Steve Rappaport. *Worlds within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. xv,449.

One of the chief preoccupations of historians who write about early modern cities is the attempt to reconstruct as accurately as possible the conditions under which people prospered or struggled, succeeded or failed. Most often the exercise includes a revision of interpretations offered by previous writers on the subject. Steve Rappaport's impressive study of social structures in Tudor London follows this tradition: it represents both a thought-provoking historiographical review of the work of earlier historians, and a new interpretation of the economic and social conditions which shaped the careers of men who became members of the city's liveried companies.

In the first five chapters of the book the author undertakes a careful reappraisal of the social and economic evidence which has led previous historians to portray sixteenth-century London in an unfavourable light. His own findings suggest that the capital was, in fact, "admirably free" of the serious level of disorder which characterised its Continental counterparts in the same period, that perennial complaints about unemployment were symptomatic merely of the marked changes in the structure of London's economy which occurred in the second half of the century, and that the so-called "price revolution", though contributing to a general decline in people's standard of living, was not accompanied by either widespread hunger or dire poverty.

Rappaport's scholarship is best revealed in the second portion of the book, where he suggests new methods for analyzing social mobility. Here he bases his arguments on a sample group of 1000 men, 530 "entrants" enrolled in the city's register of freemen between 1551 and 1553, and 470 masters under whom they served. In Chapter 6 he reviews, then rejects, the model of urban social structure found in the work of W.G. Hoskins and other historians of London, which defines the structure of the city in terms of a pyramid, with the bottom two-thirds of the population living "below or very near the poverty line" and, at the top, a very small minority of people who jealously controlled most of the city's wealth. He argues that a more accurate picture of social structure may be drawn by examining the means by which power was distributed in the city. There existed in sixteenth-century London several levels of administrative units – in effect "a multitude of worlds within worlds," in which power and authority were shared by freemen of all ranks. Under the watchful eyes of the aldermen officials of the city's parishes, wards and precincts performed a variety of social and administrative services, from peace keeping to poor relief. But even more significant were the everyday aspects of authority and social control exercised by the livery companies. In an exhaustive survey of the scope of activities of a legal and social nature carried out by company members, Rappaport demonstrates convincingly that the

companies contributed to the governance of the city to a degree which has not yet been fully appreciated.

The livery companies themselves were conscious of the crucial role they played in the economic, political, legal and social life of London; consequently, admission to their ranks was a highly prized privilege. Within the companies was another series of worlds within worlds, a hierarchy which included assistants, liverymen, householders, journeymen and apprentices. Each estate was clearly defined, with the highest status groups (the assistants and liverymen) enjoying privileges and assuming responsibilities denied to lesser men, but admission to the companies, which carried with it the freedom of the city, promised all prospective members some share in the political and economic life of the city.

In Chapter 8 Rappaport criticizes the methods traditionally adopted by historians to examine social mobility. "Social stratification is normally conceived of statically, its focus being the structural inequity of a society at some point in time." He proposes, instead, to study social stratification "dynamically." Thus, he tracks the career paths of some 528 of his 1000 entrants and masters, and compares and contrasts two models: social mobility determined by "achievement" (that is, an individual's personal skills), and by "ascription" (mobility determined chiefly by external factors, such as an individual's family background). His findings strongly support the contention that the opportunities for social mobility in sixteenth-century London were considerable.

Apprenticeship was the means by which seven of every eight men became freemen of London and members of the livery companies. Ascriptive characteristics such as family wealth had little *direct* effect on the length of time which young men spent learning the skills of their chosen trade or craft; family background, however, did go some way towards determining who apprenticed in the city's wealthiest and most prestigious companies, and who secured the best masters. Ultimately, these factors influenced the whole course of a man's career. Thus, the sons of gentlemen, yeomen and native Londoners were generally recruited by the twelve most prestigious companies, and served their apprenticeships under masters who were liverymen. The sons of husbandmen, by contrast, trained in the lesser companies, usually under masters who were mere householders.

Ascriptive characteristics likewise played only an indirect role in determining which apprentices went on to become householders; opportunities for setting up shop were open to all journeymen, and most had taken this step within two or three years of completing their training. In general, then, there was still in operation at this level a "contest mobility system, a process in which what you did apparently mattered more than who you were." Once again, however, family wealth and patronage ensured that the ascent to the level of householder within a company was accomplished most rapidly by the sons of high-status families and men who had trained under liveried masters.

Opportunities to enter the higher levels of the company estate hierarchy were more severely limited, and here ascriptive characteristics and patronage played key roles in determining which men were recruited into the ranks of the company elite. In the twelve great companies at least, young men who had apprenticed under liverymen (that is, sons of high-status families) were nearly four times more successful than other men in being offered the livery. Such men were also virtually guaranteed to rise to the highest ranks in the company, that is, to serve as wardens, assistants and ultimately as master of the company. In terms of social mobility, then, the estate hierarchy of the sixteenth-century companies was "rather fluid," with a generally equitable system of competition determining admission to the lower ranks, but a "fairly permeable barrier" separating mere householders from the liveried elite.

Rappaport's book is beautifully written and demonstrates an impressive command of the voluminous sources upon which it is based. It remains, nevertheless, a study of only one segment, however numerous and influential, of sixteenth-century London, and the author's conclusions are, in this sense, overambitious. In addition, the numerous company records which survive from the sixteenth century bear witness to a system in which members of parishes, wards, precincts, and the liveried companies worked together in a remarkably efficient manner to deal with incidents of minor violence, debt and fraud, but the story which these records retell is only a partial one, and though other types of judicial record are not plentiful, they are not as rare as Rappaport suggests. Assize records from the Home Counties, to cite but one example, bespeak a level of violence in the general environs of London which legal historians suggest reflected conditions within the city; among other things, they reveal a high incidence of criminal activity on the part of individuals identified clearly as citizens and companymen of London. Rappaport's apprentices and companymen themselves lived in a world within a larger world, and the conditions under which they lived and prospered were significantly different from those which governed the lives of the less privileged.

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