

La città del Seicento. Daniela del Pesco and Andrew Hopkins.
Storia della città 10. Rome: Editori Laterza, 2014. 192 pp. €18.

La città del Seicento is the latest and final addition to Donatella Calabi's ten-volume History of the City series, an excellent, concise overview of European urban history from the Greeks to the twentieth century that targets not only academics, but also a general educated reader. This volume is divided into fourteen short chapters: six focus on specific geographic areas, and the others examine major themes. The result is an effective synthesis of the main characteristics of the seventeenth-century city that offers a much more complex and detailed analysis than the brevity of the work might suggest. While the volume reveals many of the unique characteristics of the different urban centers in the various areas of the Continent, it also highlights the vast exchange of ideas and theoretical models, and the collaboration of architects throughout Europe.

The authors emphasize the polycentric and multiform nature of the seventeenth-century city, in which the Baroque style, usually associated with the architecture of the period, was only one of the many elements of the urban fabric. In contemporary tracts, the city was often conceived as an organic entity, ideally organized in a geometric form,

with the main buildings erected in specific locations to emphasize clearly defined functions, but also to reflect beauty and decorum. While this sort of rigorous urban planning was more theoretical than practical, a clear effort to rationalize the urban fabric and connect, through targeted urban modifications, the more relevant landmarks existed as a primary goal. An increasing focus on infrastructures — aqueducts, fountains, sewers — significantly improved urban life. Water and waterways proved essential to urban development. Some of the fastest-growing cities were the ones tied to water and included not only the port cities, especially on the burgeoning Atlantic coast, but also those connected by rivers and artificial canals.

The seventeenth-century city also represented a privileged arena for individual and collective self-representation. More clearly than in any earlier period, buildings and specific urban locations acquired a symbolic valence, reflecting the agenda of individual families, urban elites, and especially religious and secular powers. In a period that witnessed the consolidation of centralized monarchies, the link between politics and urban planning became more evident. Squares were frequently turned into stages for public ceremonies and monumental expressions of authority. The French *places royales*, closed regular spaces organized around a statue of the king, perfectly embodied this celebratory function. The new capital cities, often organized around the royal palace, represented the growing power of the central authority and integrated different essential political, religious, and military functions.

The latter were particularly relevant in a century characterized by almost constant conflict. The innovations introduced in military architecture in the sixteenth century to respond to the increasing use of more effective artillery were further developed, as evidenced by the large number of published tracts on fortifications. The central powers throughout the Continent invested heavily in the fortifications of their states in the shape of walled cities and citadels. By the end of the century, however, with the borders fortified and secure, the need for the protective functions of city walls diminished. Because of the improvements to border security, the walls of Paris were partially dismantled in 1670, although urban limits were still clearly marked for fiscal and sanitary purposes.

These are only a few of the many aspects of the seventeenth-century city examined in this work, which also highlights some of the major themes with short but effective profiles of individual cities at the end of many of the chapters. The range of these profiles, devoted to metropolises like London, Amsterdam, and Naples, but also newly founded towns like Zamość and Richelieu, clearly indicates the geographic breadth of the volume, which includes frequently neglected areas such as Eastern Europe and the Scandinavian countries.

Certainly, not every theme is fully analyzed, and the illustrations, although numerous and useful, do not always effectively elucidate the arguments of the chapters: the sections on Paris and Turin, for example, would have benefited from more-detailed maps clarifying the urban transformations narrated in the text. However, this work represents a very valuable synthesis, one of the best on the

topic, and it would be unfair to expect too much depth and detail from a work that sees its conciseness as one of its major strengths.

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