

Sheard, Sally; and Power, Helen, eds. *Body and City: Histories of Urban Public Health*. Historical Urban Studies. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000. Pp. xvii, 221, tables, figures, index. US\$84.95

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[See table of contents](#)

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## Book Reviews

Compared with an earlier, excellent collaborative effort of Russian and American urban historians (West, James L.; Yuri A Petrov, eds. *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), *Commerce in Russian Urban Culture* wins through its comparative approach. The editors made a point of contrasting developments in several major cities of the Russian Empire and even introducing, in Blair A. Ruble's concluding chapter, a comparison of Moscow with Chicago and Osaka. The chapters by Russian and American authors share similar theoretical approaches and read well together – a proof of both the editors' fine work and the validity of Russian-American projects in humanities and social sciences. (The book is based on a project of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.)

The collection's overarching theme is the connection between commerce and urban culture during the Late Imperial period, with an emphasis on the growth of banks, the development of charitable activities, and the emergence of commercial architecture. The first three chapters portray St. Petersburg as the Russian Empire's leading banking center, where the financial elite was closely connected with government circles. Boris V. Anan'ich and Sergei G. Beliaev show that banking institutions emerged late in Russia – during the 1760s – and as a rule were of state origin. Although the State Bank and the Exchange remain St. Petersburg's architectural landmarks, private banking developed as such only after the 1860s, and entrepreneurs never challenged the aristocracy's control over the city. Sergei K. Lebedev argues that the structure and operation of St. Petersburg banks demonstrate a quick appropriation of "European business culture." (The word "European" is generally overused in present-day Russian scholarship and often means modern, Western, or capitalist.) In Chapter Three, Sergei K. Beliaev shows how, in the 1870s, the St. Petersburg municipal authorities discovered city bonds as a means of financing bridge construction, eventually using them to bankroll the city's streetcar system and telephone network.

As Yuri A. Petrov argues in Chapter Four, in contrast to the imperial capital, Moscow was fast developing into the country's major mercantile and industrial center, where a diverse bourgeoisie aggressively claimed the role of "city fathers." Old Believers, who in the seventeenth century had rejected the reform of Orthodox religion, as well as ethnic Germans and Jews, were represented prominently in Moscow's business world. Galina Ulianova reveals that bankers from all these groups contributed to charities. Although the state usually initiated charity projects, the bankers viewed philanthropic activities as enhancing their social status. In his chapter James L. West addresses an interesting question of whether the prominent role of Old Believers among the business elite in Moscow and elsewhere was determined by their religious views. Rejecting a simple explanation of the success of Old Believers as "Russia's answer to Weber's enterprising Calvinists" (80), the author notes that there was nothing in their ideology that sanctioned enterprise. Rather, the precarious

position Old Believers as a persecuted religious minority instilled the values of self-discipline, thrift, and striving for surplus. Galina Ulianova's second contribution to the volume, Chapter Seven, focuses on Nizhnii Novgorod, where commerce and industry were virtually dominated by Old Believers, who developed a network of welfare institutions and "a local civic spirit."

Chapters Eight through Twelve examine bank and commercial architecture in various cities. Boris M. Kirikov discusses financial St. Petersburg, which was represented by massively constructed state buildings. Natalia Datieva's painstaking research documents developments in Moscow, where private banks played a bigger role, and functionalism was more pronounced. William Craft Brumfield focuses on Moscow's various "trading rows" that symbolized the transition from small shops to department stores, while at the same time illustrating the search for a national style in architecture. Patricia Herlihy argues that Odessa's diverse architecture reflected the southern port's specificity as a multi-ethnic trade center. Finally, Brumfield contributes another chapter, on Nizhnii Novgorod, tracing a fascinating continuity in architectural styles in Odessa between the 1900s and the 1990s. These chapters are accompanied by beautiful illustrations, mainly building photographs and architectural drafts.

Blair Ruble's article, Chapter Thirteen, serves as a thought-provoking conclusion to the book by comparing the mercantile elite's political ideas in three economic powerhouses – Chicago, Moscow, and Osaka. All in all, the collection succeeds admirably in analyzing the connection between the entrepreneurial world of the Russian Empire and the cultural milieu of its major cities. The book is a significant contribution to the field and will be of interest to urban historians working on other regions.

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The essays in this volume were, with one exception, presented at a conference on the history of public health held to mark the 150th anniversary of the appointment of England's first municipal medical officer of health, Dr. W. H. Duncan of Liverpool. Though the papers selected for publication in this volume are primarily rooted in Duncan's century, their diverse questions and methodologies – contributors include geographers, economists, and social, medical, and economic historians – give the collection an impressive interdisciplinary breadth.

Three papers analyze medieval and early modern developments. Peregrine Horden's fascinating essay on medieval

## Book Reviews

public health urges a more nuanced reading of a wider range of medieval (and ancient and early modern) texts than is usually considered. The hagiographic writings of Gregory, sixth century Bishop of Tours, yield, in Horden's hands, "techniques for the reconfiguration of urban space" in epidemic and non-epidemic situations. (24) Yet Horden does not neglect the symbolic and ritualistic dimensions of his texts in order to isolate sensible (according to our current perspective) prescriptive measures. If Horden warns us against stripping these texts of their contemporary content in order to render them familiar, Colin Jones cautions us against using them as straightforward registers of contemporary events. In this too brief essay (9 pages) on the languages of plague in early modern French plague tractates, Jones identifies three primary scripts or genres, each with different producers, intended consumers, and analyses. The paper is tantalizing, but most readers will derive more benefit from the longer version in *Representations*. Peter Christensen's analysis of the 1711 plague in Copenhagen is, similarly, too brief to develop its thesis about Danish absolutism.

The remainder of the essays begin their analysis in the nineteenth century. Two papers share Horden's and Jones's emphasis on textual analysis. Flurin Condrau and Jakob Tanner analyze the language of disease in cholera tracts in nineteenth-century Switzerland, and Marjaana Niemi dissects the discourse of public health in Birmingham and Gothenburg from 1890-1920. Niemi persuasively links public health analyses in the two cities to local economic, political and moral agendas; public health authorities in the two cities, facing similar public health problems and relying on the same internationalized scientific discourse, nonetheless defined their problems and thus those problems' solutions in revealingly different ways.

Shifting attention away from texts, three papers explore the nineteenth century decline in mortality and its causes. The economic historian Robert Millward and his collaborator Frances Bell add another instalment to a series of papers devoted to a quantitative analysis of local authority expenditure in the second half of the nineteenth century. Using taxation records, the authors note that local authorities devoted a large proportion of their capital spending to public health broadly construed, but the timing of this expenditure, showing a marked late century peak, discouraged them "from assigning significance to investment on infrastructure as a cause of mortality decline before the end of the nineteenth century." It appears that the type of social interventions described by Simon Szreter in his important 1988 *Social History of Medicine* article had "only a weak influence on mortality before 1900." (163) In a similar vein, the economist John Brown argues in his study of the decline of infant mortality in German towns from 1889-1912 that policies explicitly designed to reduce infant mortality, such as the encouragement of breast-feeding or the provision of milk stations, "appear to have had only a limited effectiveness." (192) Brown's statistical analysis suggests that declining fertility was the most important variable determining infant mortality decline. The

gains from sanitary reform were so limited that in any given year unusually high summer temperatures could wipe them out.

The picture of public health drawn by Millward and Bell and Brown is difficult to reconcile with that drawn by Paul Laxton and Gerry Kearns in their respective papers on Dr. William Duncan, the first Liverpool medical officer. At the very least, Duncan's commitment would have been sapped had he known that many of the most important mortality determinants were beyond his power (the temperature) or purview (fertility). Yet the role of health reformers may not have been as unimportant as quantitative analyses imply. Millward and Bell admit that their local authority expenditure data does not fully capture all public health activity and that much of the improvement in housing to which they give significant credit for mortality reduction may be in part due to public health initiatives. Brown likewise suggests that sanitary improvements — the provision of waterclosets and water — had the potential to reduce mortality, especially from diarrhoea, the major infant killer. Brown's paper is nicely complemented by one from Jörg Vögele, Wolfgang Woelk and Silke Fehlemann, also oriented around the early twentieth-century decline in German infant mortality. They argue that the effectiveness of interventions targeted at individuals such as milk depots and infant welfare centres remains unproven, but suggest that those directed at the environment probably reduced deaths from diarrhoeal disease. This trio of papers reminds us that research into the decline in mortality continues to deliver interesting and important results nearly thirty years after Thomas McKeown published his provocative thesis.

The volume's editors are clear that this collection of essays is highly selective in terms of chronological and geographic coverage: there is no discussion of developments after 1920 and no non-European developments. Seven of the ten essays cover the period from 1840 to 1920, and six of them deal with England and Germany. Notwithstanding these limitations, I recommend it to urban historians and historians of public health.

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Mayne, Alan, and Tim Murray, eds. *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland. New Directions in Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 192. Illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$25.00 (paperback)

Archaeologists can help historians understand the history of cities by recovering and interpreting past material culture. A new — probably the new — theoretical direction in urban archaeology is "landscape" archaeology, in which a landscape is any outcome of human physical or mental activity interact-