

D. M. PALLISER. — *Tudor York*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. 327.

CHARLES PHYTHIAN-ADAMS. — *Desolation of a City. Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. 350.

D. M. Palliser and Charles Phythian-Adams have been among the most active of the younger generation of English urban historians dealing with the pre-industrial era, and their latest works enrich this burgeoning field with two major case studies. Of the two, Palliser's *Tudor York* is the more traditional in its approach. It covers the entire Tudor period and investigates all the aspects of urban life which have been in the mainstream of recent research and discussion: geographic setting, politics and government, social structure, economy, and religious change. Palliser relates his findings in each of these areas to show how York did or (less frequently) did not conform to patterns which have been noted elsewhere. His findings do not lead him to propose new arguments or alter the conceptual framework established for such communities in the last decade or so of serious scholarship.

This should not be taken as a criticism of what has been accomplished, for Palliser has done his homework and written a careful, thorough and persuasive study of his chosen themes. At this still tender stage of research in the field it is important and reassuring to have the further support for current theories which is provided here: for the general traits of urban oligarchies as proposed by Clark and Slack and others; for the chronology of urban decay and recovery as seen by Wrigley, Dobson, Phythian-Adams, et al.; for the characteristic occupational structure as worked out by Hoskins and Cornwall; and even for the level of literacy as proposed by Stone. Like most cities of its size York suffered an era of particular hardship from the late fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century and — unlike some — was able to recover and endure as a stable community. It did so by regaining its administrative importance as the permanent home of the Council in the North, by some artful management of corporate land, and by balancing the decline of cloth manufacture with an increase in middle and long-distance trade. Palliser is more struck throughout by continuity than change, and his treatments both of commerce and of social structure, perhaps the strongest points in the book, do much to sustain his theme.

Although a number of Palliser's findings for York are echoed in Phythian-Adams's *Desolation of a City. Coventry and the Urban Crisis in the Late Middle Ages*, this is a very different and, as implied by the title, more complex book. In some ways it is narrower, for he deals chiefly with the span of one generation and omits narratives of such matters as town-crown relations. Yet in at least two ways it is broader as well.

First, Phythian-Adams asks a wider and more eclectic range of questions and employs more varied techniques to answer them. Borrowing generously from the anthropologist, demographer and ethnographer, Phythian-Adams dissects Coventry in layers, from muscle and bone to psyche and spirit. We find here not only such formal institutions as the guild and the craft (which are nicely distinguished from each other), the household and the councils of government, but also the informal structures of kinship networks and spatial distribution of social groups. He reveals the facts of oligarchic direction and the characteristics of social mobility as well as the unwritten traditions which governed their operation and the public rituals which exemplified and reinforced them. As drawn by Phythian-Adams, early Tudor Coventry was bound both by the sinews of political, social and economic life and by a communal psyche perhaps never before revealed in cities of this epoch.

Secondly, while most case studies of Tudor towns emphasize continuity (e.g., Palliser's York or Wallace MacCaffrey's Exeter) or deal with change by examining still photos taken at irregular intervals, Phythian-Adams has managed to reproduce a true moving picture. Historical change thus serves not merely as the inferred process for bringing the subject from one pose — or one descriptive document — to the next, but, at least for the critical years 1518-25 or 1530, change itself becomes the subject. By happy coincidence the historian of Coventry is served not only by the survival of the 1524 subsidy assessment, but also by a muster assessment for 1522 and a possibly unique civic enumeration for 1523. Taken together, these allow him to follow in remarkably close and continuous detail the worst ravages of Coventry's urban crisis.

In Coventry and, by inference, elsewhere, this early Tudor crisis meant a striking demographic collapse (from about 9,000 in 1500 to half that number fifty years later; from roughly 7,500 to about 6,000 between 1520 and 1523 alone!) and an even larger proportionate decline of the "honest commoners" who traditionally shouldered the twin burdens of providing employment and holding office. This meant a scarcity of capital, a decline of industry, an inability to cope with fiscal demands and economic competition. Except in degree, these observations would apply to York and elsewhere. Yet in Coventry, at least under Phythian-Adams's lens, these crisis years and the Reformation which followed close at hand had a *cultural* impact of even greater devastation and finality: these years "represented a line drawn under the long and evolving tradition of medieval urban community ... [and] signalised a final disruption of cultural assumptions" (p. 275).

Whether we would find such a sharply defined cultural break elsewhere remains to be seen, but at least where the documents hold out hope of an answer the question must now be put. While both of these studies are impressively carried out, their goals are different. Palliser has matched York against a rough template devised by an acknowledged consensus and has lent important confirmations and a few caveats to the assumed norms. Phythian-Adams has cut some new designs in the plate altogether. His case makes vivid reading and seems persuasive for Coventry, but remains to be tested elsewhere.

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CHRISTOPHER R. FRIEDRICHS. — *Urban Society in an Age of War: Nördlingen, 1580-1720*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. xvii, 350.

Christopher Friedrichs here examines the effects of the Thirty Years' War on Nördlingen, one of the surviving free cities of the old German empire. This revised Princeton doctoral dissertation is based on an extensive examination of parish registers, tax assessment records, and minutes of the town council. The author attempts to challenge some current interpretations of the Thirty Years' War which tend to dominate the English-language literature, especially the theses of Ergang (vintage 1940s) and of Steinberg, that the war was not as disastrous as nineteenth-century German historians used to contend.