H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lübken, Jordan Sand, eds. *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. vii + 409 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-299-28384-1.

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Published on H-Urban (November, 2013)
Commissioned by Alexander Vari

Urban Fires in World History

Urban historians are familiar with the ways that fire hazards have affected city planning and development in the past, often citing the well-known fires of London (1666), Chicago (1871), and San Francisco (1906) to make this point. In this global comparative study, the authors use fire hazards in cities as a framework for understanding the formation of the modern world. They show that at one point or another since the fifteenth century, nearly all city dwellers have had to confront and adapt to the risk of fire. Whether that experience involved extinguishing a conflagration, purchasing a fire insurance policy, or drafting new fire codes, humans have been forced to interact with this potentially deadly element. The well-crafted case studies contained in this book examine how fire, more than any other hazard, cannot be divorced from its social and political context, and therefore is an ideal avenue to explore human-environment interactions.

This book covers fires in eighteen cities and regions from the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Urban fires, due to their anthropogenic nature, allow the authors to unearth the intricate economic and social contexts that spurred conflagrations. The editors divide the book into three distinct but overlapping sections. The first section, "Cities as Fire Regimes," frames the entire study around Stephen Pyne's idea that social and environmental factors combine to create certain patterns of fire. In the modern world, urbanization, industrialization, and fossil-fuel use led to more explosions and hotter, longer burning fires, a process that the authors call an "urban fire regime." Susan Donahue Kuretsky's chapter about seventeenth-century Amsterdam, Jordan Sand and Steven Wills's chapter about Edo, and Samuel Martland's chapter about Valparaíso all address how urban populations developed technologies and organizations to respond to the threat of more frequent and destructive fires within the framework of Pyne's regime. Complementing that discussion, Cornel Zwierlein's work on fire insurance in Istanbul, Cathy Frierson's chapter about imperial Russia, and Amy Greenberg's chapter about Porfirian Mexico question where fire and modernity intersect. Earlier interpretations regarded cities as "modern" once they became safe from major fires. The aforementioned authors assert that that definition is limiting and does not allow for regional and cultural variation.

In the second section, "Fire as Risk as a Catalyst of Change," Mark Molesky's chapter on Lisbon, Dirk Schubert's on Hamburg, and Andrea Rees Davies's on San Francisco each stay close to the classic "great fire" narratives, wherein one devastating fire marked a historical turning point. The benefit of examining the great fires of history, which these authors aptly show, is that it allows scholars to look at one particular moment when a city's built environment was erased, thus exposing deeper social and political conflicts that surfaced during the rebuilding process. The other authors in this section examine how city residents reacted to smaller, more frequent fires. Greg Bankoff's chapter on building materials in Manila, Jason Gilliland's on the rebuilding of Montreal in the aftermath of several fires, Sara Wermiel's on U.S. fire insurance, and Kristen McCleary's on theater fires in Buenos Aires explain how the accumulated effects of smaller fires can drive urban change over time. Reactions to fire show how some residents of cities had greater access to safety and resources.

The third section, "The Politics of Fire," which focuses on fires that occurred between 1960 and the present, shows how urban fire can be a tool to achieve or destroy political power. In her analysis of Singapore, Nancy Kwak explains how finely constructed narratives of that city's 1961 fire legitimized and solidified the political rule of the newly elected People's Action Party. By contrast, in Cleveland and Beirut, city residents found empowerment by using arson as a form of social protest. Daniel Kerr explains that African Americans in Cleveland re-

sorted to arson when they had no other weapon against the urban decay brought on by police brutality and unemployment. Ayodeji Okukoju on Lagos and Jérôme Tadié on Jakarta conclude the section by showing how fire exposes social inequality and government failures. In Lagos, class-based criticisms of slum fire hid the reality that few public services, including water infrastructure, were available to the poorest members of society.

Flammable Cities will gain a readership from those interested in urban history, environmental history, social history, and global-comparative history. Using urban fires to address the making of the modern world is a novel idea and the authors execute it well. For historians aware of existing fire literature, *Flammable Cities* makes valuable contributions. The editors made a concerted effort to challenge the idea that all major fire developments occurred within the "European-American model," and they selected case studies outside of Western Europe and the United States to reflect the importance of fire globally. Also, in line with Greg Bankoff's earlier work *Cultures of Disaster: Society and Natural Hazards in the Philippines* (2002), this edited collection speaks to the importance of assessing everyday hazards, not just the most devastating ones, as a way to understand how people feared and coped with risk. Through the small, daily confrontations with fire, people actively chose to make alterations to their physical world. Despite the editors' careful selection of regionally and topically diverse case studies, there remains one intriguing omission: there was no mention of fire during the first half of the twentieth century. I am curious if this means that the world entered a new fire regime at this moment.

Flammable Cities is an accessible and engaging read that makes a valuable contribution to urban history. By examining natural and manmade fires, these authors employ an innovative approach to understanding the making of the modern world.

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Citation: Anna Alexander. Review of Bankoff, Greg; Lübken, Uwe; Sand, Jordan, eds., *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World.* H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. November, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=37517

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