

cities? If so, why? And in what sense is the statement that 'society became more dependent on the horse' [in an unspecified part of the nineteenth century] true? A selection of well-chosen photographs adds understanding and appeal, but it is a shame that they are not reproduced on appropriate paper. The best image, of an elaborate frame house being moved along an unidentified street (for the record it is San Francisco in 1908 by Sumner W. Matteson), appears on the dust wrapper only and will be discarded by most academic libraries before the book is shelved. One more gripe for the publishers, though they are in crowded bad company. Is it too much to ask for a consolidated bibliography of the kind without which a Ph.D. dissertation would be referred?

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Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London 1868–1906*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007. xii + 260pp. 11 tables. £50.00.
doi:10.1017/S0963926808005816

Historians examining the complex nature of London's local politics face an unenviable task. By 1885 the city was a patchwork of constituencies, returning 59 MPs to Westminster. It was a socially and culturally diverse metropolis and its rapid suburbanization has been seen, following the path-breaking work of Paul Thompson, as a key factor explaining political change. The growth of Conservatism and the eventual break-up of the Liberal coalition were, in this view, a result of the division of the city into (relatively) socially homogeneous constituencies. There is much in this debate to interest the urban historian. It raises fundamental questions about the relationship between urban social geography, electoral systems and political change and encourages reconsideration of the dynamics of British suburbanization.

Alex Windscheffel's ambitious study examines the question from the perspective of the Conservative party in London. This is a welcome change in that although there has been much written about the 'decline' of the Liberal party or the relative failure of Labour and Socialist parties, less attention has been given to the Conservatives. This is odd in that the Conservative party's populist transformation in the era of mass urban politics is clearly a significant factor in explaining the tardiness of their opponents' electoral performance. In order to explain this transformation Windscheffel delves deeply into the nature of local party activity, the nature of electoral narratives and, for some constituencies at least, the social geography of neighbourhoods and communities. Such a complex array of material is not easy to organize and this is reflected in the book's rather complex structure. The first section appears to focus on electoral languages and discourses. However, this section also offers something of a chronological review of local politics in London, the basic dynamics of civic Conservatism, redistribution debates, broad electoral trends and the social composition of constituencies. The middle section of the book is more tightly organized, focusing on issues of organization, campaigning and candidates. This is followed by an interesting discussion of municipal Conservatism, although here one might wish for more on Conservative attitudes to 'the government of London' problem before the 1889 Act. Finally, there is a valuable examination of the Conservative party's fortunes at the end of the

period, the role of imperial affairs in the refashioning of the Conservative party's basis of support and finally the 'unmaking' of London Conservatism in the years after 1900. Over all, Windscheffel offers a detailed, sophisticated and, on the whole, convincing account of London Conservatism. His methodology is one that gives due weight to the language and culture of grass-roots politics without seeking to give it explanatory primacy. Indeed, this is a serious attempt to examine how the culture of politics emerges from the complexity of specific political histories, local conditions and social conflicts. The question of the complexity of suburban life is taken seriously and myths about socially homogeneous constituencies are exploded. There is also useful analysis of the changing platform of the London party. Following Paul Readman, Windscheffel detects a distinct move towards imperial issues and away from local and social issues in the closing years of the Victorian period. There are also interesting observations on the supposed growth of racial attitudes and hostility to immigration in the East End, with valuable analysis of the career of Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownaggee, the Asian Unionist MP for Bethnal Green North East, who famously ousted George Howell in what was once regarded as one of the Liberal party's safest London seats.

The critical reader may, however, be left with some uncomfortable uncertainties about processes of long-term change in London Conservatism. Perhaps the most fundamental question is how much the overall electoral fortunes of the London Conservative party were really transformed in this period. If one compares the 1885 general election with that of January 1910 – two elections that the Liberal party nationally 'won' very narrowly – the number of seats won by each party in London at the two elections is almost the same. Indeed, the figures show a slight long-term gain for the Liberals. Of course aggregate totals mask many local changes, but one is still left with the question: did the nature of London as a world financial capital mean that it was just as much of a 'free trade' Liberal as an 'imperial' Conservative metropolis? There is also the problem that relatively small swings of electoral support saw very large numbers of seats changing hands. This is an interesting facet of London's political life and it makes study of long-term electoral transformation difficult. Many would point to the period 1868–85 as being the crucial period in which the Conservative party became seriously competitive in London politics – a period before many of the organizational and political changes which the author focuses upon. It would also be useful to have more discussion of London in the wider comparative context of national and regional politics. Without this, it is sometimes difficult to know to what degree the trends observed marked London's experience as genuinely exceptional, as opposed to a local manifestation of wider developments.

Despite these reservations, as a political history this is a stimulating and thought-provoking book. It will also raise many questions for the urban historian interested in debates about the city as a place where politics are performed. It is one of several recent publications to open up the way for a more thorough understanding of the relationship between urban environments and political culture. Did the nature of London as an imperial capital and a theatre of imperial spectacle make it easier to stimulate popular imperialism at election times? Was the nature of London suburbanization conducive to the display and promotion of popular Conservatism? Perhaps there is ultimately a need to develop a more sophisticated typology of suburbs and their constituencies to really understand local political dynamics. How important was the changing social profile of particular estates in

influencing party fortunes? How functionally different was a working-class suburb in West Ham to a working-class district of the 'old' East End? Today's political parties use sophisticated demographic data and software to model the social and cultural characteristics of streets, neighbourhoods, wards and constituencies. This may be the next step in developing our understanding political change in London and, indeed, other large cities.

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Eric Ross, *Sufi City: Urban Design and Archetypes in Touba*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006. xv + 290pp. 56 plates. Bibliography. £45.00/\$75.00.

doi:10.1017/S0963926808005828

Cities are organic and living entities, developing unique characteristics as a result of the actions and ideologies of those who live within and outside of their boundaries. Another publication in the burgeoning Rochester Series on African History and the Diaspora, this work investigates the physical and metaphysical foundation and organization of Touba (est. 1887), Senegal's second largest urban centre. In *Sufi City*, Eric Ross paints a complex picture of an intricate relationship between Sufism – both as a philosophy and as a social action – and the dynamic urban development that has resulted in the creation of a distinctly Sufi city. Designed, constructed and administered by the Mourides, a Senegalese Sufi order, all aspects of Touba's built space, according to Ross, reflect a combination of Islamic, Sufi and West African ideologies and concepts. What makes Touba unique in urban terms is that it serves as a holy city, the 'capital of the Mourides', and is officially designated an 'autonomous rural community' by the Senegalese government, thus enhancing its independence within the modern state. Ross' main goals in writing this book are to show the influence of Sufism on the urban development of Touba and to reveal to the reader the uniqueness of the city as a spiritual project that transcends ideas of tradition and modernity.

Ross has more than 17 years of experience in the region. He holds a Master's degree in Geography and a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies, and has served as an assistant professor of Geography at Al Akhawayn University (Ifrane, Morocco) since 1998. He has conducted fieldwork in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Mauritania and Algeria, where he has done research on shrine towns in Senegal, cultural development and religion in Moroccan cities, as well as trans-Saharan trade networks. His wealth of experience and unique academic interests contribute to the organization and analysis of this book, moving from Islamic studies in chapter 1, to cultural geography in the second and third chapters and lastly returning to the organization of Touba within Islamic and indigenous African beliefs in the final chapter.

The first chapter is a philosophical investigation of the archetype of tree within Sufi phenomenology. The discussion of the cosmic tree – Tuba the tree of Paradise – in terms of Sufi cosmology and the meaning of landscape reveals the metaphysical underpinnings of the city and raises the idea that traditional spiritual views of architecture and design in some Islamic and West African societies are not so different from those that formed the foundations of Touba: 'Part of their purpose was to reflect or express some part of a divine or cosmic reality. They were never