

**Reher, David Sven. *Town and Country in pre-industrial Spain: Cuenca, 1550-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. xiv, 337. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$?**

**John Jay TePaske**

Volume 21, numéro 2, march 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016802ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016802ar>

[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

TePaske, J. J. (1993). Compte rendu de [Reher, David Sven. *Town and Country in pre-industrial Spain: Cuenca, 1550-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. xiv, 337. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$?]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 124–125.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1016802ar>

Cabe first in Kansas and later in Oklahoma. In addition, he charts the close ties between Isaiah Montgomery of Mound Bayou and Booker T. Washington. Beyond Washington, Montgomery also made use of white industrialists and philanthropists like Julius Rosenwald both to promote the city and to increase his own profits. Allen Allensworth of Allensworth, California, was less successful than Montgomery in attracting the support of Washington but he made the effort nonetheless. Allensworth's promotion of the town included running ads in the leading black newspapers of the time including *The New York Age*. Economic promotion was coupled with old fashioned boosterism sometimes reaching proportions that overstated the actual conditions of the new townsite.

As with speculation in other town-finding ventures in the Trans-Appalachian West, black towns were also characterized by political and financial chicanery. Still, Hamilton's research makes clear that most of the promotional literature for the new towns made a conscious appeal to well-mannered, industrious middle class types.

Black towns, like their white counterparts, needed natural advantages like waterways, railroad access, educational facilities, farm land that was better than marginal, and a population with a pioneering spirit. Those that were able to develop their natural resources and attain outside support usually survived. Hamilton also suggests that in several cases a loose frontier equality existed between whites and blacks in their entrepreneurial pursuits although not necessarily in living together. He recounts the adventures of black developers out to make a fast buck either speculating in land or engaging in politics.

For all its interesting new material, Hamilton's book is a curiously unbal-

anced work. Each successive chapter is shorter than its predecessor and the volume ends with a slight four-page conclusion that repeats the conclusions already revealed in the separate chapters. Despite the structural and perhaps conceptual weakness cited above, readers will find much to treasure in Hamilton's work.

HARRY A. REED  
Department of History  
Michigan State University

**Reher, David Sven. *Town and Country in pre-industrial Spain: Cuenca, 1550-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. xiv, 337. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$?.**

This wide-ranging, richly textured book makes rewarding reading not only for historians of early modern Spain but also for urban, economic, and family historians and historical demographers. The author deals successively with the theoretical underpinnings of the history of towns; Cuenca viewed in the larger comparative context of the decline of Spain in the seventeenth century; the relationship between economic change and urban demographic behavior: epidemics, famine, and death in an urban setting; household and family structure; and nineteenth-century migratory patterns in Cuenca.

Prospering from an active textile industry in the mid-sixteenth century involving almost thirty percent of the active population, Cuenca began to decline in population in the 1590s, dropping from 13,000 to 5,600 by 1650; two centuries later in 1860 the population had only increased to 7,400 inhabitants. Economically, the demise of the textile industry in Cuenca in the 1590s led to a ruralization of the region and an increase in the number of people in the agricultural sector, a pattern that persisted into the twentieth century. Deurbanization and economic

and demographic stagnation (1600-1876), also typical of towns in Old and New Castile and Estremadura, occurred when urban areas outstripped the agricultural carrying capacity of the surrounding countryside. This, in turn, imposed a "ceiling to potential urbanization."

Patterns of nuptiality, marital fertility, and mortality reveal a good deal about Cuenca, particularly in the nineteenth century. Although marriages occurred later from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, population remained stationary because delibacy declined. Among the determinants of nuptiality were the volatile marriage market, migration, residence, societal status, and time of year. As for marital fertility, Cuenca had a seven-to-ten percent lower level than rural areas. Conception was lowest in August and October and during Lent, when religious attitudes dictated abstinence. Mortality, particularly infant and child mortality, was high: only half the children born in Cuenca reached puberty, while life expectancy for the newborn was twenty-nine years. Linking prices to demographic phenomena demonstrated that high prices depressed fertility and nuptiality, though the strongest relationships in Reher's model were between prices and mortality, mortality and nuptiality, and most likely, nuptiality and fertility.

By Reher's definitions, mortality crises occurred in any year when mortality rates doubled the average. Usually, subsistence and epidemic crises went hand in hand. Subsistence crises in bad harvest years were virtually unavoidable, compounded always by hoarding and a lack of regional markets and of adequate municipal grain storage facilities. When epidemic disease struck the town, *conquenses* responded by flight, isolation, cancelling fiestas, public gatherings, and bull fights, and improving hygiene, but for the most part these measures failed to control epidemics, at least until after

1804, the year of the last general mortality crisis in Cuenca.

On the surface the nineteenth-century household structure in Cuenca was simple, with a head and his wife, children, co-resident kin, and domestic servants, but Reher demonstrates that a far more complex kinship network transcended the obvious, simple family structure. The high mobility of the population made such networks absolutely fundamental—and possible. In fact, the constant in- and out-migration from the town was a stabilizing factor for Cuenca and showed the resourcefulness of the population in maximizing their income and meeting their economic needs. Moreover, this constant movement of people reflected the dynamism and mobility of *conquenses* despite the existence of static social and economic structures and demographic stagnation after 1600.

Reher's work is richly multidimensional. Thoroughly familiar with the debates prevailing in historical demography and urban history, he brings a fresh, new approach to his early modern Cuenca by arguing and demonstrating that the town cannot be viewed separately from the countryside; the two, he shows, particularly by his migration analysis, are inseparably, almost symbiotically linked. In the author's discussion of the decline of Spain, he compares demographic and economic patterns in Cuenca with those in other areas of Spain, pointing both to regional similarities and differences while confirming some conventional wisdom. Moreover, Reher—modestly—does not make too much of his prodigious research and analysis and is eager to ask new questions that he feels he has not answered adequately or can only speculate about. Lastly, his deep seated affection for Cuenca and its people, even in his heaviest statistical passages, gives the book warmth. One feels that Reher

has walked every meter of the town—no easy task—and knows *conquenses* past and present very well. This is a fine book that can be read with great profit.

JOHN JAY TePASKE  
Department of History  
Duke University

**Murray, Oswyn and Price, Simon (editors).** *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 372. 19 figures, 4 plates. \$110.00 (Can.).

**Owens, E.J.** *The City in the Greek and Roman World.* London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. xi, 210. 54 black and white illustrations. \$65.50 (Can.)/\$52.50 (U.S.).

The city was the basic organisational unit of the Greco-Roman world, remaining fundamental both to administration and to men's conception of their place in the universe even when the heyday of the independent citizen-states of classical Greece was no more than a remote memory. In the second century of our era, a Greek panegyrist could present the Roman Empire as a commonwealth of cities, and hardly a single Roman or early Byzantine emperor failed to found cities to perpetuate his memory and that of his family. Moreover, for obvious physical reasons, inscriptions and archaeology, which together provide so much of the available evidence for the Greek and Roman world, tend to document in the first instance individual cities, their inhabitants and the dealings of both with other cities, individuals and groups. Therefore both the city as a historical phenomenon and individual cities have long been a primary focus of modern research into the classical world.

The title of *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander* consciously and deliberately provokes comparison with A.H.M. Jones' classic study of *The Greek City from*

*Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford, 1940). But, whereas Jones gave a systematic survey of the development and history of Greek cities in Asia Minor, Egypt and the Middle East over nearly a thousand years, the new book consists of ten papers presented at the Oxford Ancient History Seminar in 1986/7 plus four others. It possesses many of the strengths of its scholarly genre, such as the lively presentation of different points of view, but also some of its weaknesses, particularly a tendency to address questions of more interest to the group who formed the original audience than to 'the general reader and the student of the social sciences' who are identified as the target audience for the book. The stated aims of illustrating 'the different methodological approaches currently being practised' and providing 'an introduction to the state of the art' are achieved, but not every chapter can be unreservedly recommended to those who do not already have considerable familiarity with the history of the Greek city between Hesiod and Demosthenes—whose names, though less resonant than those of Homer and Alexander, would give a better indication of the real scope of the volume.

The book has three main sections. In the first, Nicholas Purcell gives a brilliant Braudelian analysis of migration and mobility in the eastern Mediterranean from c. 800 to c. 500, while Bruno D'Agostino discusses military organisation and social structure in archaic Etruria primarily from iconographic evidence. The second section, on 'the geography of the city,' contains four excellent essays on topics of wide interest. Oliver Rackham argues with elegance, erudition and wit the controversial thesis that the landscape of classical Greece was closely similar to that of modern Greece. Anthony Snodgrass provides both a theoretical justification of survey archaeology and a demonstration of its practical results when applied to western Boeotia. Lucia Nixon and Simon Price use the