

bowing at the name of Jesus, and so forth. However, a false emphasis on religious excesses and conflicts by some historians has previously given a distorted view of both puritanism and Anglicanism in the seventeenth century. Bourcier suggests that what united these people religiously was profounder than what divided them. Furthermore, she gives no support to those historians who find a political motive behind every religious manifestation. It is salutary to be reminded of "l'immense religiosité d'hommes et de femmes conscients de leurs faiblesses et de leurs imperfections..." in the seventeenth century (p. 325).

If the book does not provide a complete picture of private life in the period, it none the less presents a judicious collective portrait of a remarkably diverse group of men and women.

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PETER CLARK and PAUL SLACK. — *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700*. Oxford: Open University Set Book, 1976. Pp. 176.

The publication of Peter Clark and Paul Slack's *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700*, in 1971, made a decisive contribution to the rapidly burgeoning interest in pre-industrial English towns. Its introduction was among the first successful attempts to identify general trends from the wealth of literature which has come forth in the past decade, while the essays which followed provided illustrations of key themes. It was not, however, a book for the novice or undergraduate: though it may have encouraged the introduction of the subject into an increasing number of university curricula, its value as a teaching tool remained limited by its very specialized approach. Thanks in part to the needs of the Open University in particular, we now have a companion volume by the same team, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700*, precisely for that purpose.

In view of this pressing need in one of the genuine growth areas in the field of English History, it would be difficult to imagine a more timely and appropriate publication. Yet one must not ask of it more than it was intended to offer: the authors have identified, categorized, and synthesized the work of others, but they have not, with few exceptions, added evidence unpublished elsewhere. Yet this is a caveat, not a criticism, for what they have done has been done splendidly.

Beginning with a rational sifting of the literature, we are offered a convincing and fundamentally functional definition of a "town". This is followed by a taxonomy of urban types, based again largely upon functional criteria: country towns, new towns, provincial capitals, and London, a type all its own. The concluding chapters turn from taxonomy to modes of urban life: the economy, social structure, political order, and, in the only rather weak chapter, the cultural role.

Several themes emerge from this approach, and here we find the specimen leaving its glass case and engaging in the dynamics of social, political, and economic change. Thus, for example, we have towns of middling proportions prospering as centres of marketing, transport, and administration during the 16th and early 17th centuries, and often combatting successfully the remnants of feudal and manorial ties through the acquisition of incorporative charters and the growth of

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.

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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