

Comptes rendus – Book Reviews

GERALD BURKE. — *Towns in the Making*, London, Edward Arnold, 1971.

This book, the author tells us, is intended primarily for undergraduates studying town-planning and town-building. For the most part, it has the great merit of clarity and simplicity of style, and undergraduates may well be grateful for such lucid paragraphs as those which set out the advantages and disadvantages of Renaissance ideal-city plans (p. 78), or the obstacles to the realization of Wren's plans for rebuilding London (pp. 103-4).

Unfortunately, however, this lucidity is sometimes deceptive. The book appears to be based almost entirely on secondary sources, and it is hard to tell on what principle, if any, these were chosen. The bibliography is a curious compilation, and quite inadequate as a guide to further study. The illustrations are generally helpful, but lack references to the sources of plans and reconstructions. The text contains some errors of fact, and the editing is not impeccable. Finally, the book is unbalanced: some sites and topics are discussed at a length disproportionate to their importance, others which one would have expected to find are omitted completely.

The author appears least at home, and the faults of the book are most apparent, in the earlier chapters (the book is arranged chronologically). The chapter on Greece and Rome is particularly full of traps for the unwary. Athens should not be described as "under the rules of Pericles;" certainly the Erechtheum and probably the Temple of Athene Nike (so-called in the text, but Temple of Nike Apteros in the caption to fig. 5 — would everyone know that the two were the same?) were not completed by 432 B.C.; equally misleading is the reference to the agora as a "later expansion" (pp. 14-5). The two illustrations purporting to represent Greek cities of the classical period in fact show Roman Athens and Roman Leptis Magna (p. 17). "The great Hellenistic era of town foundation" is anachronistically made responsible for Syracuse, Naples, Pompeii, Marseille, Cyrene, Carthage (!), "and many more" (p. 19), whereas the great town-planning impulse of the true Hellenistic period is exemplified only by Pergamon and Antioch (mere names), Priene and Alexandria (a dozen lines each), and, at some length, little Glanum (pp. 22-4), as if it were a site of real importance.

Rome's achievement, vaster and less easily comprehensible than that of the Greeks, fares worse. There are several errors of the type detailed in the previous paragraph. More serious are the omissions. The Etruscans are ignored. Distinctions between eastern and western halves of the Empire are so little considered that the author can write, "Most Roman colonial towns were laid out not on virgin sites but on locations previously developed by Aegean, Phoenician, Greek or other colonisers" (p. 31), as if it were

possible for this to be true in north-west Europe or the Danubian lands (not that it is altogether true in the East, for instance in Asia Minor). The vital role of the towns in Romanization and economic development in the West is slurred over in the single sentence, "These lavish places of amusement (i.e. theatres and amphitheatres) were intended to introduce and accustom conquered peoples to the "civilised" Roman way of life and gradually to make them good Roman citizens and regular consumers of Roman products" (p. 28). The mere use of the phrase "Roman products" begs any number of questions concerning internal trade, economic relationships, and the precise meaning of "Roman" in this context. There is no attempt to link up this chapter with the rest of the book by emphasizing the extent to which Roman town plans still determine the layout of the centres of so many great cities in western Europe. Rome itself receives only superficial attention. The description of Nero as "less sympathetic towards fire prevention" than Augustus (p. 29) may be meant as a joke, bearing in mind Nero's undeserved reputation as an incendiary, but it does less than justice to his zoning and building ordinances designed to prevent a repetition of the Great Fire.

Roman Britain gets a section of its own, in which more space is given to Caerwent and Fishbourne (the latter not even a town) than to London. The bibliography does not record the excellent recent works on Roman London by Merrifield and Grimes, which might have shown cause to revise the statement (p. 37) that town walls, including apparently London's, date from soon after the rebellion of 61 A.D. The map of chief towns and roads (fig. 20, p. 35) is unreliable: Silchester has strayed, and Chysauster and Holyhead scarcely qualify.

The Later Empire is barely noticed, and the chapter on the Middle Ages begins with the affirmation that by A.D. 500 "almost the entire known world" had been reduced by barbarian invasions to "subsistence economy for small groups of families living in the countryside under the protection of tribal leaders" (p. 41), although later we hear that even in Britain there were towns which "probably remained in almost continual occupations" (p. 43). By "the known world" we are clearly meant to understand the Roman Empire: nothing later than Ur and Mohenjo-daro is discussed from east of the Euphrates. But even so, the generalization becomes ludicrous, if one considers the eastern half of the Empire. Constantinople, however, is not even mentioned in the book, except when it is captured by the Turks. But after this inauspicious start the chapter improves, with a section on bastides derived mainly from Beresford and a notably clear discussion of "adaptive" towns, which is however confined almost exclusively to Britain.

The later chapters, from the Renaissance onwards, sin more by omission than by commission, although one might contest the statement that More's *Utopia* describes "the good Christian life in the ideal city" (p. 68), the Hôtel des Tourelles on the site of the future Place des Vosges had belonged to the French Crown since 1402 (p. 83), and Napoleon would be

aghast to have the Colonne d'Austerlitz taken for a mere copy of Trajan's Column (p. 85). The choice of sites discussed, however, and the space allocated to each appear somewhat arbitrary. Can one justify a discussion of "Renaissance town improvement in Italy" which confines itself to Vigevano and Rome, with passing references to Vicenza and Venice (pp. 78-82)? And even for Rome, only two projects are mentioned, the Piazza del Popolo and the forecourt of St. Peter's. Paris and Versailles are discussed at slightly greater length, under "Renaissance planning in France," London in still more details. But why four and a half pages for London in the seventeenth century and only one page for the eighteenth?

For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the book limits itself to Britain. Commissions, Committees, Schemes and Plans abound. True, the author in his preface declares his intention of narrowing "the breath (*sic*) of prospect" for this period, but can one really, without distorting the whole picture, virtually ignore all that has happened elsewhere in Europe and in North America? There is surely a lack of perspective, when the only mention of Le Corbusier is in half a line at the end of a paragraph devoted to François Fourier (p. 137, wrongly shown in the index as p. 13).

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J. D. CHAMBERS. — *Population, Economy, and Society in Pre-Industrial England*, London, Oxford University Press, 1972.

This, the author's third posthumous book, is a revision of a series of lectures delivered at the University of Kent in May, 1967. Their final form had still not been determined when the author died in March 1970; and the task of editing was completed by W. A. Armstrong of Kent.

Chambers pioneered the application of new methods of historical research to local history. Best known for his *Nottinghamshire in the eighteenth century: a study of life and labour under the squirearchy* (1932) and *The Vale of Trent, 1670-1800; a regional study of economic change* (1957),¹ he obliged historians, by his revealing conclusions drawn from local conditions, to recast some of their generalizations. More recently he had turned his attention increasingly to population studies.

His Kent lectures attempted to put into proper perspective recent work on English population movements before the first census of 1801. Their publication serves as a useful reminder of the often highly speculative

¹ For a complete list to 1966 of Professor Chambers's publications, see E. L. JONES and G. E. MINGAY, eds., *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution: Essays presented to J. D. Chambers*, London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1967, pp. xiv-xvii.