

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Krautheimer, Richard. *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Pp. xvi, 389. Illustrations. \$50.00 (U.S.) cloth, \$16.50 (U.S.) paper

Morris, A.E.J. *History of Urban Form Before the Industrial Revolutions*. 2nd ed. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979. Pp. x, 317. Figures. \$41.95 (U.S.)

C. M. Wells

Volume 10, Number 3, February 1982

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019092ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019092ar>

[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

Wells, C. M. (1982). Review of [Krautheimer, Richard. *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Pp. xvi, 389. Illustrations. \$50.00 (U.S.) cloth, \$16.50 (U.S.) paper / Morris, A.E.J. *History of Urban Form Before the Industrial Revolutions*. 2nd ed. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979. Pp. x, 317. Figures. \$41.95 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 10(3), 77-79. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019092ar>

feelings of many urban migrants.

Over the years there were, however, some significant changes in Dickens' literary vision. Through the chronological examination of the novels, Schwarzbach traces the shift in Dickens' perception to a view of the city as a new metropolitan environment which, while it harboured evil, allowed for the possibility of good. For instance, in the most substantive chapter of the book, the author shows how Dickens' changed view of London in *Bleak House* is the result of his maturing appreciation of social questions. His new concerns were reflected in several practical projects, such as a home for fallen women, a venture supported by his wealthy friend Angela Burdett Coutts, and in his new magazine *Household Words*. Here the interweaving of Dickens' social and imaginative writings might have been highlighted a little more precisely. For example, both the message and description of some of the novel's 'bleak houses' had their origins in specific articles in *Household Words*, a connection which could have been pursued fruitfully. Finally, Professor Schwarzbach shows Dickens' movement in his later works from predominantly social to more personal concerns, a change which involved a painful dispelling of his personal myth of a rural Golden Age and a new interest in passages of sustained streams of consciousness (especially in *Our Mutual Friend*), which, he argues, look forward to Henry James and James Joyce. In these and other ways the author documents the interaction between the novelist and his subject and demonstrates how Dickens' work came to terms with the obscurities and threats of the urban environment. This is a fine book which deserves to be read by historians and English specialists alike.

Patricia E. Malcolmson
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

Krautheimer, Richard. *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Pp.xvi, 389. Illustrations. \$50.00 (U.S.) cloth, \$16.50 (U.S.) paper.

Morris, A.E.J. *History of Urban Form Before the Industrial Revolutions*. 2nd ed. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979. Pp.x, 317. Figures. \$41.95 (U.S.)

Two books on the city, or one particular city, in history, but books of a very different sort. Krautheimer is a professor Emeritus of New York University, now living in Rome. He writes with obvious passion for the city. "I have tried," he writes in the preface, "to sketch a profile of

Rome as a living organism from the time of Constantine in the early fourth century to the removal of the papacy to Avignon, a thousand years later.... I have striven to outline a history of Rome during a thousand years *through*, rather than *of*, her monuments." Before the enormity of the task, he is humble, but he concludes, "It was fun to find out so much I did not know after a lifetime and to sum it up."

This is, then, a very personal book. It carries its learning lightly; the enthusiasm is contagious. Again and again, I found myself thinking, "I never knew that, I've never noticed that, I can't wait to get to Rome again and have a look." One might single out for mention the vivid description of Constantinian Rome in the opening chapter, with the reminder that the distinction between areas *entro* and *fuori le mura* then had little importance, and the care taken to relate topographic detail to broader social and economic conditions. Or take the account of the *abitato* as it developed through the eleventh to thirteenth centuries (Chapter 12), where the crowded street was "an extension of the house rather than a self-contained entity," and the paragraphs on the transformations of the Capitol combine splendid lucidity with a conversational tone, as if the author were showing you around in person ("one keeps forgetting that in Roman times the principal buildings of the Capitol faced east overlooking the forum").

There are of course points of detail which might be challenged. Occasionally one feels that what is happening at Rome might have been brought into relation with conditions elsewhere. It might, for instance, be pointed out that the physical deterioration of the city from the fifth century on is part of the general decline of urban standards in the west. The economy did not permit the investment of the vast sums that were needed to maintain the services and monuments which an ampler age had provided. Carthage, second largest city of the Western Empire, was in the same state as Rome. One is reminded that in Britain today the cities face a massive investment programme to replace Victorian sewers, and on the weekend that this review was written, British Rail announced plans to close or curtail seriously services on two lines because it could not afford to repair two century-old bridges now, in the phrase of the Roman monuments, *vetustate conlapsa*, "collapsed through age."

This is then a necessary book for all students of the urban history of Rome and for all lovers of the city. It is beautifully produced. Photographs are outstandingly good and well chosen to illustrate the text. They are the fruit of many hours of archival research, and include a number of unusual and interesting views. The same is true of the drawings and watercolours which are reproduced. The author's own maps (e.g. figures 28, 1193a, 193b) are most useful. My biggest complaint is that the index is not detailed enough for a book of this density.

1. G. Robert Strange, "The Victorian City and the Frightened Poets," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XI (Summer 1968), p.631.

By contrast, Morris's work has a wholly different genesis and purpose. A friend of the author's describes it in a foreword as "the best single-volume general history of urban planning and development that has yet appeared" (page vi, cf. acknowledgements, page ix). The author himself states that it is intended "for students of urban history in the widest sense," and that his "primary concern . . . has been to describe in detail the most significant international examples of urban form." Except for a series of brief appendices and some discussion of the Near East and the Indus valley civilisation in the opening chapter on "The Early Cities," "international" must be interpreted to mean only the Greco-Roman world, Europe, and the U.S.A. Even within these limitations, it is not clear what criterion of significance has been used.

Two difficulties in using the book strike the reader almost at first sight. Although the photographs are good, and most of the air photographs are particularly striking (e.g. Erbil, in Iraq, figure 1.11; three English villages, figures 4.18, 4.19, 4.20; Caernarvon, figure 4.53), the plans are often so reduced as to be virtually unusable, and frequently lack indication of scale and orientation. Secondly, footnotes refer to modern works cited without giving page references, so that it is hard to follow references up. This is true also for the interesting passages forming a sort of descant to the main text, which are scattered through the margins.

The author makes it clear that he has commonly used single modern works as "the basis of individual chapters." It follows that the quality of individual chapters differs widely, depending on the value of the source used. A debt to Summerson's *Georgian London* is acknowledged and much in evidence in the relevant pages of Chapter 8 ("Britain: Sixteenth to mid Nineteenth Centuries"). Elsewhere the choice of guides to follow has been less happy. The only book on Greece cited in the Select Bibliography which is not specifically concerned with architecture and urbanism is Kitto, *The Greeks*, whose somewhat breathless enthusiasm for the Greeks is followed uncritically.

For the chapter on "Rome and the Empire," the main works used are said to be two nineteenth-century archaeological works, plus Carcopino's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. The latter, first published forty years ago, is still a standard text. But even the non-specialist might guess that the archaeology of Rome has not stood still since the 1890s. It will not do to quote Lanciani, no matter how good he was in 1897, as if he were the last word on the origins of Rome. It will not do to discuss the aqueducts without mentioning Ashby or the city walls without mentioning Richmond. "The reader is referred to Gilbert Picard, *Living Architecture: Roman*, for a general illustrated description of Roman architecture." The reader has a right to expect to be referred to the latest and best work on the subject, which is Boethius and Ward-Perkins, *Etruscan and Roman Architecture* (Pelican History of Art, 1970; parts

2 to 4 by Ward-Perkins, now reissued separately in a revised edition entitled *Roman Imperial Architecture*).

Perhaps it is the books he has chosen to use which explain the choice of towns described from elsewhere in the Empire. We are offered six "case studies" outside Britain. The first is Aosta, wrongly stated to have been built on the site of the native village (for "native village," read "legionary base"). For Pompeii we get a plan "as revealed by the continuing excavation programme" – sadly out-of-date. Certain main buildings are mentioned, but there is no attempt to discuss them in the context of the city's development. Ostia is described in 12½ lines, without any mention of the apartment blocks which make it so different from Pompeii, and which are indeed Ostia's main contribution to our knowledge of Roman urban planning. On Timgad, it is implied, wrongly, that the legionary base at Lambaesis predated it, and it is praised for its "diagrammatic simplicity, unmarred by later displacements and renovations," a simplicity that owes a great deal to nineteenth-century archaeologists, who failed to record, so often, especially in North Africa, the changed urban conditions of later Roman times. Finally, Trier and Autun. Why? Pompeii, Ostia, and even Timgad are fairly obvious choices. But why Aosta, Trier, and Autun, about which the author tells us so little that it serves no useful purpose, and which in any case seem to have no particular importance? And why no town from the East, such as Ephesus, to link up with the Greek past and a very different future from the western towns?

Similar criticisms could be made of the section on Roman Britain. Briefly it may be pointed out that, contrary to the impression given in the text, Colchester was rebuilt after Boudicca's revolt; it is odd to omit discussion of York, now that excavation in recent years has revealed so much more about it; *castra* and "legionary fortress" are not wholly interchangeable, and the brief discussion of the relationship between a *castra* and a subsequent civilian settlement, if any, is misleading; Hadrian's Wall was by no means an "impenetrable frontier barrier" (the author actually calls it "directly comparable" to the Maginot or Siegfried line); and so on. Throughout the chapter on Rome and her empire Septimius Severus appears as Septimus, and we also have Caracalla called Antonius (instead of Antoninus).

Later chapters give more space to preliminary analysis, but even there the case studies are not used specifically to illustrate the main themes, and the choice of towns discussed seems as arbitrary as for the Roman period. Modern writers are cited for facts or opinions, but seldom criticized. It comes as a surprise to find the author citing someone in order to disagree with him, as he cites Hofer (p. 83). The work contains a lot of interesting information, but it is not integrated. And the choice of authorities remains unreliable. For mediaeval Rome, the chief source is a work which Krautheimer, in the other book under review, does

not even mention. From the Renaissance onwards, the author has the advantage that the subject has been more thoroughly dealt with by the sort of general book which he seems to know best. He often uses Pevsner's *Outline of European Architecture*, though not listing it in the "General Reference" section of his bibliography. Bacon, Mumford, and Rasmussen are also laid under contribution, while the chapter on the U.S.A. depends largely on Reps's *The Making of Urban America*.

I described Krautheimer's as "a necessary book." Morris's is not. As a mere compilation of examples, it is wayward, lacunose, and uncritical. As a history of urban form, it is poorly planned and lacks any clear narrative thread or organizing principle. The reader must find his way as

through an Arab casbah (he will not, incidentally, find Arab cities discussed, even in an appendix to this work, although the author calls it "a fully international history" – so much for Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Algiers). There is no clear through street. He looks for familiar things, and does not always find them. The turnings are not well signposted. There are interesting passages, which all too often end in a blank wall. Some of the stuff is modern, some desperately delapidated. Everyone will find something of interest. But he will wish he had a better guide.

C.M. Wells
Department of Classical Studies
University of Ottawa