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Review Of "Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, And Change In Early Modern London" By J. P. Ward

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the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the editors of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*

Review

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of what would have to be done to establish them securely. The practical import of some geographical studies in extending empire is well documented in *Charting an Empire*; their causal ideological function is mainly just asserted.

This is a worthy and informative book. Historians of both English education and imperialism will have much to learn from it. But it is not an easy read. Large chunks are devoted to dense seriatim accounts of individual Oxbridge geographers and painstaking inventories of geographical books held in college libraries. These would have formed useful appendixes to a more reader-friendly text. The author's preference for the trees over the forest is evident. Poor Marx; poor Merton.

Steven Shapin

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Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London. By Joseph P. Ward (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997) 202 pp. \$45.00

Together with its prolonged religious strife, political upheaval, and cultural efflorescence, early modern London experienced dramatic population growth, physical expansion, and economic transformation. Echoing contemporaries, many scholars consider that these developments led both to the breakdown of traditional City-based institutions, rules, and sense of community and to the forging of new enterprises and identities in unregulated suburbs and liberties. The fate of livery companies (trade guilds) is taken to exemplify these changes. Rigid, oppressive, outmoded, and ineffective, these bodies lost the allegiance of, and control over, artisans and merchants, as immigrants pouring into freer areas outside the City engendered a new economic dynamism.

Ward challenges these views. Rather than a novel *Gesellschaft* of unstructured peripheries superseding the inflexible old center's traditional *Gemeinschaft*, he argues, the turbulent sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the formation of a metropolitan order. Manifest in consciousness and in organizations, the new metropolis combined elements of both impersonal society and sociable community; in it, individuals assembled identities by "selectively giving and withholding allegiance" to corporations, parishes, and neighborhoods (3). The metropolitan community could be glimpsed in reform-minded sermons and pamphlets that sought to understand the new London as an entity beyond its evident divisions. It was most concretely embodied in livery companies; in sharp contrast to the prevailing interpretation, Ward holds that they remained vital associations operating throughout the region. Although their members' diverse attitudes, experiences, and interests generated numerous conflicts, the tangible material benefits and the sense of community that companies provided promoted continuing loyalty. With members across City, suburbs, and liberties, the

guilds of early modern London epitomized emergent forms of metropolitan community that accommodated a variety of individual values and goals.

Metropolitan Communities takes its place in the scholarship that is currently reassessing the social and economic roles of early modern corporate institutions in a more positive light. But its contribution is less substantial than might have been expected. Ward is aware of the recent scholarship on guilds, but he makes no effort to situate his findings within it. Yet, a comparative perspective could have lent weight to the author's claim that livery companies survived because they offered material and psychic services rather than, as he notes in passing, because they gave access to citizenship and political power. Nor can the significance of livery companies to the larger economy—much less changes in that position over time—be gauged, since Ward does not attend to English economic history. Much production even around London escaped company control, however, and numerous industries abandoned London altogether for other parts of the country, well beyond the liveries' reach. Did London guilds remain central to this changing economic geography? Or were they increasingly marginalized?

Most disappointing of all, *Metropolitan Communities* does not engage the exciting interdisciplinary discussions about constructions of identity and community presently occurring in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and literature, as well as in history. Ward could well have participated in this forum by, to take just one example, drawing out the implications of his findings for literary history. As he notes, in a brief allusion, recent works on early modern English theater have relied upon just the kinds of dichotomous views of the metropolis that he seeks to supplant. In short, although the author “would like this book to contribute to the multidisciplinary investigation of the cultural consequences of social and economic change” (v), it remains essentially a history of London guilds based mainly on conventional, if interesting, company archives analyzed in a conventional, albeit intelligent, way.

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An Atlas of Victorian Mortality. By Robert Woods and Nicole Shelton (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1997) 165 pp. £30.00 cased £15.00 paper

Woods and Shelton have not only illuminated the Victorian morality experience; they have written a primer in descriptive epidemiology. In addition to the customary view of epidemiological change, Woods and Shelton show us the geographical variation in mortality and the extent to which that variation changed during the last half of the nineteenth century.