BOOK REVIEWS

FRIEDRICHS, CHRISTOPHER R. The Early Modern City 1450–1750. [A History of Urban Society in Europe.] Longman, London [etc.] 1995. x, 381 pp. £14.99.

"European cities of the early modern era belonged to a common civilization" (p. 7). This is the fundamental basis of the author's argument. Friedrichs compares European urban regions, except those of Russia and much of the Balkans, by emphasizing principally what they had in common before bringing out their differences. He follows the same approach in terms of chronology. Friedrichs convincingly presents the continuities that defined the period between 1450 and 1750, but he never fails to consider the importance of change either.

In each of the book's three parts the author stresses the structural parameters of urban life above all. The parameters discussed in "The City in Context" include the urban space, the political environment in the form of the state, the role of the church in the city's internal order, the organization of production and exchange, and the demographic patterns of urban society.

Part Two, "The City as a Social Arena", deals with the urban social order. Inequality is sharply profiled as the dominating principle of that order. The author stresses the crucial role of family and household as the basic elements of that urban social order. Concerning the political elites, urban society proved to be astonishingly flexible. An "open elite" was the rule. However, the chapter on poverty and marginality clearly shows the limits of social stability. In the long term increasing immigration became a problem which threw urban social stability into greater and greater disorder.

"Disorder was the eternal enemy of urban life" (p. 245), and urban society constantly had to try to master it. This is the main thesis of Part Three, entitled "The City in Calm and Crisis". Friedrichs approaches the question of mastery by demonstrating the importance of time in structuring the routines of urban life. This found expression in clock towers, which structured the working day, Sundays, which structured the working week, and political, economic and religious events, which structured the year. He also demonstrates the multiplicity of elements that ordered administrative action. However, order was not simply the outcome of political and administrative intentions. The social organization of neighbourhoods and guilds represented the pattern on which urban life was based. Natural phenomena, epidemics, outsiders who could not be assimilated into the urban order, war and starvation were crises challenging the urban routine. When it became clear that the urban authorities had failed to master them, conflict was the unavoidable consequence. But the motives behind urban conflict were by no means confined simply to this. A wide spectrum of conflict-producing factors, from tax problems, clashes between elite factions and struggles with non-urban political powers to religious divisions, challenged the viability of the urban social and political body. Nevertheless, Friedrichs does not interpret conflict as a normal characteristic of urban life. As a rule, the mechanisms that ensured the maintenance of the urban normative consensus were effective, and Friedrichs concludes that "the early modern city remained remarkably stable" (p. 331).

Friedrichs' basic thesis is developed throughout the book and supported by a vast array of material. Nonetheless, the book would have benefited from several shifts of emphasis. The chapter on "City and Church" for instance stresses the practical and organizational aspects of that relationship to the virtual exclusion of any other. But the relationship between the community of believers and the burger community fundamentally touched the normative basis of the European city. The actual social inequality stressed so strongly by Friedrichs was counteracted, for example, by religiously founded ideas of equality, especially during the period of the Reformation, but even earlier too. Those ideas sometimes had an enormous impact on political action. How important they could have been becomes clear when Friedrichs writes that the normative centre of urban society was the guilds. Their crucial hallmark was the levelling-out idea of *Genossenschaft* – the corporative equality of their members. My impression is that by and large Friedrichs' interpretation is oriented too strongly towards government authority as the determining component of socio-political action. As a consequence, his description of attempts to regulate the problem of poverty emphasizes too little the help offered by neighbourhoods, parishes and civic corporations. The same is true of those parts of the chapter on "Urban Routine" where the maintenance of order is treated mainly as the result of the success of government action. However, modern historical anthropology stresses the importance of the organizing function of informal components of the urban political culture, of corporative-egalitarian rituals, and of social subsystems loosely connected with the civic authorities. Nonetheless, it is not my intention here to challenge the theses presented in Friedrichs' book, merely to suggest modifications that may help us to better differentiate our image of the early modern city. They by no means diminish the author's achievement.

That achievement rests not only on the author's ability to formulate a coherent argument from such abundant material. It is based too on the author's success in making his arguments comprehensible to the reader. Again and again, one is impressed by the lucidity of Friedrichs' writing. He refers to the results of case studies drawn from virtually all over Europe. He presents a multitude of sources. He also provides valuable insight into the practice of doing research. As a result readers are encouraged to formulate their own enquiries, and these will be made much easier as a result of Friedrichs' detailed bibliography and suggestions for further reading. Students will find this book a valuable introduction to an important field of historical research. But it is more than that. Because of the stringency of its arguments, it will do much to stimulate debate on the fundamental principles of urban life.

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LIS, CATHARINA and HUGO SOLY. Disordered Lives. Eighteenth-Century Families and their Unruly Relatives. Polity Press, Cambridge 1996. x, 230 pp. Ill. £39.50.

In *Disordered Lives* Lis and Soly investigate the phenomenon of *confinement on request* – a still little known form of imprisonment.[1] Families could request the

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[1] *Disordered Lives* was originally published in Dutch: C. Lis and H. Soly, *Te gek om los te lopen?* (Turnhout, 1990).