

# Travels in time

Four centuries ago, two men created an atlas depicting all the known cities on earth. Now reproduced, it captures life during the Renaissance as never before

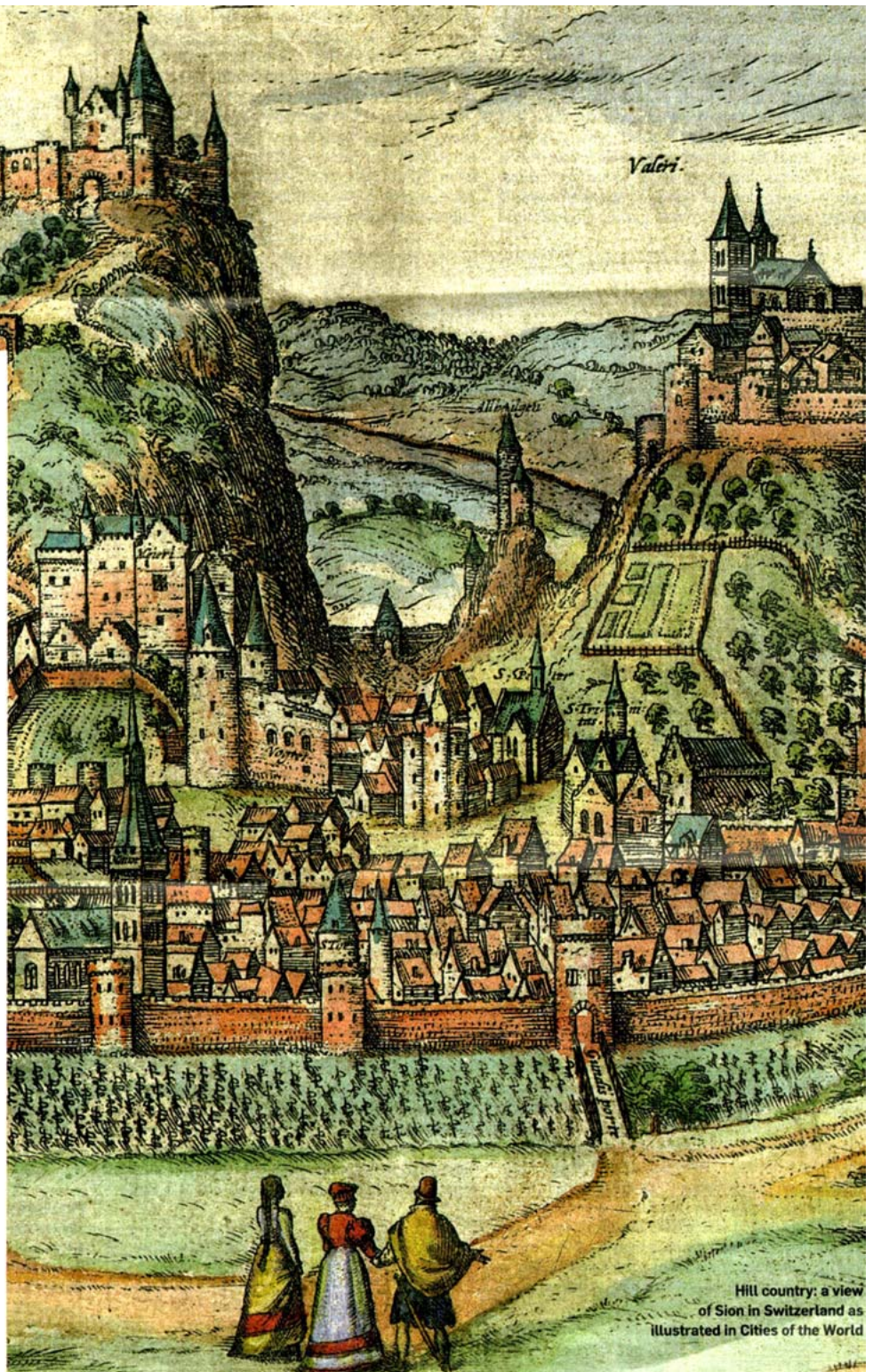
**JOHN CAREY**

**CITIES OF THE WORLD: Complete Edition of the Colour Plates of 1572-1617** edited by STEPHAN FUSSEL, foreword by REM KOOLHAAS, Taschen £120 pp504

In 1572 in a canon of Cologne cathedral, Georg Braun, and the Flemish engraver Franz Hogenberg published the first volume of one of the most magnificent books of the Renaissance. It was a kind of atlas, but more splendid than any atlas that had appeared before, and its aim was to present panoramas and bird's-eye views of every city in the known world. When the sixth and final volume came out in 1617 it brought the total of cities displayed to 564, and they spanned the globe from Europe to Asia, Africa and Central America. The title was simple and majestic: *Cities of the World*. Braun supplied the Latin text, but the artworks came from many sources. Some of the finest began as travel sketches by Georg Hoefnagel, the son of an Antwerp diamond merchant, who toured Italy, France, Spain and England in the 1560s. These, and contributions from other artists, including Pieter Bruegel the Elder, were turned by Hogenberg into resplendent hand-coloured copperplate engravings, which became collectors' items. Many copies of the book were dismantled and their plates sold separately, but Stephan Fussel and Rem Koolhaas found an exceptionally well-preserved one in a Frankfurt museum. Their sumptuous new edition reproduces all the coloured plates, with modern commentaries and excerpts from Braun's original notes. Roughly the size and weight of a paving stone, it is fascinating from start to finish, and gives you a far more vivid sense of Renaissance Europe than any history book could.

What strikes you at once is how empty it was. The cities are tiny by modern standards, and set neatly among green fields. There are no suburbs. Once through the city gates you are among orchards, pastures and vineyards. It is also evident at first glance that the two most important things in this world were religion and

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Hill country: a view of Sion in Switzerland as illustrated in *Cities of the World*