Book Reviews

Owen M. Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism and the Imperium Christianum*, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2014, pp. 336. ISBN 9780198718031.

The Frankish king Charlemagne, crowned emperor in Rome by the Pope in the year 800, created an empire larger than anything that had been seen north of the Mediterranean since the Romans. What was it that enabled this empire to cohere? And what, if anything, was its long-term legacy? The answer given by Phelan's interesting book to both these questions is the Christian initiation ritual of baptism. The historian Walter Ullmann once memorably described the Frankish movement of cultural reform—the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, traditionally associated with the regime of Charlemagne and his successors—as the baptism of an entire society, a collective baptism operating 'on the largest conceivable scale'. Phelan takes that insight to a new level, arguing that baptism was Carolingian Francia's 'most basic organizing principle' (p. 1), and provided its 'conceptual glue' (p. 10).

In the later Middle Ages, baptism was a Christian sacrament, one of the seven major religious rituals marking stages of the life cycle from birth through to death. Things were not so codified in the early Middle Ages, but nevertheless from an early date, the rite was described using the complex Latin term *sacramentum*. For this reason, Phelan begins with a helpful survey of that word's semantic field in Late Antiquity and the period prior to Charlemagne's rule, showing how it shrugged loose from its moorings in military and legal contexts to take on a theological sense. He then explores the significance of baptism in capitularies (royal edicts) and letters from Charlemagne's reign, notably around the great council of Frankfurt in 794, before concentrating on the work of one particular scholar at Charlemagne's court, Alcuin of York. Phelan discusses Alcuin's

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ideas about baptism as expressed in his surviving letters and in the early medieval liturgical commentary on the baptism ritual, a commentary known by its opening words as *Primo paganus* and attributed here to the emigrant Yorkshireman.

The following chapter, Chapter 4, is the most compelling and rewarding chapter for this reviewer: a close reading of a discussion in 811–12, initiated by Charlemagne himself, around baptismal practice in the Frankish kingdom. In a sophisticated analysis, Phelan exploits Susan O'Keefe's remarkable editions of the surviving traces of an empire-wide flow of information, to show something of the mechanisms by which it took place: how Charlemagne contacted the archbishops of his empire, who duly passed on his written questionnaire to the bishops under their supervision, and then sent back the results to the imperial court. This is an impressive illustration of how efficient early medieval administration really could be under the Carolingian dynasty of kings. The fifth chapter examines the extent to which the concepts of baptism had worked their way into everyday consciousness by the later ninth century—Phelan thinks very far indeed—while the conclusion presses home the point that Carolingian discussions of baptism left an imprint on medieval Europe that far outlasted Charlemagne's territorial empire itself, gone by 900.

Phelan's book will certainly dispel any doubts its readers may have about the great importance of baptism to early medieval European thinkers. However, sometimes its focus seems to waver. The slippery Latin word *sacramentum* was used to denote oaths as well as baptism, but contemporaries were quite aware of the difference between swearing an oath and being baptised, as one of the Carolingian authors that Phelan cites, Radbert, makes clear. So, the book's extensive discussions of oaths appear a little out of place. Occasionally, too, the book pushes its sources too hard in its quest for allusions to baptism. For instance, it treats a passage from Alcuin's account of the life of the fourth-century saint Martin as revealing 'an underlying conceptual framework of *sacramenta*' (p. 47); but to this reviewer, Alcuin was simply drawing a contrast between Martin's former military service and his new Christian activity, without particularly dwelling on baptism as such. Whether baptism 'provided the frame' (p. 207) for the history written by the ninth-century layman Nithard, or whether Charlemagne's authority really was 'anchored' in baptism (p. 52), is to my mind not quite demonstrated either.

The result is a book that at times seems to expand what is fundamentally a perceptive and usefully contextualised study of ideas about baptism during Charlemagne's reign into a slightly over-stated argument about the very nature of Frankish society. That baptism was important to Carolingian thinkers in coordinating ideas about the *imperium christianum* rests assured, but Charlemagne's empire did not rest on liturgy, theology and prayer alone. One would hardly guess from reading this book that some ninth-century lay people in Francia instrumentalised baptism for their own personal ends, for example, by acting as godparent for their own children in order to orchestrate a divorce, still less that things like law codes or Frankish identity could have been important in holding the empire together too.

It is also striking how liberally the book makes use of the word Europe, whether as 'Frankish Europe' or 'Carolingian Europe'. Contrary to some current assumptions, the Carolingian Franks did have a concept of Europe, but it was not a prominent one, and in this regard, the book perhaps betrays its own intellectual and cultural assumptions: this is an account of the Carolingian Empire, and of its associated cultural renewal, that is very much oriented to a general history of Western or European civilisation, written in a religious key. However, these reservations should not detract from the fact that Phelan has undoubtedly provided the most sustained and wide-ranging exploration to date of the role that baptism played in ninth-century Frankish culture, and it is a study which has a great deal to commend it.

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Sonja Filip and Alexandra Hilgner (eds), *The Lady with the Phoenix Crown: Tang-Period Grave Goods of the Noblewoman Li Chui (711–736)*, Schnell und Steiner, and Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Regensburg and Mainz, 2014, pp. 135, ISBN 978-3-7954-2927-0.

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This attractive publication presents in condensed form the main results of an interdisciplinary study of the well preserved grave of a Chinese noblewoman dating to the early eighth century. The book under review draws on the detailed research report of about 400 pages: Susanne Greiff, Romina Schiavone, Zhang Jianlin, Hou Gailing and Yang Jungchang (eds), *The Tomb of Li Chui: Interdisciplinary Studies into a Tang Period Finds Assemblage* [Monographien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz (*Romano-Germanic Central Museum Mainz, monograph series*)] 117, Mainz, 2014. Both volumes—the book under review and the detailed report—were published a year earlier in German and now in English, making the investigations available to a wider audience. The collection edited by Filip and Hilgner consists of 20 papers that present different aspects of the subject—from discovery and excavation (carried out in 2001) through conservation (completed 2009) and analysis of context and interpretation (finished in 2012).

The grave chamber had collapsed in ancient times, and it is therefore probable that no later grave 'looting' or manipulation took place. Nevertheless, several objects and parts of the body were dislocated through water, thus disturbing their original deposition. A relatively short inscription, written in colour on a ceramic tablet, facilitates the identification of the buried person, Li Chui. She was born in 711 and died in 736, and belonged to a high-ranking family (the first Tang emperor Gaozu was among her ancestors four generations before). Li Chui was married to an unknown man 'from the north' and had a child. The epitaph offers little further information, apparently following a common scheme. To present Li Chui's life as a 'dramatic–romantic love story' seems to be an inappropriate interpretation by the authors.

Li Chui was buried in a cemetery just east of the city walls of Chang'an (today's Xi'an) during the heyday of the Tang dynasty, whose capital was located there. The city had about a million inhabitants and covered an area of more than 80 km². The graves of its emperors were located many kilometres north of the city and the river Wei He; they (none opened archaeologically so far) were surrounded by graves of high-ranking officials. The famous Terracotta army made a thousand years earlier and belonging to the grave of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi († 210 BC) are to be found in the same area.

In archaeological terms, six 'ranks'—that correspond to size—can be identified among the graves, the length of which ranges from 10 metres to 100 metres. The equipment of the grave monument and the grave goods vary accordingly. The graves possess an inclining corridor and a chamber, as in the case of Li Chui, whose grave belonged to the fifth 'rank'. Often couples were buried together, and in most cases, the wife was buried in the same grave as her husband. But Li Chui had her own grave, perhaps a temporary one. Apparently, the Tang period burials had two main aims: the representation of social prestige through the graves and an expression of piety for the deceased person.

The book under review presents the grave goods of Li Chui according to the material they were made of. Viewed in a functional perspective, the grave furnishings can be ordered as follows:

1. Most of the precious objects comprise items of dress and jewellery—several jade objects in the hands, at the belt and around the skull; pins, gold foils with cloisonné and floral decorations belonging to the hairdos (an 'extravagant, high-rising coiffure'—the 'Phoenix crown') and a skirt embroidered with pearls, objects suspended from the belt of jade and gold, in addition to several small items. Apparently no textiles have been documented which limits the accuracy of any reconstruction. Three precious mirrors should be mentioned too.
2. Vessels represent the second main category of grave objects—several bowls, some plates and other vessels were made of silver (three) and others of copper alloy (nine), whose functions remain unclear; ceramic vessels are rare, but perhaps two vases were used as refuge for the Buddhist soul; some lacquer boxes used as containers for certain requisites earn specific attention.
3. About 37 figurines were found in the grave—ten human figurines and many more of domestic animals (six pigs, seven rams, a cow, a horse, four dogs, eight hens and cocks), all made simply out of ceramic material, representing the 'everyday life' of the deceased wife. About 50 bronze coins were found in small packages, about which no further information is supplied. Chin straps interestingly observed in China as well as in Geometric Greece since the eighth century BC tied the lower jaw to the skull.

Li Chui's grave and the findings recorded in the publication under review are relevant not only for archaeological research into early Chinese history but can also trigger a comparison with European examples. In general, graves and their furnishing apparently reflect social circumstances, but they are not 'mirrors of life'. In fact, they are what remains of cultural practices during burial. There are few, if at all any, traces of religious beliefs in graves—though religion probably played a central role during the performance of burial rites and ceremonies. The common assumption that grave furnishings represent a thought for the afterlife is apparently misleading in several cultural contexts. The mourning relatives arranged the grave according to their profane ideas and those of their social environment.

According to written sources of Tang period China, prestigious objects suspended from the belt were a marker of rank among both women and men. In early medieval Europe, suspended objects are associated with women's dress only, while men possessed belts in different form and quality. Similar to Europe during antiquity, laws against grave luxury were issued in China during the eighth and ninth centuries. The grave furnishings show that these attempts did not succeed either in China or in the Mediterranean. Relatives of the deceased were more interested in demonstrating their social position within their respective societies. 'Grave looting' or more neutral grave re-opening were widespread in both regions during the periods in question; this indicates probably more than criminal intention, rather a cultural practice related to the social memory of ancestors. In view of its comparative perspective, 'world archaeology' can contribute to a better understanding of similarities and differences of cultural behaviour in time and space. The above publication contributes to placing the discussion in such a framework.

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Chris Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, pp. 320, ISBN 978-0-691-14828-1.

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After a weighty monograph (*Medieval Rome: Stability and Crisis of a City, 900–1150*),[1] Chris Wickham comes back to medieval Italy for a magisterial synthesis, shifting the focus from the capital to the core of the grand national narrative of the past. The links between the two works are evident, not only because Rome is one of the three detailed case studies (together with Milan and Pisa) taken into account in the first part of *Sleepwalking into a New World*, before a more structural survey of other communes, but it is also the inclusion of the 'Eternal City' within the Italian communal area, which follows coherently (and expands, from a specific point of view) the purpose, declared by Wickham in *Medieval Rome*, 'to situate, as much as possible, the history of Rome inside that of Italy'.[2]

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[1] Wickham, *Medieval Rome.*

Indeed, this is not a completely new perspective, since Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, in his 2011 book, *L'altra Roma: Una Storia dei Romani All'epoca dei Comuni*,[3] already made a successful attempt to write a history of the '*urbe*' in High Middle Ages 'without the Popes', bucking both the old historiographical trend of Rome's extraneousness to social and political events of the rest of the Peninsula and the traditional image of its inexorable decadence after the ancient splendour of the classical age. (Incidentally, it seems significant to emphasise that this approach was adopted by two non-Italian scholars). Nonetheless, Wickham's merits are unquestionable on this question. The comparative key systematically used in *Sleepwalking into a New World* makes the Roman case in a very original and immediate way, even with its peculiarities, so deeply (and profitably) a part of communal Italy. The book will surely become a milestone in this field of study, both for its contents and methods.

If the object—and the chronological extent—of the book is revealed by the subheading, the original content of Wickham's work has to be found in the very appealing (and only seemingly enigmatic) title. The 'emergence of the Italian city communes', in Wickham's view, is rather later than historians have traditionally argued. The slow, non-linear sequence of the events that forerun the institutional crystallisation of the new regime seems to suggest more than merely informal practices of government at the beginning of that experience. It does coincide—Wickham aims to demonstrate—with a real 'sleepwalking into a new world', whose beginnings can be traced back to different levels of precocity, and whose developments can lengthen more or less, depending on specific local situations. This was significantly generalised in the whole communal area and definitively ended only in the mid-twelfth century (1150), exactly as in the monograph on Rome, being the endpoint of Wickam's discussion.

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[2] *Ibid.*: 2.

[3] Maire Vigueur, *L'altra Roma.*

However, Wickham is not completely isolated. He engages in a dense long-range dialogue with some continuitist readings, both in the slow and late documentary definition of the Italian communes' identity and of the word 'commune' itself, as shown in a fundamental study by Ottavio Banti.[4] There is an asynchronicity (or, at the very least, a non-automatic coincidence) between the first mention of communal leaders (generally named *consules*) and the official birth date of a 'commune'. But what makes Wickham's book deeply original is the radicalisation of its proposal, that does not merely consist in placing the definitive formalisation of communal institutions after about fifty years from their first documentary evidences. Wickham, as compared with Hagen Keller, on this point is not just postponing the moment in which a 'real' commune is fully established, after a first, informal (or 'latent', using the very fitting formula of Giuliano Milani)[5], phase, but, more generally, invites us to revise our traditional views on the communes' origins, definitively dismissing any determinist reading: with regards to the elites that created the first non-monarchical forms of government in medieval Europe, there is no evidence that there was any awareness that they were doing anything new (p. 6). It was a real sleepwalking, and the new world arose out of any long-term strategy. On the basis of a large quantity of charters, and, whenever it is possible (i.e., mainly for Genoa, Milan, Pisa and Rome), by constantly interlacing documents with narrative and legislative sources, he outlines a persuasive description of a 'new world'. Its most outstanding features are specific needs of defensive reactions, a certain amount of improvisation, a continuous state of sperimentalism and a keen sense of pragmatism. In all truth, the last two aspects can be regarded as structural of the entire communal history, even of the later, much more mature one (considering the long and complicated institutional trial that preceded the emergence of the *podestà* regime between the twelfth and thirteenth century).[6] On the other hand, a discussion of the rise of the Italian communes in terms of tactical defenses to the institutional breakdown of the kingdom and to the local (and consequent) political crises is particularly interesting for capturing

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[4] Banti, ' "Civitas" e "Commune" nelle Fonti Italiane dei Secoli XI e XII'[Civitas" and "Commune" in the 11th and 12th century Italian Sources].

[5] Milani, Giuliano, *I comuni italiani. Secoli XII–XIV*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007, p. 24.

[6] Artifoni, *Tensioni Sociali e Istituzioni nel Mondo Comunale [Social Struggles and Institutions in the Communal World]*.

the original nature of the new bodies of government and avoiding, at the same time, all the threadbare historiographical myths of urban liberty, proto-democracy and incipient modern republicanism that are normally associated with the new regime.

In *Sleepwalking into a New World*, there is no space for revolutionary events, and the city communes (with the partial exceptions of Rome, Cremona and Arezzo) 'were not usually the result of open conflict' against the traditional powers (p. 9). Instead, we can generally notice non-traumatic changes in the passage from the old bishopric hegemony to the new consular leadership, a strong continuity of men and structures of government, sometimes with an ordered, hierarchised cooperation (visible in Asti and, above all, in Milan, from the end of the eleventh century up to the 1130s).

Pointing out this continuity, Wickham, of course, does not aim to underestimate the radical novelty embodied by the communal phenomenon. He is well aware that a certain duration of a group of *capitanei*, military aristocrats defined by feudo-vassalic relationships with bishops, is too limited, both chronologically and spatially, to overplay 'the importance of feudal ties in communal analyses' (p. 14). Therefore, more than with the famous (and very controversial) book by Keller on the society of orders,[7] Wickham particularly engages with Maire Vigueur's *Cavaliers et Citoyens*[8] and with its main thesis of a political core of the commune across the twelfth century, characterised by the 'militia', a collectivity of mounted warriors, including lesser landowners and richer members of the mercantile, artisanal, judicial and notarial strata, comprising 10–15 per cent of the urban population. Although Wickham acknowledges to Maire Vigueur the great merit of having 'given a new framing to research in this field' and shown how 'communal activity belonged to a relatively wide stratum' (p. 14), he expresses some doubts about the total homogeneity of the militarised political elite. For him, more helpful 'to get closer to real social and political differences of the early city communes' is to introduce a stratification inside Maire Vigueur's urban mounted militia based on wealth: landowners with substantial rural and urban holdings,

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[7] Keller, *Adelsherrschaft und städtische Gesellschaft in Oberitalien [Aristocracy and Urban Society in Northern Italy].*

[8] Maire Vigueur, *Cavaliers et Citoyens. Guerre et Société dans l'Italie communale, XII^{e}-XIII^{e} Siècles*.

lesser landowners with some commercial interests and a 'medium elite' of judicial officials. It is the interplay of these strata that determined the formation and nature of consular communal government in the first decade of the twelfth century. It is the same dynamic interplay and the continuous change of those social hegemonies (visible again in Milan, with the substantial pre-eminence of the 'medium elite' after a first aristocratic period) that can help one understand the ad hoc, improvisational nature of earlier communal development: the 'sleepwalking into a new world' by the new urban leaders, the lack of a large-scale strategy, except for (at least in the major cities) a clear plan of occupation of the rural territories, the *contado*, almost from the beginning. Indeed, despite a range of very diverse local experiences and precocity of communal consolidations, 'only military commitment', Wickham says, 'was there in every case from the start' (p. 189). It was so much earlier than the other elements of the ideal-type commune: 'assemblies, consuls with rotating offices, regularised court proceedings, legislation'. When they all were definitively formalised, in the 1150s, and the 'sleepwalking into a new world' finally ended, the long-standing experience gained in the military field turned out to be the winning card in the direct clash with Frederick Barbarossa and his pretenses on a little (but singularly rich and politically complex) word that had radically changed from the end of the eleventh century.

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Munis D. Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp. xvii + 348.

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In this book, Munis Faruqui studies the role played by princely households in the establishment of the Mughal Empire in South Asia. Specifically, Faruqui argues that the acrimonious nature of political competition, especially during the periods of succession, 'actually helped spread, deepen, and mobilize Mughal power through an empire-wide network of friends and allies'. The book is divided into seven chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction, Faruqui reviews the relevant literature about the Mughal state and focuses on the recent trend of analysing the relationship between the state and society as exemplified by Farhat Hasan's *State and Locality in Mughal India*. Chapter 1 provides an overview of Mughal succession practices from Babur to Aurangzeb, showing how the earlier tradition of shared sovereignty bolstered by territorial princely appanages gave way to a progressively narrower line of succession and more imperial control of the princely networks. Chapter 2 focuses on the early phase of this trajectory, from 1504 to 1556, and shows how the exercise of shared sovereignty competed with and proved unmanageable for the growing imperial project, especially under the second emperor Humayun. Chapter 3 reconstructs the princely household as an institution as it existed from the late Akbari period to the 1680s. This was where potential future emperors gained political and administrative experience and also learned how to prepare for a successful accession. Chapter 4 investigates the interactions between the princes and elite groups across the empire. This exchange created a space where a prince could strengthen his future bid for the throne, and also served as the means of attracting talent into imperial service. In Chapter 5, the author explores the oppositional behaviour of Mughal princes and explains how acts of rebellion by a prince and counter-rebellion by the emperor, far from weakening the empire, served as the means of recruitment, engagement and extension of patronage that rejuvenated and projected the Mughal system further across the subcontinent. Chapter 6 elaborates upon this argument by considering wars of succession, again showing how each succession process kept the Mughal state dynamic through the reshuffling of elites. Chapter 7 demonstrates that matters changed drastically in the last two decades of Aurangzeb's reign. The financial problems of the *jagir* system undermined the ability of the princely households to function in the ways described above. The fading away of princely households strengthened the hands of powerful intermediaries and severed their bonds from one another. In the conclusion, Faruqui argues that finally in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, a new political system developed that witnessed the gradual disappearance of the imperial state as an effective political force. This was symbolised by the overthrow and blinding of the emperor Farrukhsiyar by nobles, and his replacement by two sickly cousins, both of whom died within months. In short, with the collapse of the princely household came the collapse of the empire.

Faruqui provides an important contribution to the field of Mughal political history. While the issue of Mughal succession has preoccupied a number of scholars for some time, no study has undertaken a systematic investigation of the household and its role in maintaining the power of the Mughal system over the two centuries of its effective rule. The author should also be commended for his solid knowledge of the historiography and his imaginative application of relevant new research in order to expand his argument. A good example of this is where Faruqui draws on Jos Gomman's identification of five or six key zones in the subcontinent in order to illustrate how successful princely rebels were able to control at least one of these (either through ruling them as appanages or through conquering them) while successful emperors managed to hold on to two or more (pp. 217–25). Finally, Faruqui's contention that rebellion actually strengthened the empire is inventive and counter-intuitive. It certainly solves the apparent paradox of violent succession struggles combined with imperial expansion.

I do think *The Princes of the Mughal Empire* could have given more space to the female members of the imperial household. Faruqui is very much aware of the important roles played by princesses such as Jahanara and queens such as Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal and certainly discusses them in the book. A more detailed study of these individuals along with those who were not blood relatives of emperors such as the powerful Maham Anga (who orchestrated the overthrow of Bayram Khan) would have given us a more complete view of the household which we know was also very much a feminine space. Leslie Peirce's *Imperial Harem*, referred to by Faruqui in the introduction and conclusion, could have served as a very good model for this task.

I also have some objections to the way the empire is conceptualised in its formative period. In the second chapter, 'The Early Years, 1504–1556', Faruqui attributes the high prestige offered to all male members of the imperial family (not just the emperor) to a 'steppe political tradition' that presumably was inherited by Babur and Humayun from Central Asia. This is of course problematic since the Timurid family had ruled during the whole length of the fifteenth century in urban and agrarian Khurasan and Transoxania and not on the steppes of Inner Asia. We cannot assume that the 'Central Asian' political tradition was static and unchanging in the face of different social conditions from that in which it was presumably first developed. Nor would it be appropriate to refer to the Timurid *mīrzā*s (princes) as belonging to 'clans'. They are actually members of important aristocratic lines, each commanding the loyalty of former retainers who had flocked to the new refugee kingdom of Kabul.

Such disagreements notwithstanding, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire* is a significant and welcome publication. It enriches our understanding of Mughal political history and will serve as the point of departure for future studies on the topic.

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Yogesh Sharma and **Pius Malekandathil** (eds), *Cities in Medieval India,* New Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. x, 828. ISBN 978-93-80607-99-3.
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A product of two conferences that were organised by the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), one in 2008 and the other the following year, the work ambitiously brings together, from a wide variety of perspectives, the latest scholarship on the urban centres and urbanisation in medieval and early modern India. A voluminous collection, the work is marked by case studies of a large number of cities and towns: Agra (K. K. Trivedi), Delhi (Pius Malekandathil), Shahjahanabad (Shama Mitra Chenoy), Patna (Satish Kumar), Thanjavur (S. Jayseela Stephen; T. K. Venkatsubramanian), Ahmedabad (Rakesh Kumar), Lucknow (Madhu Trivedi), Srinagar (Anubhuti Maurya), Cambay (Abhay Kumar Singh), Warangal (I. Lakshmi), Puducherry (Jean Deloche; Arvind Sinha), Chennai (Jangkhomang Guite), Goa (Vitor Luis Gasper Rodrigues), Diu (Luis Fredrico Dias Antunes), etc. While each of these studies focus on different aspects of urbanisation, they are all empirically rich studies, and one thing that so obviously ties them together is the ease with which they work through a wide range of source material. It is indeed commendable that most of the contributors have not just depended on the standard sources, emerging from the imperial archives, but have also engaged with the regional/local sources. While the contributors have chosen to focus on different issues to bind their stories of urbanisation together, they seem to share a couple of important concerns about urbanisation. In their own ways, they share a certain discomfort with the state-induced model of urbanisation, and suggest a perspective of urban development, some more convincingly than the others, that is based on socio-economic factors and the agency of the elites, merchants, gentry and the plebian groups inhabiting the urban spaces. In line with the growing trend in urban studies, the essays here seek to develop a perspective of 'urbanisation from below'.

In order to recover the urban networks, and more importantly urban–rural linkages so crucial for urbanisation, several contributors in the volume have chosen to focus not on a singular city, but rather on integrated regions: western Rajasthan (G. S. L. Devra), Bengal (TIlottama Mukherjee), Marwar (Tanuja Kothiyal), etc. It is interesting that the essays that look at regions to recover the relations between urbanisation and economic processes largely choose to focus on the spaces between the city and the village—the *qasbas (townships), mandis (local markets), chowkis (small, street corner vending places)* , pilgrim centres, etc. In recovering the processes that informed urbanisation in the rurban centres, the work takes issue with the standard orthodoxies on the subject. Developing a perspective for 'urbanisation from below', these studies present urbanisation as an integrated development based on a relation of reciprocity between the towns and the villages. Taken together, these essays debunk the thesis of parasitical urbanisation, within which urban centres are viewed as 'parasites', freeloading on rural supplies for their existence and enjoying with the village socio-economic order a unidirectional relationship, scourging their resources from the villages without providing anything in return.

At a more theoretical level, the inadequacies of this model are set out early in the collection in an engaging essay by Rajat Dutta entitled 'The Rural–Urban Continuum and the Making of a Proto-industrial Economy in Early Modern India: A View from the East' (pp. 83–112). Taking issue with the work of historians like Irfan Habib and K. N. Chaudhuri, he argues that urbanisation was a complex phenomenon and cannot be exclusively attributed to the rural surplus appropriation by the overly exploitative Mughal state. Within the state-determined model of urban development, indeed, the towns and cities in the early modern period come across as shallow entities subsisting on aristocratic consumption and appropriation of rural surplus; lacking a socio-economic base of their own, they are understood as dependant on the state and the ruling classes for their continued sustenance. Debunking the view, Dutta argues that the socio-economic processes tended to bring both the towns and the villages into networks of market, trade, consumption and exchange; it is the rural–urban continuum that marks the pattern of urbanisation in the early modern period in India. This is indeed the perspective that, as I mentioned earlier, informs the work of several other contributors in the volume, but Rajat takes the argument further and sees within the production, exchange and consumption patterns in the rural and rurban levels of economy, the development of proto-industrial economy. In this, of course, the Indian experience is scarcely different from Western Europe, and this helps foreground the significance of comparative and cross-cultural perspectives in doing urban history.

The volume is enriched by two introductory pieces by the editors. In his article, Pius Malekandithil (pp. 1–22) critically engages with the historiography of early modern urbanisation in India; he brings out the important trajectories and possibilities that have opened up with the availability of a wider range of source material. At the same time, he also looks at the significant developments in European urban history, and, in a definitive move away from ‘European exceptionalism’, finds interesting convergences between European and Asian experiences of urbanisation. The other introduction by Yogesh Sharma (pp. 23–820) critically looks at a wide range of European sources, including the travellers’ accounts to recover the experience of living in a city in medieval India.

This is an important collection of essays, wide-ranging and thought-provoking. Even as the articles are written from different perspectives and deal with different regions and urban centres, they share the uneasiness with the prevailing historiography, in particular with its top-down approach to urbanisation. Within their distinctive viewpoints, their authors move away from the state-centred approach to urbanisation and develop enriching perspectives of urban development that are rooted in socio-economic changes and the agency of the social actors engaged in production, exchange and consumption in the towns, villages and the intermediate spaces between them. I did feel though that the issues of culture and social life could have been more detailed, for there is no discussion in the volume on crime, criminality, legal system, norms of civility, moral order, etc. One omission is particularly glaring: in a work that is so voluminous and runs into more than 800 pages, there is not a single piece on women and gender relations.

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