal and Cerda which are, if no more, the principal contributors to the shaping of a specific and characteristic Portuguese and Spanish urbanization, are paradigmatic. In the process of reconstruction of Lisbon, after the earthquake of 1755, Pombal personally took control of the evolution of these works. His vision of the city and the State were fully represented in the model that he defined for the future urbanization of the city. So, when Porto began to perceive the necessities for its urban transformation a decade later, it had to be managed from the governmental experience of Lisbon as well as with the new concepts and methods raise.

For Spain a similar situation is to be found one century later. After the difficult development of the works of urban transformation developed in Barcelona by Ildefonso Cerda since 1859, the State—which had to manage similar experiences in other cities, even in Madrid, the capital city—decided to build upon his work a legislative program to regulate the works of urban growth to avoid the problems experienced with the *Ensanche* of Barcelona. Since then, the public intervention in the transformation of the city took and homogenized pattern in many different cities: on the one hand the *Ensanche de Poblacion* (urban extension), and on the other hand the transformation of the city center was mainly conceived in terms of urban reform.[7] Urban transformation in the nineteenth century, leaving aside important and interesting local initiatives, had to deal with this face of its national political administration. In the Spanish case the development of public works for the transformation of the urban structure has to be situated in this general context. The urban experience of Madrid, Valencia, Bilbao, Sevilla, Zaragoza, etc., derives, in many ways, from this fact.

If this was clear for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, recent times are more difficult to be interpreted in this terms. From the *Atlas* one can see that the twentieth century is the consolidation of the paradigm of urban transformation and intervention developed in the nineteenth century. That is to say, from a morphological point of view, recent times achieve in the great majority of cities the regularization of many aspects of urban life that the nineteenth century left without solution. But from another perspective, one can not avoid the feeling that something changed in the way of managing urban transformation.

The increasing importance of local developments is restoring the confidence of many cities in developing their own projects, with a limited intervention or control by the State. I agree with P.Y. Saunier when he said that the representation of the nineties in the atlases seemed to be excerpted from a promotional local booklet, which could be also true for the information on the Olympic Games in Barcelona, or the International Exhibitions of Sevilla in 1992 or Lisbon in 1998. I would add that from a historical perspective, and looking for example at Bilbao, it is possible to think that we are now assisting since many times ago, with the permission of Mike Davis, [8] to a new renaissance of cities and urban life.

Notes

[1]. See Vol.II on H-Urban 27 Dec. 1996 <<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/infoserv/urban/hma/hurban/1996q4/0238.html>> and Vol. I on H-Urban 15 May 1997 <<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/infoserv/urban/hma/hurban/1997q2/0128.html>>. There is also a response to this review by Javier Monclus at <<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/infoserv/urban/hma/hurban/1997q2/0166.html>>

[2]. See J.L. Oyon, "Spain" and M. Texeira, "Portugal" in R. Rodger, ed., *European Urban History: Prospect and Retrospect*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).

[3]. See P. Lavedan, *Histoire de l'Urbanisme*, 3 vols., (Paris: H. Laurens, 1926-1952); E.A. Gutkind, *International History of City Development*, 7 vols., (New York: The Free Press, 1964-1972); and A. Garcia Bellido et al., *Resumen Historico del Urbanismo en Espana*, (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios de Administracion Local, 1954).

[4]. O. Jurgens, *Ciudades Espanolas: Su desarrollo y configuracion urbanistica*, (Madrid: Ministerio para las Administraciones Publicas, 1992); (Spanish translation of *Spanische Staedte: Ihre bauliche entwicklung undausgestaltung*, [Hamburg: Kommissions Verlag L. Friederichsen & Co., 1926]).

[5]. See F. Quiros Linares, *Las Ciudades Espanolas a mediados del siglo XIX: Vistas de ciudades espanolas de Alfred Guesdon, planos de Francisco Coello*, (Valladolid: Editorial Ambito, 1991).

[6]. Specially P. Madoz, *Diccionario Geografico-Estadistico-Historico de Espana y sus posesiones de ultramar*, 16 vols., (Madrid: Imprenta del Diccionario Geografico-Estadistico-Historico de D. Pascual Madoz 1845-1850; reprinted as a facsimile edition in Almedralejo, Biblioteca Santa Ana, 1989-1993) and the works of the Comision General de Estadistica del Reino; for a general overview of this process see: J.I. Muro, F. Nadal y L. Urteaga, *Geografia, Estadistica y Catastro en Espana, 1856-1870*, (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1996).

[7]. See M. Bassols, *Genesis y Evolucion del Derecho Urbanistico Espanol, 1812-1956*, (Madrid: Editorial Montecorvo, 1973); and especially L. Coudroy de Lille, *L'Ensanche de Poblacion en Espagne: Invention d'une pratique d'amenagement urbain, 1840-1890*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Paris: Unversite de Paris X-Nanterre, 1994).

[8]. M. Davis, "Urban renaissance and the spirit of postmodernism," *New Left Review*, 151 (1985): 106-113.

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