LATINOAMÉRICA: LAS CIUDADES Y LAS IDEAS

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JAMES J. SCOBIE

In the field of Latin American urban history, where students are still in the early stages of defining methods for examining such a complex subject, the appearance of a major work by José Luis Romero is particularly welcome. On the basis of nearly two decades of investigation, reading, and speculation, this well-known Argentine historian has developed a schema for periodization and interpretation, which should become a classic.

Historians of the Latin American city have, so far, taken three basic approaches to their research problems. One group, headed by Richard M. Morse, has tended to see the Latin American city as unique and distinct, requiring different methodologies and models from those used to examine the European or North American counterparts. A second, and by far the largest, group of practitioners takes an ecological approach similar to that laid out in United States urban studies by Leo R. Schnore. Romero belongs to a third school, whose best expression in English has been "Two Thousand Years of Latin American Urbanization" by Jorge E. Hardoy, also an Argentine and an urban planner by profession.[2] This latter group seeks to formulate urban patterns in terms of chronological periods of growth. Hardoy's interpretation pointed out six stages, determined largely by economic aspects of the city's function and structure.

Romero approaches urban growth from a different vantage point than Hardoy and, of course, in a much longer work based on a greater perspective of historical detail. Romero's frame of reference is that of political and intellectual trends, although into that structure he successfully integrates considerable information on economic forces and social attitudes. Works of literature constitute his principal source, and it is a pleasure him as he deftly guides the reader through the constantly changing cultural currents for an entire period.

Romero devotes most of the book to describing and analyzing five chronological stages of urban growth that apply to Latin America. The stage of the *ciudades hidalgas de Indias* marked an obsession with the life of nobility. These settlements, established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concerned themselves above all with order and class structure and sought to remove themselves from demeaning commercial activities. Such attitudes achieved their artistic epitome in the Baroque architecture imported from Europe. The second stage, the *ciudades criollas*, of the eighteenth century, introduced major changes in commercial expansion, increased political activity, and reformist ideas. These trends became further consolidated during the next period, that of *ciudades patricias* (1810-1880). Economic prosperity increasingly depended on the city, and urban values began to pervade the rural environment. Despite the imitation of European models, pride in

local heritage still continued, especially among the common people. The *ciudades burguesas* predominated from 1880 to 1930 with an emphasis on rapid economic development, social mobility with the immigrant and nouveau riche, and the total transformation of the city's physical environment. Europe now provided all the models for imitation and change, and the older order was rapidly discarded or restructured. Politics played an ever larger role as new groups –labor, middle classes, students– entered the arena.

With the world depression, the present-day state was reached in the *ciudades masificadas*. Here the variables change sharply, and Romero leaves most of his generalizations on different phenomena: the huge urban sprawl created by migrations, undefined but increasing political role of the masse, fragmentation of the city into distinct social pockets, the uncertain groping for an ideology of populism.

Significantly Romero's focus yields very similar periodization to that of Hardoy, although the insights tend to differ substantially. Where Hardoy sees the eighteenth century as a slowdown in urban development, Romero views it as one of new ideas and values stimulated by commercial expansion and the penetration of reformist ideologies. For Hardoy the addition of railroads and immigrants during the nineteenth century hardly changed the function and pattern of the colonial city. Romero, on the other hand, stresses the victory of the city over the country-side, of European models over the local experiences, of bourgeois mentality over the patrician.

In sum, *Las ciudades y las ideas* provides a marvelous display of the intellectual and political forces at work in Latin America during five centuries. Romero also attempts to introduce order and system into a chaotic jumble of variables and trends. Doubtless this work will provoke disagreement and stimulate new efforts to periodize or otherwise categorize urban experiences. But the integration of materials, the command of ideas, and the sweep of interpretation recommend this study to careful reading by all those concerned with Latin America and with the city.