

local institutions. Yet by the mid 17th century these centres began to give way to larger towns in the competition for regional trade and industry. Many provincial capitals, on the other hand, proved sufficiently large and economically diversified to cope with changing patterns of trade and consumption. Clark and Slack pay considerable attention to the pressures of external forces upon urban growth, including the political claims of the shire gentry and the court, and the economic pull of greater regional integration.

Internally, towns became almost entirely closed to social and economic mobility, a phenomenon most clearly reflected in the growth of oligarchic institutions and in the increasingly restrictive terms of incorporative charters. Although prone to greater inequity and corruption, these oligarchies were often actually able to cope more effectively with such endemic problems as the influx of unskilled labour from the countryside, urban poverty, and the increasing financial burdens of town government.

One may always find hairs to split in a work of this type. In striving for general statements exceptional cases will be excluded: for instance, the classic age of borough incorporation is placed at 1440-1640 (p. 128), though incorporation had become quite rare between 1485 and 1540. The proposal of categories may also seem arbitrary: one fails to see, for example, the distinction (p. 22) between corporate and market towns at a time when so many of the latter gained incorporation.

Yet these are hardly serious criticisms in view of the book's objectives. A more serious concern lies not with the text, but with the question of documentation. While it is not, on balance, objectionable that a work of this type should divest itself of the scholarly apparatus of footnotes, numerous references to specific works are nonetheless made in the text, and remain entirely mysterious to the non-specialist for whom the work is intended. The "select bibliography" offers neither the source for such provocative quotes as that regarding the aldermanic bench at Lewes (p. 127), nor a satisfactory list of the fundamental works on the subject of each chapter. Despite these shortcomings, however, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700* is quite simply the best introduction to the field, indispensable to the student and not unworthy of the specialist's serious attention.

Robert TITTLER,
Concordia University.

* * *

MARTIN REISSMANN. — *Die hamburgische Kaufmannschaft des 17. Jahrhunderts in sozialgeschichtlicher Sicht*. Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1975. Pp. xvii, 447.

Early modern Hamburg was a city state run by a self-perpetuating merchant oligarchy. Reissmann explains who those merchants actually were, and how they exercised power as groups of family and kin, regularly enriched by immigrants. The book examines first the basic economic precondition and secondly the social status which upheld the ruling group of burghers. Emphasis is on the seventeenth century, ranging from a period of monetary instability before 1622, when the currency fell from two to nearly three and a half Marks to the Reichsthaler, into the 1630s and 1640s, a time of rapid growth when much of central Europe was being devastated by wars, ending with an uninspired and narrow prosperity

in the eighteenth century. The political question Reissmann poses is why a city which in theory boasted almost democratic regulations and constitutions in practice allowed a minority of merchant burghers (*Kaufleute*) to monopolise office. With meticulous attention to the remaining archives, he shows that this was basically due to the fact that citizens and non-citizens were agreed in wanting low taxes. Hence Hamburg's top jobs were done without pay and without the benefit of substantial public expense accounts. Under these conditions only richer merchants, financiers and rentiers had the private family wealth to pay for the exercise of public office. Only they invested money in the legal formalities and social niceties that preserved continuity within the city council and on its important committees. Low taxes spelled popularity and in turn meant frugal government; the average citizen had to be grateful that he found rich neighbours who were seemingly misguided enough to take on the worries of exercising authority. A paternalism of the few grew out of the apathy of the many, and then firmly entrenched itself.¹

Reissmann has studied the few, their economy and social habits, especially as linked to the politics of office in the city. His reconstruction of family and business among the several hundred richer and more active Hamburg merchants is a veritable social anthropology of a very self-aware seventeenth-century middle class. Reissmann employs no jargon and he never stretches his evidence too far: he collects a wealth of detail but is hesitant to formulate conclusions, whether about the longevity of merchant economy, merchant society or merchant government in Hanseatic Hamburg.

In the 1640s Hamburg's oversea and inland trade boomed. In 1647, the last full year of the Thirty Years' War, the port taxed ninety-one ships plying to England and Scotland, sixty-one to Iberia (the wealthiest run), and over thirty each to the Baltic and Norway with nearly as many to France. Trade with Sweden, important because of Hamburg's crucial situation between the Swedish, Dutch and North German states' economies in the later 1630s and 1640s, was disappointingly low at twelve vessels, whereas the Shetland run took a handsome fourteen sailings. Between three and six ships attempted the Atlantic crossing to the West Indies. Twenty firms handled more than 50,000 Marks of goods each every year in the Iberian trade, and half of these were Portuguese and Dutch concerns. Several hundred firms, including a large minority of foreign enterprises, had a turnover of between 2,000 and 50,000 Marks, some specialising in commodities like Dutch sweetmilk cheese, drink, wood and tar, wood-dyes, and sugar, while others were retailers clearly speculating in wholesale, hoping to move up in the world if the risk produced enough profit. The biggest foreign firms took the precaution of registering some of their family and partners as burghers or privileged equivalents. For example, Adrian and Johann Baptista Juncker were Dutch. They were also citizens of Hamburg, holding honorary offices and turning over 300,000 Marks a year in Iberian trade. However, the foreign element on the city council or among the *Oberalte* was in effect kept to a bare minimum.

Over six generations, 124 of these families produced 1,335 males, and for every five that left the merchant profession eight stayed in it (p. 268). Of those that left, many went into careers such as the Lutheran church, law, medicine, or civic affairs after university studies. Fresh recruitment into merchant and academic professions was usually from among the ranks of well-off immigrants, retailers,

¹ See H. RUCKLEBEN, *Die Niederwerfung der hamburgischen Ratsgewalt*, Hamburg, 1974, for another recent, relevant treatment of Hamburg politics, a study that Reissmann unaccountably ignores.

of society and kin to stay there. Families in this group who fell on hard times were given a chance to retain their status and connections by obtaining paid office of the middle rung in city government which was often linked to the duty of public notary (*Notar*), whereby trained lawyers could often make enough to stage a family "come-back", above all through favourable marriages. The city council family of Kampe produced the following line of merchants and lawyers over six consecutive generations between the sixteenth and eighteenth century — generations 1 and 2, merchants; generations, 3 and 4, six merchants and three lawyers; generation 5, four merchants and three lawyers; generation 6, two merchants and three lawyers (p. 270). Jobbing, university-trained lawyers seldom enjoyed the esteem accorded to possibly more altruistic professions. It is lists like this that may explain why it was not only Molière in aristocratic France who could parody the pragmatic, self-seeking seventeenth-century pettifogger, committee-seeker and paragraph constructor. Hamburg was teeming with them.

Yet an urban republic could preserve its ruling merchant oligarchies because there was no one in home affairs to side-track them into aping the feudal aristocracy, the possible result being ruin, as perhaps happened to their equivalents in Bourbon France. It is uncanny how the mass of information Reissmann provides confirms traditional generalisations about the early modern middle class, above all in the way it could perpetuate itself when not tied to a monarchical system. The "virtues" of modern society were all present among the Hamburg merchants. Opportunity, competition, profit and family property were positive but volatile principles and trade could produce wealth within a single generation, but it could be lost as easily in another. In the Hamburg committees of administration, of about 700 seventeenth-century paid officials of the middle rung only 23 were of non-merchant background. Of the 185 honorary *Oberalte* between 1600 and 1725, nearly all were merchants. Service was time-consuming. In parish and central administration a major meeting a week was common. Audit was severe and high office costly (pp. 340-68).

Benefits came in an indirect way. The sumptuary law of 1692 ordered each and every burgher and inhabitant to stick to his or her station in life in a seemly manner as regards permitted clothing and fashion in order to preserve the difference between the higher and lower sort (p. 283n). All marriage feasts had to have prior approval from the city council. Those who could afford it (according to tradition and to the tax and public service lists) could have a wedding with wine and invite fifty guests. Next was the half-wedding of thirty guests. Common burghers had to save face by indulging in wedding by invitation (*Gastgebot*) of fifteen guests to distinguish them from those who only celebrated "five-pair weddings," which was the mere ceremony paid out of the parish poor-box. Nearly two-thirds of all weddings in Hamburg in 1713-14 were of the five-pair variety. Many domestic servants, however, achieved "respectability" by having invitation weddings. Funerals and christenings followed similar patterns of grade and outward show. Clothing regulations were intended for church parade on Sunday before God and fellow parishioners (pp. 278-330).

Reissmann has produced an unusual book that provides a great amount of information but spells out very little, leaving the perceptive reader to immerse himself in seventeenth-century *Bürgertum*. It will be a delight to the unhurried and a burden to the rest, as perhaps befits work done under the supervision of the late Percy Schramm at Göttingen.

Gerhard BENECKE,
University of Kent.