

**Musset, Alain. *Villes Nomades du Nouveau Monde*. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2002. Pp. 398. Tables, maps, illustrations, bibliography, glossary, geographic index, thematic index. (Civilisations et sociétés 109). ISBN 0069-4290**

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## Book Reviews

jects they are writing about, and all in their own ways offer considered and thoughtfully crafted essays which will become a first point of reference for students and scholars alike. Some, such as those on London and on culture, offer succinct and carefully balanced introductions to topics much discussed and somewhat controversially so (as, for example, the debate over stability in London). Others introduce subjects newly studied or recently invigorated by new work, such as politics and government, population, industrialisation, the formation of regional and county centres, disease, and belonging.

A further pleasure comes in reading parallel essays across the 1700 divide. Thus one learns a good deal about ports between 1540 and 1800, or small towns, or the role of towns in the predominantly agrarian economy before 1700 and in the rapidly changing economy thereafter, or the changing nature of urban space. However, as with the regional divisions, there are problems with choosing 1700 as a decisive dividing date. To take one obvious example, the division of the two chapters on culture implies that religion was the essential feature of urban culture before 1700, but not thereafter, which sits awkwardly with several recent studies of religion and urban society in the nineteenth century.

The decision to avoid separate chapters on women, children, and the poor, in preference to integrate their experience, was an understandable one, but several essays could have gone further in insisting upon the importance of gendered experience. Topics such as childhood, youth, and aging get short shrift here, which is unfortunate given our rapidly expanding knowledge of children, youth, and the old in urban societies. Overall, aside from the chapter considering urban identities – ‘belonging and estrangement’ – the impression given is that this is a worthy, but somewhat traditional, selection of topics and themes. There isn’t as much as one might have hoped on such topics as food, consumption, health and medicine, theatre, and the professions. Readers would have also benefited from a much stronger attempt to integrate the picture section with the text.

These reservations aside, this is most certainly a very rich collection, and readers will want to return to its essays several times. One of its great successes is that Wales and Scotland are not abandoned after the two early chapters devoted to those countries; many authors worked especially hard to ensure their contributions were truly British. Overall, then, this volume of *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* goes a long way to providing an authoritative introduction to the state of the field. Clark’s volume of essays is timely in another sense, for as the British urban landscape and structure changes with developments such as the construction of suburban shopping malls and mayoral elections, never was there a more pressing need to understand the nature of the dramatic changes that took place in Britain’s urban communities between the Reformation and the railway age.

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Musset, Alain. *Villes Nomades du Nouveau Monde*. Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2002. Pp. 398. Tables, maps, illustrations, bibliography, glossary, geographic index, thematic index. (Civilisations et sociétés 109). ISBN 0069-4290.

Commentary on and analysis of the city as a tool of Spanish conquest and colonization in the Americas have existed since settlers on Hispaniola overthrew Christopher Columbus in part for failing to understand that, for Spaniards, to “discover and settle” meant founding a proper town and establishing a local government. Yet substantial scholarship on colonial urbanization has traditionally concentrated on broad theory or local practice, shying away from systematic analysis of geographically separate but culturally or politically related phenomena. French geographer and historian Alain Musset breaks this trend in a study of the practice of relocation of colonial Spanish cities and towns, finding colonial administration and society open to, and actively supportive of, “nomadic” urban practices.

As is often the case with paradigm-breaking historical research, coincidence piqued Musset’s initial interest in the topic. Present in Mexico City during discussions of relocation after a devastating 1985 earthquake, he learned that similar proposals had been made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While that metropolis never moved, seven years in European and American archives, combined with gumshoe work on location in ruined cities of Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America showed Musset 161 instances of successful *traslados*, or relocations, of colonial capitals and strategic cities over a period of three hundred years. From these disparate cases, he developed a theory of causes and consequences of “nomad cities” in colonial Spanish America.

The lengthy study is divided into four sections (3 chapters apiece), each accompanied by useful black and white maps, tables, drawings, and photographs that illustrate an often-spatial argument. The first, and more compelling, sections – “Towns of paper” and “Times of Error and Wandering” – address the theory and practice of Spanish settlement that created conditions favoring municipal relocation as a tool of empire. Musset’s principal task is to explain close to 300 relocations experienced by 161 Spanish towns he believes comprise about 15% of those founded during the colonial period (p. 120). To do so, he demonstrates how ideas from Roman to Renaissance influenced the choice of the city, an idealized community, as Spanish America’s principal political institution and shaped settlers’ expectations as well as royal ordinances for city layouts and location that addressed issues of health, geography, and order. Musset then shows that when, despite careful planning, the ideals failed to produce viable results, the same demands for health, physical security, and order justified relocation. Limits of early modern scientific knowledge about climate, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and hurricanes (80 moves) and failure to plan adequately for Indian and pirate attacks (112 moves) accounted for the majority of relocations. Regional maps refine this information to demonstrate how natural disasters and health concerns occurred in all areas of the Americas, whereas human challenges

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justified relocation primarily on the fringes of empire. Not content to understand why Spanish Americans relocated so many cities, Musset asks when they became peripatetic and finds that two thirds of the moves represented “immediate” or “rapid” relocations responding to immediately recognized errors in a town’s first few years (50 moves), before a substantial physical plant and economic system were firmly in place. Yet, at the other extreme, 41 moves occurred as reluctant response to disaster more than a hundred years after an initial foundation, confirming Musset’s thesis of a fundamental cultural openness to movable cities. As a further taxonomy, Musset hints that some towns could be considered “ephemeral,” some “intermittent” and others “portable” (p. 139), but does not elaborate. This section provides a compelling model for the phenomenon and classification of nomad towns, although the reader may wonder why Musset insists that such moves represent the fragility of the urban system, since his evidence implies that the other 85% of towns and cities, established under similar situations, nonetheless remained in their initial locations.

The second half of the book – “To leave is to die a little” and “Territories of the nomad town” – considers the political, social, and economic process, and consequences of resettlement. Musset first evaluates the costs and benefits of a municipal move from local and imperial perspectives, and is most successful when showing how the cases made for or against a *traslado* by affected interest groups – Crown, royal officials, clergy, city officials, elites, and plebes – provide insight into social divides and political fractures. However, instead of investigating patterns of behavior for each group, as he ascertained key causes and parameters for each relocation, Musset provides cascades of examples for each point that dilute the focus from analysis to narrative (Chapter 7). As a result, he fails to address important paradoxes raised by his cases, such as why the Crown instigated efforts to move some cities (Mexico, 1629) while it disapproved the move of others (San Salvador, 1674), and why local support for a municipal transfer in response to one earthquake (Guatemala, 1717) turned into resistance following another (Guatemala, 1773). Similarly, actions of town councils are assumed to represent proto-nationalist Creole interests standing up to Spanish officialdom, when actual relationships were often based on trans-Atlantic and regional patron-client networks (Chapter 8). Finally, the book addresses the territorial aspect of municipal relocation: selection of a new site and assignment of new lands to those who leave the old. Musset considers that not only material concerns were at stake, but issues of individual and municipal prestige and prominence. Who would receive a lot near the center of the new town? Would selection of new common lands interfere with existing private land ownership? Should Indian villages around a city move with it? What status might a city lose within the colonial administrative hierarchy by relocating? Here Musset once again raises key issues and provides relevant cases, but fails to provide a unifying thread or analyze change over space and time.

In sum, Musset lays out four key areas for study in cases of “nomad cities” – theory and practice of municipal foundation, causes for relocation, conflicts created by relocation, and political, social and territorial consequences of moves – but presents do-

zens of cases and few comparative analyses, except in the section on the timing and causes of the *traslados*. The multiplicity of topics addressed, methods used, and cases presented sometimes make it difficult to follow the broader argument or evaluate evidence of change over time. Yet there is much to recommend this research. As both geographer and historian, archivist and interviewer, Musset uses colonial texts and images to give voice to ideals, ideas, and policies of individuals and societies of the past; narration of encounters with city officials, residents, and military officers enliven the text while demonstrating the long-term resonance of colonial municipal loyalties and dispute. Together, these methods highlight the cultural and political (subjective) as well as scientific (objective) spirit that infuse the creation of resources historians use to understand the past. Of particular interest is the comparison of Mexican and Central American town reports of 1573 on climate, with contemporary meteorological data from the same areas to demonstrate how political and cultural agendas, as much as scientific knowledge or religious faith, influenced Spanish decision-making and official reporting on city foundation and location. Finally, this book, while raising as many questions as it answers, underlines the importance of comparative research programs, which, by correlating seemingly independent or disparate phenomena, arrive at important insights, such as a pattern of municipal settlement and resettlement in colonial Spanish America. Subsequent research should address the complexities glossed over in this volume. In the meantime, the story of Spanish America’s nomad cities will be of interest to scholars not only of this place and time, but to urban historians who might find methods and arguments useful for examining nomad cities within national contexts, or for comparison with cities founded as part of later European colonial projects in Africa and Asia.

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Christoph Bernhardt & Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud (eds.) 2002. *Le démon moderne. La pollution dans les sociétés urbaines et industrielles d’Europe. The modern demon. Pollution in urban and industrial European societies*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, Pp. 464.

La pollution urbaine n’est pas un phénomène nouveau. Avec l’industrialisation massive des villes au XIXe siècle, les autorités publiques et les membres de l’élite locale se sont graduellement préoccupés des nuisances engendrées par les procédés de production industrielle. En raison des interventions des autorités locales, nationales, de même que de l’action collective des mouvements sociaux visant à maîtriser le «démon moderne», nos milieux urbains sont aujourd’hui relativement plus sains que ceux que connurent les habitants des villes européennes en voie d’industrialisation. En effet, dans nos villes post-industrielles, plusieurs indicateurs récents témoignent, notamment, d’un air assaini et d’un certain retour de la «nature» en ville par le biais de l’agrandissement des surfaces boisées. En plus du processus de désindustrialisation et de l’intérêt pour la qualité de vie,