

Eliassen, Finn-Einar, and Geir Atle Erslund, eds. *Profit and Urban Land: Landownership in Medieval and Early Modern Northern European Towns*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 277. Maps, tables, charts, black and white illustrations, bibliographies and index. (\$84.95 cloth)

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design. No less interesting, however, is Colton's appraisal of Khrushchev's hands-on form of urbanization that brought about a number of fiascos, but also resulted in the artistic marvels to be found in Moscow's subway stations. All this and more is augmented by a generous number of tables, maps, illustrations and appendices. Among the last of these is one in which Colton first explains how Soviet statisticians defined living space requirements, then tabulates the total amount of housing constructed by year from the early 1920s to the early 1990s.

In the midst of this plethora of information, one might pause to wonder why the city's experience of the Second-World-War years has been so neglected. Also, the all-encompassing nature, not to mention the length, of this "city biography" might be a bit daunting to some readers, and perhaps Colton has overdone it when it comes to what some might consider extraneous details. When all is said and done, however, there can be no doubt that both the time and the effort required to absorb the material offered by this author would be well invested by any scholar. Furthermore, the book is an essential addition to the library of any sovietologist, regardless of his or her discipline. And finally, it is most fitting that this in-depth biography of the "socialist metropolis" should have been published in the year of the Russian capital's 850th birthday. Despite its concentration on only seventy-five of those years, Colton's tome stands as a monument to that great city.

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Eliassen, Finn-Einar, and Geir Atle Ersland, eds. *Profit and Urban Land: Landownership in Medieval and Early Modern Northern European Towns*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 277. Maps, tables, charts, black and white illustrations, bibliographies and index. (\$84.95 cloth).

This volume presents papers from a conference on urban landownership in medieval and early modern Northern and Eastern Europe which took place in Bergen, Norway in October 1994. In their introduction to this volume, the editors, Finn-Einar Eliassen and Geir Atle Ersland, note that "among the 'thousand flowers' of modern urban history research, some topics may still be regarded as more fundamental than others, and at least from a topographical point of view, few themes can be more fundamental than those relating to urban land — the sites on which the towns were built." (p.10) According to the editors, in the last few decades new interest has developed in patterns of landownership in Northern and Eastern Europe during the medieval and early-modern periods, so they have brought together twelve active researchers in the field — economic, social and legal historians, archaeologists, historical geographers, and urban planners — from eight different countries of the region, who have approached the subject from a variety of different angles.

A.J. Scrase (United Kingdom) reviews the continuing debate over what defines a town. Warning against relying on one or a number of limiting defining features, legal, demographic or otherwise, Scrase makes a plea for using multiple, related criteria — what he calls polythetic rather than monothetic sets of characteristics — and goes on to discuss the potential and problems of the different types of sources that are available for the historical reconstruction of British towns. In an essay on the early development of Ghent, Lübeck, and Novgorod, Rolf Hammel-Kiesow (Germany) calls for the need to address multiple issues not only in defining towns but in studying them as well. Using a variety of sources, including monastic chronicles, archaeological evidence, and plans, T.R. Slater (United Kingdom) compares towns founded by the Benedictine order in England with those established by other religious orders and secular authorities.

Economics takes center stage in a number of the papers. Derek Keene (United Kingdom) notes that the urban property market is often claimed as an invention of the modern age, but all available evidence for medieval England points to the early origin and continuity of key features of property holding: monetization of value, the capacity to reckon it as capital or income, and a high degree of spatial differentiation in value determined by demand and the frequency of exchange. Richard Rodger (United Kingdom) shows that the "feuing" system, a distinctive Scottish form of land tenure, provided property owners an annual income in perpetuity and other fees, which they could use to borrow capital to finance building and other developments. Geir Atle Ersland (Norway) discusses a form of land rent that was characteristic of many medieval and early-modern European cities, but which existed in a "pure" form in medieval Bergen: namely, that only in a small percentage of cases did house owners own the land on which their houses stood (in Bergen that figure was less than 3%). Taking off from an earlier thesis stating that the social assignment of space in pre-modern European cities dominated within a general economic context, Katalin G. Szende (Hungary) shows that in the case of Western Hungary, economic factors were as important as social ones.

The relationship between politics, landownership, and urban expansion is another key theme represented in the papers. Maria Bogucka (Poland) discusses new town formation in Poland, 1500–1650. Bogucka notes that while the role of towns in the political life of Poland was drastically circumscribed during this period due to the overwhelming dominance of the nobility, the period witnessed a growth both in the number of new towns as well as an expansion of some older ones. She argues for the need to understand this urbanization process within an urban-rural context, pointing to the fact that town dwellers were buying up rural land at time when the nobility and the clergy were involved in a massive purchase of town properties. Robert Sandberg (Sweden) and Finn-Einar Eliassen (Norway) discuss, in two separate papers, urban expansion and landownership in early modern Sweden and Norway. In both countries, in the middle ages, the population was mostly made up of freeholder peasants and the urban network was much smaller than in other

parts of Europe. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the respective crowns founded cities by buying up land from peasants, using vastly different strategies.

The volume concludes with two contributions on Ireland on the eve of industrialization. Brian J. Graham (Northern Ireland) discusses the social, economic, political, and aesthetic motivations behind urban improvement efforts. Susan Hood (Northern Ireland) describes the planning of Strokestown, a small town in the Irish Midlands.

As is to be expected of conferences of this type, the contributions are uneven, both in quality and scope. Some of the essays represent summaries of secondary literature, others are reports of research in progress. The broad range of the contributions is both a strength and weakness of the volume. The geographic diversity is refreshing and valuable: many of the areas represented in this volume are not usually included in the literature. In the pre-modern age which had different contours than today, these areas can potentially shed important light on the European urban experience as a whole. At the same time, however, the geographic focus seems arbitrary. Are these lands to be understood as a periphery? North (and East) versus South? The experiences of Poland and Hungary might have been more appropriately discussed along with the Czech lands (which are not represented) within the context of the Great Eastern Expansion (bringing in the German lands as well). The wide periodic range is also problematic, serving as much to pull apart as it does to bind together the major thread: the issue of urban land-ownership. Furthermore, although all the papers address land-ownership, some do so only tangentially. The book would have benefitted by the addition of a concluding chapter, which could have taken some material from the introduction, making it more lucid in return. To a certain extent, some of these problems have as much to do with the state of research than with the volume itself. Rather than take away from this volume, they underscore the importance of continuing comparative, multi-disciplinary discussions of this kind; and this volume suggests plenty of directions for future dialogue and research. On the whole, this is a highly informative work that should be of interest to everyone involved in the research of the pre-modern European city.

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Spann, Edward K. *Designing Modern America: The Regional Planning Association of America and Its Members*. (Urban Life and Landscape Series). Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi, 247. Bibliography, index. US\$45.00 (cloth)

The Regional Plan Association of America (RPAA) looms large in American planning history not because of what the organization did collectively (not much), but rather because of what the members contributed as individuals (a great deal). The organizational designation suggests a substantial body with regular publi-

cations, local chapters, annual meetings, etc. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. The RPAA was an informal and loose knit group of acquaintances in overlapping friendship circles who would get together periodically to advocate for various of the ideas that they held in common.

But as individuals, the RPAA consisted of many of the finest minds in American planning, architecture and social activism in the early decades of this century. Benton Mackaye was instrumental in the creation of the Appalachian Trail. Henry Wright, Clarence Stein and Alexander Bing breathed life into the evolving American version of the English garden city through their creation of Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, New York and Radburn in Fairlawn, New Jersey. Edith Elmer Wood was an important figure in the creation of public housing. Perhaps the most prominent contribution of all came via the towering figure of Lewis Mumford, who through the power of his intellect and his writing talent continues to instruct generations of planning students and urbanists about important issues in city building. Among the other RPAA leading lights were Catherine Bauer, Stuart Chase, Robert Kohn, and Charles Whitaker; all significant names in American planning history.

Edward Spann's book about these remarkable people and their times is a thoroughly researched history of this extraordinary organization. It provides far more detail about the intersections between their collective deliberations and individual works than has heretofore been known. It is an important contribution to American planning history because it permits us to more fully understand the personal and political dynamics behind some of the important innovations and writings with which RPAA members were connected both collectively and individually.

The RPAA's "brief shining moment" was the two decades from the end of World War I to the end of the 1930s. From the vantage point of planning history these years are important as the moment in which the dimensions of the American landscape were transformed to accommodate the voracious spatial appetite of the automobile.

Ideologically these planners, architects, and social activists were critical of the unregulated market. They tended to view the problems of America as driven by over speculation. Their solution was tight control of regional land use. The auto-driven sprawl which plagues us now was then in its infancy. Few could perceive the social, economic, and environmental disaster awaiting future generations. It is a tribute to their collective intelligence and prescience that they could. Their solution was to use public planning mechanisms to reign in speculation and order regional growth. As our generation of planners attempts to help society dig out from under this costly sprawl with ideas about "new urbanism," "transit oriented development," and "pedestrian pockets," we can only wonder at what might have been if the RPAA's call had been heeded in its time.

The RPAA vision was built around a notion of the region as a natural entity. Because it was natural, it and not the market was the proper spatial focus for land use, urban design and civic con-