
This book forms part of the renewed interest in recent years in maps and city views. Its subject is rich and wonderful: urban representations produced in Spain and Spanish America (though not the Spanish-ruled regions of Italy) between 1493 and 1793. The early modern Hispanic world generated a dazzling array of representations of cities, ranging from Anton van der Wyngaerde’s nervous watercolors erupting with architectural detail to stolid, deliberate drawings that adorn New Castile with the features of the Holy Land, from ceramic models of Mayan houses to El Greco’s hallucinatory portraits of Toledo. The plethora of terms used in this period to refer to maps and representations of cities—prospect, bird’s-eye view, veduta, ichnographic view (in orthogonal perspective), “plataforma,” “portrait,” “description,” *iconographia*, *disegno*, and “pianta”—reveals the richness of purposes and points of view.

The scope of this book is immense, embracing both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, synthesizing an impressive mass of disparate secondary source material, attempting to fill in artists’ biographies and urban histories, and analyzing iconographies of literally hundreds of urban images. At times almost an historical survey, the book tours through a bewildering array of images and Hispanic cities, though special attention is paid to Mexico City, Lima, Cuzco, and Potosi. Kagan commendably undertakes the analysis of both Latin American and European mapping traditions and recognizes that they had much in common, but that “over time the pictorial language employed by the Europeans prevailed” (p. 70).

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To enter this abundantly-chartered territory, Kagan adopts his own conceptual map, which focuses on the difference between “chorographic” views and “communicentric” views, that is, between seeing a city and knowing a city. His book seeks to understand that issue historically. This distinction, which derives from that between *urbs*, an architectural entity, and *civitas*, city as community, is itself, of course, deeply-rooted in a classicizing European past, as Kagan recognizes. “The Renaissance idea of the city,” he writes, “was predicated upon a notion of *civitas* that combined Aristotelian polity with Augustinian piety” (p. 21). However, since Aztecs, Incas, and other Native American cultures conceptualized their cities “in social terms” rather than in terms of buildings, Kagan finds this distinction generally useful. Chorographic urban views therefore emphasize “description,” attempt to understand the city as an architectural entity of *urbs*, provide a sense of the city’s topographical setting, or “a sense of the city as a whole” (p. 16). A communicentric view, such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fourteenth-century allegory of Siena, *Good and Bad Government*, substitutes for the physical components of the city its human side, and “therefore represent[s] the visual expression of *civitas*” (p. 17).

Kagan seeks to dominate the prolific richness of his material by applying neat taxonomies. He writes, “We are interested in distinguishing between views that are primarily illustrative of *urbs* and those that embody the idea of *civitas*, the essential qualities of the city being represented” (p. 17). Thus, Kagan’s model approaches city representations as if they are necessarily either objectively accurate or embody an urban essence. But images are *always* mediated—and in relation to power. And it is power that is often overlooked here.

Many representations of cities in this period defy his neat taxonomy. Consequently, he finds those extraordinary maps that combine profile, perspective, and ichnographic forms “confusing” and “troublesome” (pp. 6-7). But, pointing out that the relationship between *urbs* and *civitas* interested some artists and their patrons, Kagan tries to discuss the two together. Nevertheless, the taxonomy becomes a strait-jacket, since “urbs” raises the question of “accuracy” (stemming largely from the modern-day assumption that maps are to guide city visitors). In turn, “accuracy” becomes an alibi for neutrality, and “civitas” for evident subjectivity. The vital significance of how representations of a city are mediated in relation to power is thus never brought into sharp focus.

At times, in spite of his rudimentary analytical model, Kagan’s analysis is insightful. Interesting observations about individual maps abound.