

Abstracts of articles

Harry S.J. Jansen

Wrestling with the angel: problems of definition in urban historiography

The question 'what is the city' raised by Martindale in his edition of Max Weber's *The City* is an omnipresent one in urban history. This analysis of urban historiography since 1840 explores two definitional strands, each with many theoretical dimensions. The first is a somewhat self-contained conception of the city and relies on rural-urban contrasts; the second is a more open conceptualization of the city. The article tries to unravel the different approaches rather than preferring one approach to the other.

Martha Howell and Marc Boone

Becoming early modern in the late medieval Low Countries

The history of cities in the Low Countries at the end of Middle Ages is commonly presented as one of discontinuity in which old textile centres collapsed, and were replaced by new centres such as Antwerp, Leiden, Lille and Amsterdam which were in fundamental respects entirely unlike their medieval predecessors. This conventional interpretation is challenged with reference to Ghent and Douai. Neither suffered devastating economic decline, social trauma or political upheaval in the period, and both enjoyed a degree of relative economic success. Contradictions are also identified, especially the way that economic flexibility was associated with an intensification of social conservatism. This process not only helped produce a characteristically 'early modern' social order but also decisively linked the 'medieval' with the 'early modern' in these two cities.

J.C. Robertson

Reckoning with London: interpreting the *Bills of Mortality* before John Graunt

Early modern Londoners had access to weekly reports on the numbers of deaths. These weekly 'books of death' that the Parish Clerks' Company compiled provided the base for a city-wide system whereby the number

of deaths in every parish was reported to the Lord Mayor and the monarch. Under James and Charles royal interest led to the extension of the parishes listed in the *Bills of Mortality* to cover the wider metropolis while readers developed strategies for interpreting these weekly figures. In 1662 statistics derived from the annual summaries of the London *Bills* provided the base for John Graunt's path-breaking actuarial calculations. However, despite Graunt's demonstration of the importance of supplementary data that the *Bills* had incorporated, a system geared to report the weekly ebb and flow of epidemics was unable to provide the statistics that statisticians wanted. Rather than blaming the *Bills*, disappointed scholars claimed that the female parish searchers were incompetent.

D. Sim

The Scottish house factoring profession

The tenement is the traditional form of urban housing in Scotland and most tenements were built for rent. From the early nineteenth century onwards, private landlords in Scotland employed 'factors' to manage the houses on their behalf, responsible for houseletting, rent collection and the organization of repairs and maintenance. This paper examines the nature of the house factoring profession in terms of its organization and uses case studies to illustrate the way individual firms operated. The representation of the profession through factors' associations is also examined and there is a consideration of the negative image which factors have acquired. The paper explores the changing nature of factoring as tenement flats have been sold off and factors have become agents not for individual landlords but for a multiplicity of owner-occupiers.