

## Book Reviews

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*Cities at War in Early Modern Europe*. By Martha Pollak. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010. 370 pp. ISBN 0 521 11344X ; ISBN-13: 978-0521113441

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, gunpowder-operated artillery and its use in siege warfare transformed not only the political and military landscapes of early modern Europe but also the shape and form of European cities. For this was a period when fortifications became a prime instrument of war in the struggle for supremacy and survival, and their influence on architecture and urbanization was, invariably, all encompassing. ‘The most beautiful aspect of architecture’ wrote Pietro Cataneo in his influential book, *I Quattro Primi Libri di Architettura* (a set of four books on architectural theory which begins by covering the design of fortified cities, published in 1554) is that ‘which deals with cities’ and since cities were then being threatened with artillery, they had to be built differently to defend themselves from this menace. The identity of the European city, as a result, came to be defined by the science of its new military architecture with its regular bastioned enceintes and geometrically designed plans. In turn, this same process of military planning generated new forms of urban spaces within the walled cities, such as the orderly grid layouts of streets, the tree-lined avenues, the great central *piazze* dominated by

triumphal monuments, and the wide open esplanades and glacis that provided clear boundaries and viewpoints.

In *Cities at War in Early Modern Europe*, Martha Pollak, who is Professor of Architectural History at the University of Illinois in Chicago, examines how this new gunpowder warfare helped reshape the nature and form of walled cities throughout Europe. Despite its title the book is not, strictly speaking, a military history. It is not about the city at war and nor does it seek to examine the science of fortification *per se*. Its perspective differs from that of other histories of the fortified city that have looked at it from a predominantly military point of view. Indeed, the fascinating relationship between cities and warfare has been explored – Horst de la Croix's *Military considerations in City Planning: Fortifications*, first published in 1972, is one of the more popular essays that comes to mind and Antoine Picon's *La Ville et la Guerre* (1996) is another.

Rather, what makes Martha Pollak's study refreshingly different is that it focuses on how urban design and its spatial and visual ordering were influenced by the continual threat of war – how monarchs, princes and planners engineered the militarization of urban spaces and refashioned civic life with their bastioned star-shaped enceintes and citadels, massive esplanades and glacis, barracks, and parade grounds, in order to prepare the city for war. *Cities at War*, therefore, revolves around the 'multifarious affect of fortification, of the logistics of war preparation and its reflection in the physical form of the city,' what Martha Pollak equates with 'military urbanism' (a term that the author does not maintain to have coined herself). As such, Martha Pollak's work gravitates towards the political, social, economic, artistic, and even cultural influences on the design and construction of extensive defences and, in turn, their influence on the societies they were meant to shield and protect. The author is more concerned to illustrate how the so called 'military revolution' triggered off in the sixteenth century, and reaching its apogee in the Baroque age, altered towns and cities throughout the European mainland, giving rise to a widely recognisable 'international style' of urban design and urbanization characterised by geometry, uniformity, monumentality, architectural economy, and order. In Peter Arnade's words, 'Pollak does not reiterate the familiar narrative of the

late medieval commune giving way to the baroque city'. Instead, she explores 'the enormous investment of artists, architects, and engineers in an urban design style that married the state's interest in warfare to the architect's concern for mathematical harmony'.

In *Cities at War*, Martha Pollak offers a pan-European, richly illustrated, multi-disciplinary study of early modern military urbanism; she examines the manner in which this phenomenon was visualized by engravers, painters, and cartographers of the time in their plans and panoramic aerial views. In the words of Peter Clark, this book is 'very much an architectural historian's take on the significant and wide-ranging theme of war and the city'.

It expands on the central thesis of Martha Pollak's early study of Turin (*Turin 1564-1680: Urban Design, Military Culture, and the Creation of the Absolutist Capital*, University Of Chicago Press, 1991) that the military culture of early modern Europe decisively altered the conception, representation, and design of the European city. In her new book, however, she extends her survey of 'military urbanism' to the whole of Europe, in order to illustrate how 'a core of design ideas generated in the treatises of Italian military engineers evolved in the various local political and geographic conditions' that shaped the form and nature of the city. As a result, the author provides us with a wide-ranging study that covers all Europe, from Valletta to Stockholm, from Naples to Antwerp, London, and Paris. Her attention, though, does not extend beyond the best studied regions of Europe – France, Italy, Netherlands, etc - and stops short of considering Europe's overseas colonies, where many of the fortresses erected would undoubtedly have continued to enrich her central argument.

*Cities at War in Early Modern Europe* is divided into five chapters, each of which concentrates on a crucial stage in the militarization of the city, from its fortification and its theorization, down to its celebration, violation and rebuilding. The study begins with a look at the geometrically planned citadel, with a special emphasis on the pentagon, 'the symbol of the Baroque city'. The following chapters then explore the theoretical treatises on military architecture and the dissemination of knowledge; the siege views; the competing forms of street layout; the typology of temporary architecture constructed

for urban public ceremonies and large-scale ‘public rituals that turned the city into a trophy’; the commemoration of the city in print; the celebration of peace, and the transformation of urban space. The book concludes with an epilogue on the use of firework displays as a form of ‘transforming destructive power into urban spectacle’.

This is a carefully researched work, lavishly designed, and contains a wealth of information. It is also richly illustrated with over 200 images (there are over 100 fortified places depicted), including contemporary plans and panoramic views by the artists, cartographers and engravers of the period. All in all, this book offers an extensive and multi-disciplinary treatment of the subject matter as it brings together a wealth of material that will interest not just the architectural, urban and military historians, but also the students of culture, cartography, and art history. It can be highly recommended as an important reference work on the subject.

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