

Stinger, Charles L. *The Renaissance in Rome*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Pp. xv, 444. \$37.40 (U.S.)

Antonio Santosuosso

Volume 16, numéro 1, juin 1987

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017967ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017967ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Santosuosso, A. (1987). Compte rendu de [Stinger, Charles L. *The Renaissance in Rome*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Pp. xv, 444. \$37.40 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 16(1), 142–143.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1017967ar>

range and variety of sources used by the contributors are impressive; and the illustrations are helpful, with the unfortunate exception of the single and unrepresentative one of Warsaw. The city maps are schematic with distances and angles occasionally distorted but quite adequate for their purpose. Taken as a whole, the book succeeds in demonstrating the connection between the urban environment in a stage of rapid and largely uncontrolled expansion and the growth of the revolutionary movement. It will be useful to students of Russian social and economic history as well as to those interested in the more general problems of accelerated "urbanization," internal migration and social conflict.

K.A. Pappmehl

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
University of Western Ontario

Olsen, Donald J. *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. xiii, 311. 142 black and white plates; 8 colour plates. Index, bibliography. \$35.00 (U.S.).

Donald J. Olsen's unusual interdisciplinary book is neither traditional art history nor conventional urban history, but imaginatively combines elements of both. By focusing upon the building and rebuilding of London, Paris and Vienna in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he demonstrates that concern for aesthetic principles and social comforts were as important to town planners as considerations brought about by increased industrialization, economic growth and political power. To support this argument, Olsen assembles a particularly rich collection of visual material ranging from old contemporary photographs, plans (both of cities and of individual buildings), prints, drawings and paintings. The result is an attractive volume which offers a fresh approach and original insights into the historical development of three major urban centres.

Olsen believes that "societies better reveal themselves at play than at work." For this reason, he concentrates his study of urban life upon five "superficial" aspects of the city's function: luxury, monument, home, playground and document. In these categories, Olsen examines significant historical events which shaped London, Paris and Vienna.

Each of the three, he argues, was distinctive. Londoners glorified the virtues of domesticity, privacy and family life and preferred individual dwelling houses rather than block units. Neighbourhoods reflected social stratification; upper classes fled the city core and resided in suburbs. Social pleasures were not taken in public places but in private homes and clubs. A social mix was the norm in central Paris; one result was the appearance of cafés, restaurants, gardens and boulevards where Parisians amused themselves informally

out of doors. Their flats were more crowded and communal than English houses but faced an inner private courtyard. The Viennese middle and upper classes aspired to remain in the city core despite the pressures caused by the expansion of commercial spaces. For them social life revolved around formal receptions and the ornate public buildings which lined the *Ringstrasse*. They lived in flats whose private spaces were sacrificed for a series of formal receiving rooms. The circles of the imperial and royal court enjoyed numerous aristocratic social functions. Thus the plan of Vienna came to reflect the preference for monumental public display where parks and promenades, cafés and theatres lined pleasant streets. In all three instances, Olsen believes that the architecture of the city reveals the inner nature of the period in which it was built. He disagrees with some urban historians' implicit denial that art has any relevance for history by arguing that aesthetic factors are simply another kind of evidence which cannot be justifiably overlooked in historical inquiry. Needless to say, he finds the outward appearance of cities a significant factor in determining the *Zeitgeist* of the age which created them.

The text reflects the author's wide range of reading and research in art history which is not applied conventionally towards his subject. He avoids discussions of aesthetics for their own sake; instead he employs the tools of the art historian's trade in order to examine theories of cultural and urban history. His discussions are both scholarly and readable, although at times his generalities seem strained and his comparisons self-consciously forced, as if he were attempting to impress the reader with the breadth of his knowledge. Numerous verbal illustrations to support contentions are provided: historical examples are drawn from politics, music, drama, poetry, painting, architecture and philosophy, among other things. To explain the language of architecture, Olsen writes: "Henry Adams did not really worship the Virgin Mary while at Chartres any more than we adopt the tenets of the Mayan religion while wondering at the monuments of Uxmal. Yet as an understanding of the intellectual life of early thirteenth-century France contributes to an aesthetic apprehension of Chartres, an awareness of the intentions of their builders can intensify our pleasure in Vienna, Paris, and London." Such juxtapositions are typical of both the style and the substance of the book.

Sarah M. McKinnon
Department of History
University of Winnipeg

Stinger, Charles L. *The Renaissance in Rome*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Pp. xv, 444. \$37.40 (U.S.).

Charles L. Stinger's book on Renaissance Rome is based on a number of assumptions, the most important of which is

his assertion that "the Renaissance in Rome elaborated a persistent vision of religious and cultural renewal" (p. 334). He also maintains that this vision was distinctively Roman, that is, different from Florence, and that eventually the city of the popes supplanted Florence as the leading centre of the Renaissance.

Rome's renewal did not begin, according to Stinger, with Martin V but with Eugenius IV: 1443 "appears . . . as the most suitable date for marking the beginnings of the Roman Renaissance" (p. 6). The end came with the Sack of Rome in 1527.

The main values of the Renaissance in Rome were not the product of outstanding individuals like Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni in Florence, or of a specific group of people, but of dozens of individuals. These individuals aspired to establish a certain "image of Rome, the restoration of the Roman Church, the renewal of the Roman Empire, and the fullness of time" (p. xiv). Those aspirations led the Roman popes and the intellectuals and artists working for them or around them to manifest their views not only on paper, but in the physical surroundings. In the process a city which in 1443 was a decaying medieval town would become by the turn of the century one of the splendors of the civilized world.

The Roman humanists identified "the transcendent historical purpose of the Roman Church" with "the timeless endurance of the Eternal City" and in the process "the *res publica christiana*" with "the Roman *imperium*" (p. 293). The imperial characteristics were especially strong during the reign of the warrior pope, Julius II. The aim was to identify the "capital of the world," Rome, also with "the cosmic centre point, and the entrance to the heavenly kingdom" (p. 334). Stinger admits that this view had been put forward before and will be advanced later, but what distinguished Renaissance Rome was "the breadth of its vision, the passion with which these ideas were articulated, and their realization in the physical and cultural renewal of the city" (p. 334).

There are a number of characteristics which distinguish the Roman Renaissance from Florence, according to Stinger. Florentine humanism had centred around the idea of the citizen as an active member of the *polis* and in the process it had emphasized republican Rome. For the city of the popes the classical ideals were instead Alexander and the Caesars, that is, the symbols of imperial rule. Florentine architecture had reflected the sober, almost frugal views of the citizen. Roman art would be the embodiment of a goal which was striving not just to conquer the inhabitants of the city, but the world. In Florence the intellectuals had been laymen; in

Rome they were men whose mental background was founded mainly on theology and canon law. Florence would experience continuous political turmoil especially at the turn of the century; Rome was a city relatively free of political crisis.

Stinger's book makes interesting reading. At times his descriptions are stylistically engaging like his portrayal of the bandit-ridden Roman *campagna* and his sensitive analysis of the artistic aspects of the city. Some of his views are convincing and presented very well, especially his thesis that, unlike what Luther thought and what a number of scholars still maintain today, Rome was not a den of perdition, but a city where religious motivation and goals remained uppermost in the minds of most people.

Stinger's book, being a synthesis, is open fairly and unfairly to a number of criticisms, two of which, however, should be mentioned. His emphasis on the dissimilarities of the Renaissance in Rome with the Renaissance in Florence is warranted only to a certain point. Even if we accept Hans Baron's view of civic humanism, we still would have to deal with people like Marsilio Ficino, active at the same time of the Roman humanists and emphasizing also, like the Roman thinkers, arguments of great religious significance. In other words, was the change in emphasis due to a different city or also to a different climate, similar in other parts of Italy and soon after elsewhere in Europe? Moreover, one could argue that humanism shared similar traits throughout its hegemony in European culture. This interpretation emphasizes the basic similarities in method more than the dissimilarities of the themes that the humanists put forward.

A more basic criticism might be directed to Stinger's choice of 1527 as the end of the Renaissance. The Sack of Rome was without doubt a traumatic event in the life of the city of Rome and of the intellectuals and artists there. Look for example at the circle of Giovanni Della Casa in the 1530s. On the other hand, the Sack did not signify the end of the Renaissance. The pontificate of Paul III Farnese (1534-1549) should be regarded as part of the period in spite of the introduction of institutions like the Roman Inquisition and the Jesuits or of policies, like the elevation of cardinals, on the basis of religious merit, not of political and social connections. The world, which Stinger describes, came to an end only during the pontificate of Paul IV Carafa (1555-1559).

Antonio Santosuosso
Department of History
University of Western Ontario