Des causes de la grandeur des villes. Giovanni Botero.
Ed. and trans. Romain Descendre. Collection versions françaises. Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2014. 188 pp. €17.

Cités humanistes, cités politiques (1400–1600). Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, Denis Crouzet, and Philippe Desan, eds.
Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014. 316 pp. €28.

Was there a recognizable humanist paradigm for conceptualizing the city in the period from 1400 to 1600, and, if so, how did it evolve or disintegrate over the period? Two new works address this question with differing levels of success. While a new French translation of Giovanni Botero's *On the Causes of the Greatness of Cities* (1588) highlights the remarkable originality of the Italian Jesuit's thinking about the size and importance of cities, the edited collection *Cités humanistes, cités politiques (1400–1600)* proposes a series of well-researched articles but nevertheless fails to present any overarching conclusions on the relationship between humanist ideals and urban political culture.

Romain Descendre's new translation and analysis of Botero's comparatively little-known work on the causes leading to the variable size and importance of cities is extremely welcome and will likely help to bring this remarkable treatise into greater awareness. First published in Rome in 1588, the work saw editions in Spanish, German, Latin, and English from 1592 to 1635, but this is the first time that it has been translated into French. Further, Descendre's text is based on the 1588 version of Botero's essay, whereas the annotated English translation recently completed by Geoffrey Symcox for Toronto University Press (2012) relies on the Venetian edition of 1598. In addition to the helpful endnotes and a translation of Botero's short piece "How Many People Rome Contained at the Height of Its Greatness," Descendre provides a note on his principles of translation and a considerable analytical essay that helps to bring out the most significant elements of Botero's treatise.

As Descendre indicates, Botero's *Causes* is "a work like no other" (107), while at the same time inviting important comparisons with the most novel aspects of the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, and Thomas Malthus. The novelty of Botero's approach is evident from the first sentence in which he explains that the "greatness of a city does not mean the extent of its site or the circumference of its walls, but the multitude of its inhabitants and their power" (11). For Botero, cities were to be understood as assemblages of people who were drawn to the site and benefited from its particular conditions and who in turn contributed their labor and art to its preservation and increase. Where the genre of the *laudatio urbis* focused on a traditional range of qualities in the praise of a particular city, Botero draws on these categories — the pleasures of its arts, commodity of the site, fecundity of the surrounding countryside, access to water transport — to generalize about what made one site more attractive to settlement than others. He also analyzes how the presence of different kinds of

institutions, such as churches, universities, and judicial courts, could attract residents, but revealingly lays emphasis on the quantity and quality of human industry as crucial to urban success. Lest this preoccupation seem a form of Italian chauvinism, Botero was at pains to mark the mediocrity of Italian cities, and in the section where he discusses the importance of the residence of princes to the size and greatness of cities, all European cities except for Paris are comparably dwarfed by his evocation of the great cities of North Africa, the Near East, and especially China. Finally, Botero theorizes that each urban community has its own point of equilibrium, where the ability to feed the people and the attractiveness of its conditions are balanced by the disadvantages of the site and the difficulties of its supply. Thus cities in particular and the human population in general cannot exceed available resources, limited resources only leading to violence and conflict. The precocity of this kind of argument is evident, although no direct influence on Malthusian thought occurred.

In many ways, therefore, Botero drew on but also largely surpassed the Renaissance discourse on cities. Whereas earlier humanist works emphasized the magnificence of the urban fabric and beauty of the site, Botero's notion of greatness focused on the size and productivity of the population. As Descendre nicely puts it, "we have in some way passed from an urbanism based in magnificence and prestige to an urbanism based in power and number" (115). This population, too, was not to be differentiated by its functions, privileges, or rank, but was to be understood as a whole. Although the resonance with Machiavelli's generalized political analysis is evident, Descendre helpfully points out that the Florentine's stress on the role of violence and military concerns is largely absent. Further, where Machiavelli relied on an extended comparison with ancient Rome, Botero joined ancient examples with an extended tour of the great cities of the earth, engaging in the kind of geographical comparison in the search of truth advocated by Bodin. This short treatise obviously deserves greater attention than it has hitherto received, and Descendre's translated edition, in conjunction with Symcox's version, will help to make this possible.

The question of humanist understandings of and interactions with the political culture of European cities in the Renaissance period is thus an important one, but one that *Cités humanistes, cités politiques* does not entirely answer. It may be unfair to ask for a strong thesis or unity of approach from a conference volume, but the two-page introduction to this work only begins to suggest a guiding framework for the whole. The editors here ask whether the more uniform ideals of the city presented by Italian humanists in the fifteenth century were unraveled in the sixteenth thanks to the social and religious conflicts that gripped many communities, particularly in France. This is an interesting question, but not one that the volume is set up to answer. It neither seeks to explain what this initial humanist paradigm was, nor tracks its fissures over time, nor boasts any chronological or geographical organizing principle. Instead, the work does a better job of reflecting on some of its other questions, such as how particular humanists interacted with their urban environments and the various ways that Renaissance interests related to and were in conflict with contemporary notions of civic culture.

Despite its lack of unity of approach, the volume does offer numerous high-quality studies of the attitudes of particular humanists to the civic environment and the ways that living in the urban setting affected them. It is only possible to draw attention to a few interesting articles here, but I found Jean Balsamo's "La cité humaniste" particularly helpful in analyzing how humanist authors adapted traditional humanist genres, such as the *laudatio urbis*, to discuss French cities, and the ways that different forms of writing, such as the encomium, histories, and travel writing, could all intersect. Clémence Revest's "L'émergence de l'idéal humaniste" was also instructive in demonstrating how the humanist movement present in the Roman curia of the early fifteenth century was grounded in the experience of political crisis that led its members to emphasize Rome's leadership in the restoration of classical culture. Philippe Desan, too, in his "Messieurs de Bordeaux" succeeds in replacing Montaigne into the particular civic context of his double term as mayor of Bordeaux, showing that the second edition of his *Essais* was published by the new mayor in 1582 with an eye to bolstering his prestige. Thus there is certainly an important connection between the personal, the political, and the specifically urban in many of the studies published in this volume, and while scholars may not choose to read the entire work, they will certainly profit from engaging with particular essays.

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