

**Phillips, Carla Rahn. *Ciudad Real, 1500-1750: Growth, Crisis and Readjustment in the Spanish Economy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. 190. \$16.50**

C. J. Jago

Volume 8, numéro 2, octobre 1979

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019387ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019387ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Jago, C. J. (1979). Compte rendu de [Phillips, Carla Rahn. *Ciudad Real, 1500-1750: Growth, Crisis and Readjustment in the Spanish Economy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. 190. \$16.50]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 8(2), 126–127. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019387ar>

The constraints of the statistical techniques which are central to this study and the perhaps related absence of an adequate theoretical framework prevent the author from posing his problems coherently and from successfully integrating the large amount of information he has collected. Black Violence will be worth reading for some because of this information. For others it may prove interesting as an exercise in the application of regression and path analysis. It will give limited satisfaction to those trying to understand the social and historical significance of the black protest movement in the United States, and the government's reaction to it.

Joy Woolfrey  
Department of Regional Planning  
University of Ottawa

\* \* \*

Phillips, Carla Rahn. Ciudad Real, 1500-1750: Growth, Crisis and Readjustment in the Spanish Economy. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. 190. \$16.50.

Few geographical regions are immortalized through literary masterpieces; among those which have gained this distinction is La Mancha, an area of Spain immediately south of the city of Toledo. La Mancha presents a bleak and monotonous landscape; consequently it provided Miguel Cervantes with a perfect setting for his novel, Don Quixote. Its vastness lent scope to the exploits of a knight-errant and its disturbing emptiness captured the vacuity of the chivalric ideal in early seventeenth century Spain. As appropriate as Cervantes' La Mancha was to the theme of his novel, it was not simply the product of his artistic imagination. Rather, his depiction faithfully reflected the reality of a countryside--the flatest in Spain--where settlements were, and continue to be, nucleated, sparse, and widely dispersed.

Pre-eminent among these settlements is Ciudad Real. To the extent that Ciudad Real was deliberately founded and its growth carefully fostered by Alfonso X (the Wise) at the beginning of the thirteenth century, it warranted its name. The city was inherently royal; in La Mancha it was intended to serve as a royalist stronghold and to act as a counterweight and deterrent to the pretensions of the Order of Calatrava--one of Spain's leading military orders--which dominated this reconquered territory. However, Ciudad Real hardly qualified to be called a city. During the period 1500-1750, its population, which can be estimated only very roughly, hovered somewhere between six and twelve thousand at its peak--that is before the expulsion of some two or three thousand moriscos in 1610. By early modern European standards Ciudad Real was no more than a moderately sized town, a regional centre of little national or inter-

national significance.

But provincial towns have their lives and offer insights into changing social realities; historians would be completely remiss to dismiss them as unimportant and unworthy of serious enquiry. Indeed, sophisticated local histories, often of fairly minor towns or regions, now form the mainstream of European socio-economic history. For Spain the most significant study is Bartolomé Bennasser's Valladolid au Siecle d'Or. Carla Rahn Phillips' Ciudad Real, 1500-1750 comes nowhere near matching either in size or quality this magisterial study of an early modern Spanish city.

Instead of an urban biography which recreates the life and effectively sounds the pulse of an historical city, Phillips is content to provide her reader with a vaguely outlined silhouette. The profile is based on a rather sketchy depiction of the city's rural economy, its occupational groupings and the composition of its elite. What pulse there is emerges faintly from chapters on demographic fluctuations (based on registers from two parish churches), on "changing patterns of land-ownership", and on the rising incidence of royal taxation. In the course of this examination, however, Ciudad Real never acquires a strong or distinctive personality and never comes alive. This is partly the consequence of the insufficiency of the historical evidence, but it also results from the fact that this book is only incidentally about Ciudad Real.

What concerns Phillips most is evidence on the "decline of Spain." On this topic her conclusions, drawn from the vantage point of Ciudad Real, are hardly surprising. Where they are firm, they corroborate what we know already about the demographic and economic vicissitudes suffered by seventeenth century Spain. Where they are tentative and speculative--and in keeping with this genre of historical study they often are--they are generally made to conform to accepted theories and conclusions.

For the student of Habsburg Spain, therefore, this book makes a worthwhile contribution; it offers additional evidence to support established themes. For the student of urban history, it has little to offer. For the general reader, interested in recreating in his mind's eye the world of seventeenth century La Mancha, it would prove infinitely more satisfying to read Don Quixote.

C.J. Jago  
Department of History  
McMaster University

\* \* \*