

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Silver, Christopher. *Twentieth Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984. Pp. x, 342. Black and white plates, maps, tables, index. \$29.95 (U.S.)

James E. DeVries

Volume 14, Number 3, February 1986

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018099ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018099ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

DeVries, J. E. (1986). Review of [Silver, Christopher. *Twentieth Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984. Pp. x, 342. Black and white plates, maps, tables, index. \$29.95 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 14(3), 300–301. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018099ar>

For urban studies of the Middle East, this book represents a major advance. Influenced by the regional studies produced for Europe by French economic historians, Prof. Faroqhi has written a rich, sweeping, and wholly satisfying description of the urbanization of Anatolia in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

The book is organized topically within three broad categories: 1) towns, markets, and communications; 2) activities in the city center; and 3) relations between the town and its agricultural hinterland. She establishes at the outset the meaning of the word "town" and formulates three categories of towns distinguished by size. Category I, large towns, were those with more than 3,000 tax-payers or 10,000 inhabitants; Category II and IIa, medium-sized towns, had 1,500 to 2,999 taxpayers or a population of 5-9,000 (II) or 1,000-1,499 taxpayers i.e., 3-5,000 inhabitants (IIa) and Category III, towns with 400-999 taxpayers (1,200 - 3,000 inhabitants). Settlements with less than 400 taxpayers tended to lack what Faroqhi considers essential attributes, a market (evidenced by market taxes) and an administrative official, especially a magistrate (kadi). She stresses that despite Istanbul's megalopolitan influence on the economy of western Anatolia, her focus is on the urban network less influenced by Istanbul's needs and less studied by scholars.

The study uses as its sources the many monographic works done by Turkish and foreign scholars on particular regions, towns, and economic aspects of Anatolian life combined with Prof. Faroqhi's own extensive research in the Ottoman archival resources. Archival resources include official tax lists (the tahrir registers); kadi-magistrate records of litigation as well as simple registration of deeds and notarization of specific conditions (sijills); inventories of the holdings of waqf (vakif) foundations as well as accounts of the receipts and expenditures of those foundations; the registers of official correspondence (muhimme defterleri); tax-farming records; and miscellaneous contemporary materials — traveller's accounts, chronicles, essays and descriptive narratives of various types. These are prime ingredients and the author has produced an exceptionally rich dish to enjoy.

Although Faroqhi makes admirable efforts at synthesis, the partial and inconsistent nature of some of the materials and the long time span being addressed make hers a Promethean effort. The conclusions, like the material, tend to be partial and often inconclusive but the data presented more than compensates and here and there her research produces welcome revisionist interpretations. While not rejecting the importance of American silver in the rise in prices that Anatolia experienced in the 2nd half of the 16th century, she introduces a number of other factors, especially the population issue, that she suggests might have been of equal if not more importance, especially since information on the extent of the importation of silver is unknown. She confirms the problem of linking public construction to periods of economic growth and emphasizes the phenomenon already

described by Inalcik, Barkan, and others of the Ottoman city-building paradigm, the use of foundations to construct and maintain a commercial centre which attracts population and economic activity, a model which may be applicable elsewhere in the Middle East (e.g. Iran and Central Asia) during the same period. From her study of the waqf-foundation materials (deeds, accounts, inventories) she provides a basis for estimating town size and importance. She also points out that most of Anatolia's cities were inland. Ports, perhaps because of Istanbul's dominance, did not figure much in the urban network. Commercial activity was mostly overland, even long-distance trade, during this period, and the regional and national economies did not depend on, nor was it much involved in foreign trade. Because the Ottoman state prohibited the export of strategic (military) goods (including hemp, cotton, horses, arms, beeswax, grain, and leather among others) much of the record of port activities has to do with contraband transactions in these goods.

The book's appeal is less in the statistical and tabular data than in the wealth of detail about the nuts and bolts of everyday economic life. In one fascinating inventory for probate of the estates of a shoe seller, the list of his creditors shows that, although he was described as a shoemaker, he actually sub-contracted the manufacture of the shoes, boots, and leather stockings he sold and was more a wealthy retailer than a manufacturer. Among other things, the waqf-foundation accounts and deeds describe the 16th century diet. Money was set aside for the preparation of meals whose menus are given in the deeds. These lists are supplemented then in the institution's accounts of food purchased.

The book describes a period of rising national wealth and increasing urbanization even in areas far removed from the capital. The availability of credit both from government loans to manufacturers and from individual and institutional lenders helped fuel the economic growth that characterized much of the period under study. But Faroqhi also highlights a less-evident phenomenon, the great physical mobility enjoyed by the population. Without an almost unrestricted ability to migrate, neither the urbanization process nor the economic growth it spurred could have occurred in the way it did.

R.D. McChesney
Department of Near Eastern
Languages and Literatures
New York University

Silver, Christopher. *Twentieth Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984. Pp. x, 342. Black and white plates, maps, tables, index. \$29.95 (U.S.).

Planning for the city of Richmond, Virginia, as supported by the “progressive” urban elite of that city during the twentieth century, provides the framework for this rather complicated book and is its unifying theme. The term “progressive” in this instance refers to the successive generations of Richmond’s leading citizens who strove to make their city a leading metropolis in the South (pp. 13-14). The progressives maintained a vision of a “Greater Richmond” from the beginning of the twentieth century, but were able to act on their views only during times of political ascendancy. Actually, people who believed in urban planning held office for only limited periods.

When compared to other large northern and southern urban areas in the twentieth century, Richmond stands out for its essential conservatism. While boosterism was an omnipresent theme with the City Council, little was actually done to alter the city’s landscape until after World War II, and no comprehensive plan for development was completed until 1946. The major thrust of “planning” before then consisted of the annexation of outlying areas and racial zoning. J. Fulmer Bright, mayor of Richmond between 1924 and 1940, had a particular disdain for government planning and insisted on “public retrenchment and privatism.” Bright’s successor, Gordon B. Ambler, reactivated the City Planning Commission which hired the eminent Harland Bartholomew to draw up a master plan for Richmond. Bartholomew’s final blueprint contained four major proposals: the building of a civic centre, street construction, new zoning ordinances, and neighbourhood redevelopment. Silver’s major contribution in the book is in clearly showing how local politics, and not planning ideals, determined the course of events in Richmond. Even Bartholomew’s carefully constructed outline failed to survive the vagaries of local politics.

After a difficult struggle during the mid-fifties, the progressives gained control of the city’s political apparatus and approved the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike phase of Bartholomew’s master plan. This resulted in the removal of homes of hundreds of Afro-Americans in the 17th Street area of Jackson Ward. The politics of racialism clearly played a part in this controversy. In the name of progress, the citizens least able to bear the cost of development were asked to make the greatest sacrifice. A majority of the Blacks who had been home owners lost that status. Most simply spilled-over into surrounding areas as renters which resulted in the stepped-up flight of Whites to the suburbs. (Following the litany of the history of city planning, this caused further urban overcrowding and decay). Ironically, the plan that was intended to revitalize Richmond’s central business district had the opposite effect. By 1960 this failure became apparent, but more important was the political revolution that was imminent: Afro-Americans had become a potent political force in the city.

In the future, it would be difficult for professional planners and their elite supporters to plan the development of

Richmond without the support of this group. Indeed, during the mid-sixties, the urban renewal controversy over Fulton, a largely Black area, and the failure of consolidation with Henrico County highlighted this new political reality. The idea of neighbourhood conservation was pressed upon planners by the Fulton group. While the area’s residents were removed, no further programs with the “everything must go” ethic were actuated. Subsequent plans for urban renewal in the Washington Park and Randolph areas reflected the rehabilitation strategy. However, as Silver points out, this conservative approach also reflected the fact that large federal block grants were no longer available for massive urban renewal. The shift to revenue sharing in 1974 required new strategies.

Essentially, *Twentieth Century Richmond* is a diatribe against city planning. The close and indelible ties between planning and politics spelled economic disaster for several of Richmond’s Black communities and further deterioration of the city’s downtown business area. Fortunately, Richmond’s late start with planning meant that a larger percentage of its neighbourhoods and architectural heritage survived than in other northern and southern cities of comparable size. Nonetheless, what both Richmond planners and politicians failed to realize was that viable neighbourhoods, Black and White, were essential to the economy of the city. Only by allowing input from every constituency in Richmond, Silver suggests, can effective planning be undertaken. As long as progressive elites and professional planners manage the process, failure to revitalize Richmond is certain.

Twentieth Century Richmond is a carefully thought-out and complex book. The absence of personal manuscript material from leading figures has forced the author to focus on structure and process. Consequently, the volume lacks the anecdotal-narrative style so often associated with good history writing. To be sure, except for chronology, Silver’s organization of material and the transition between chapters are sometimes difficult to follow. The reader must work to keep the author’s thesis in mind. However, given the nature of the sources, this need not be regarded as a weakness. Rather, Silver deserves recognition for successfully tracing the “planning” history of Richmond while using only non-traditional materials. This case study chronicles an important phase of American urban history. At the least, the book will stand as an important contribution to the history of Richmond. Unfortunately, the volume does not include a bibliography. This reflects a trend among several of the university presses.

James E. DeVries
Social Science Division
Monroe County Community College