

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Wheatley, Paul. *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh Through Tenth Centuries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. Pp. xviii, 572. 25 maps, 4 line drawings, appendices, glossary, index. US\$65.00 (cloth)

Virginia H. Aksan

Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015767ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015767ar>

[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

Aksan, V. H. (2003). Review of [Wheatley, Paul. *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh Through Tenth Centuries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. Pp. xviii, 572. 25 maps, 4 line drawings, appendices, glossary, index. US\$65.00 (cloth)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 31(2), 45–46. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015767ar>

## Book Reviews

laire de Saint-Roch et de son architecture que l'auteure avait menée avec Luc Noppen et qui avait conduit à d'autres publications, dont celle d'un guide architectural.

Atteindre un haut niveau de clarté peut exiger une tâche ardue de quiconque veut décrire l'évolution de la forme urbaine d'une ville. Les endroits mentionnés sont parfois difficiles à repérer sur les cartes et il arrive qu'ils n'y soient pas indiqués. La difficulté se trouve alors accrue pour le lecteur qui n'est pas familier avec la ville. Sans doute consciente de ces embûches, l'auteure a pris plusieurs précautions pour les contrer, comme superposer des flèches aux plans et terminer chaque chapitre avec une carte de synthèse qui résume l'état de la trame à la fin de la période étudiée. Toujours afin de faciliter la lecture, les plans sont parfois inversés pour tourner le nord vers le côté supérieur de la page. L'avantage qui en résulte pour l'intelligence des descriptions vaut bien l'effort requis pour tourner le livre de 90 ou 180 degrés si l'on désire lire les inscriptions. Serait bien trompé cependant le lecteur non familier avec les lieux décrits qui tiendrait pour acquis que cette mesure a été appliquée chaque fois que le nord n'était pas situé au haut d'une carte. Les exemples sont trop nombreux pour les mentionner tous, mais les pages 118 et 119, avec à elles seules quatre cartes diversement orientées, sont exceptionnelles. Le lecteur en quête d'une information complète et précise aurait aussi aimé que l'auteure mette autant d'efforts pour situer sur une carte les lieux publics, tels que les églises des diverses congrégations, les synagogues, les écoles et les cimetières, qu'elle en a mis pour déterminer l'emplacement exact de chaque chantier naval. S'il est possible que les églises protestantes et les synagogues aient eu peu d'impact sur l'évolution de la forme urbaine, il est difficile par contre de concevoir que les cimetières ne se soient pas posés comme des obstacles.

Écrit dans une langue élégante nourrie d'un riche vocabulaire, cet ouvrage abondamment illustré de cartes, de vues anciennes et de photographies, dont plusieurs en couleur, constitue un heureux ajout à la bibliographie déjà substantielle sur la ville de Québec.

Claude Bergeron  
Université Laval

---

Wheatley, Paul. *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh Through Tenth Centuries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. Pp. xviii, 572. 25 maps, 4 line drawings, appendices, glossary, index. US\$65.00 (cloth)

Paul Wheatley, late Irving B. Harris Professor at the University of Chicago, was a specialist of social thought, comparative urbanism, and urban geography. His breadth of knowledge of cities and civilizations of the world, coupled with his gift for languages, made him one of the foremost scholars of the urban history of Asia. Best known for his contribution to East and South Asian studies, this new work, published posthumously, extends his erudition to the Muslim cities of the Middle East.

The jacket of this work describes it as a monumental work. It is just that, measuring 8 ½ by 11 x 1 ½ inches, a large book by anyone's estimate. The book also takes up the monumental urban history of the Muslim world in its formative stages, insofar as architectural remains stand as the symbols of ancient cities, but its contribution lies in the extensive use of textual representations of the cities as well. It is a formidable and intimidating piece of scholarship, with references taking up one-third of the volume, pages 347 to 506, and an enviable familiarity with tenth-century Arabic geographies and histories. Wheatley spent two decades working on the project before his death in 1999. His wife and fellow scholars completed the final editing, and the University of Chicago Press is to be congratulated for giving it such handsome attention.

Wheatley chose al-Maqdisi's Ahsan [dot under the "h"] al-Taqâsim fî Ma'rifat al-Aqâlim, a tenth century geographer's description of the urban systems of the Islamic world of his time, as the core manuscript for this work (62ff). Maqdisi's vision of his world serves as the template for a large and diverse range of other kinds of sources of the time, also consulted by Wheatley, who aimed at reconstruction of "...the faded lineaments of thirteen settlement systems that agglomerative and accessibility factors had molded into pyramidal urban hierarchies by the tenth century" (xiii). As the evidence and remains are scattered and minimal, Wheatley acknowledges that the best that can be hoped for is an idea of "simplified urban hierarchies as they were perceived by their inhabitants and interpreted by contemporary outsiders." Thus, the bulk of the work speaks out of those sources, although Wheatley retained the right to add the "external, explanatory perspective of a twentieth-century urbanist" (xiii).

His introductory material includes a history of the beginnings of Islam in present-day Saudi Arabia, the constitutive efforts of the community at Medina (chap. 1), and an attempt to isolate the factors contributing to the shaping of the cities that emerged with the expansion of Islam from 700–1000 (chap. 2). Chapter 3 centers on a discussion of the concept of the urban system drawn from the introductory material of Maqdisi himself, as filtered and reconfigured by Wheatley. Each chapter thereafter is one of Maqdisi's systems, which embraces the Islamic world of the tenth century, with the exception of al-Sind, which al-Maqdisi described but did not himself visit.

The urban system of Iraq (chap. 4) can serve as an example. The urbanized areas themselves are divided into four categories: the metropolis (or *misr*, [dot under the s] such as Baghdad), those with a cathedral mosque and a permanent market; capitals (*qasabât*, [dot under the s] such as Basra); district capitals (*mudun*), and a fourth level of diverse localities. Based on the Maqdisi template, Wheatley divided each category into four functions; marketing and service, transportation, industrial and craft centers, and finally, religious centers, as part of "the sacral hierarchy". It is the latter that this reviewer found most interesting. The sacral hierarchy was determined not just by a cathedral (or congregational mosque), as the placing of those was determined by law, but also on the presence of shrines and the sacral economy, for example, of cities like Medina, Jerusalem, Damascus and Karbala.

## Book Reviews

Wheatley's chapter 17, called the "Urban Fabric", itself an encyclopedia of medieval Muslim history, traces in detail the thinking about the congregational mosque as the center of the Muslim community and all its activities, and how that was gradually diversified as different urban settings were encountered and assimilated into the new religious system. Throughout, Wheatley emphasizes that he has not discerned any "built environment that was paradigmatically Arabian. What was transmitted from al-Madinah was a style of government and a schedule of responsibilities." The majority of pre-Muslim cities encountered, perhaps 1200–1500 with "pretensions to urban status" ("Epilogue", p. 327), by the tenth century "...had generated a spectrum of urban morphologies the diversity of which subverts easy generalizations" (335). "By the ninth or tenth century, ...religion had come to contextualize virtually all perceptions and expectations of urban life, past, present and future" (p. 337).

This is by no means an easy book. Wheatley's insistence on the use of transliterated Arabic forms of place names and terms, necessary to a textual analysis such as he has furnished us here, does make for a formidable barrier even for someone knowledgeable about the debates concerning urban patterns in Muslim history. What he has achieved is the recreation of an atmosphere and environment of a world at a certain moment in its history, without essentializing it, insisting, in fact, on the diversity represented by the huge piece of the globe tackled by Maqdisi. Wheatley enriches the Maqdisi descriptions by drawing on anthropological, geopolitical, and ecological observations about the region available to a twentieth-century urban scholar. In sum, Wheatley has developed a monumental urban typology of an under-represented part of the world, a fitting testament to a scholar who spent his life on the social relations and ecology of Asia's cities.

Virginia H. Aksan  
Department of History  
McMaster University

---

Lachapelle, Jacques. *Le fantasme métropolitain: l'architecture de Ross et Macdonald*. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2001. Pp. 177. Illustrations, notes, glossaire, archives, bibliographie.

*Le Fantasme métropolitain: l'architecture de Ross et Macdonald* examines the impact of "economic rationalism" on the evolution of large buildings during the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and concurrently, determines how this architecture transformed the cores of Canadian cities. Author Jacques Lachapelle, a professor of architecture history and design at the Université de Montréal, illustrates his inquiry with a selection of buildings produced by Montreal-based architects Ross & Macdonald.

The Metropolitan Fantasy in the book's title refers to ideas of modernity that were linked to urban growth in North America prior to World War II. The Introduction explains how the conception of the city as a dynamic and progressive entity arose with accelerated industrial capitalism based on mass production and

consumption. Endorsing the vision of the modern metropolis, business leaders promoted buildings of ever-increasing scale, eventually engendering architectural commercial gigantism. It is Lachapelle's contention that these buildings were proto-modern, in that they laid the foundations for certain aspects of post-war modern architecture and urban planning.

Ross & Macdonald's extensive output of large, Beaux-arts inspired buildings provide ample material for the book's themes. Founded as Ross & MacFarlane in 1905 by George Allan Ross (1878–1946) and David H. MacFarlane (1875–1950), the firm changed its name in 1913 when Robert Henry Macdonald (1875–1942) replaced MacFarlane as partner. Modeled after highly productive New York offices such as Carrière & Hastings, with whom Ross had apprenticed, and George B. Post & Sons, with whom Macdonald had previously been employed, Ross & Macdonald prospered as one of the largest firms in Canada by the late 1920s. Their ability to execute huge projects with pragmatic efficiency greatly appealed to business contemporaries.

The sections in the first chapter on The Transformation of the City, the Fear of the Skyscraper, and the Compromise of Zoning outline the initial historical context. The synopsis recounts how in the early 1900s the civic-minded, but prohibitively costly, ideals of urban reformists and the City Beautiful Movement were deemed unattainable. To control explosive urban growth and curtail skyscraper construction (because of economic and health concerns), municipalities like Montreal followed the lead of New York City and enacted restrictive height and zoning regulations. However, the legislation did not discourage the proliferation of "block buildings" – large commercial structures that occupied multiple smaller city lots in broadening business districts.

The book's following three chapters trace the development of block building through Ross & Macdonald's office buildings and art deco skyscrapers, department stores, and hotels, respectively. Each section proceeds chronologically, analyzing the crucial developments in the plans and forms of specific buildings.

In the chapter on office buildings, the Transportation Building (by Carrière & Hastings with Ross & MacFarlane as associates, demolished) is pinpointed as the prototype Montreal block building. Constructed between 1909–12, it was important for a number of features, including its unprecedented size, integration of office space with commercial outlets, and accommodation of public spaces that were accessible by several street entrances. Capitalizing on these elements, however, took a while as Ross & Macdonald's office buildings of the twenties focused on minimalist, standardized designs determined primarily by economic efficiency tempered by Beaux-arts aesthetics. The potential of the Transportation Building was finally realized in the imposing Dominion Square Building (1928–40) in Montreal. This office-commercial complex, containing underground parking and an elegant two-level shopping concourse, is credited with paving the way for later large-scale, mixed-use projects.

Lachapelle's study of the department stores and grand hotels corresponds to the trends evident in office block buildings, with additional features designed to cater to a burgeoning consumer-