

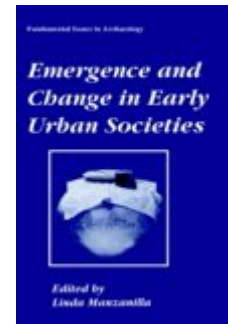
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Linda Manzanilla, ed. *Emergence and Change in Early Urban Societies*. New York and London: Plenum Press, 1997. xv + 301 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-306-45494-3.

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## Recent Archaeology of Ancient Cities

The late 1960s witnessed a sea-change in prehistoric archaeology, “from talk of artifacts to talk of societies, and from objects to relationships among different classes of data” as Colin Renfrew put it so well in his 1973 essay, “Prospect: Towards a New Prehistory.”[1] After criticizing the artifact-centered work of the past, Renfrew went on to prescribe, “Today the aim is more ambitious. It is to talk meaningfully of the societies of which these artifacts are the relics. To discuss their environment and subsistence, their technology, their social organization, their population density and so forth, and from these parameters to construct a picture and an explanation of the changes taking place.”[2]

Linda Manzanilla is affiliated with Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), in Mexico City. Her volume is a good example of recent attempts to shift the focus to whole societies, in particular to use objects, buildings, and town plans to investigate the interaction of urbanization and state formation at the dawn of written records on three continents. Manzanilla presents a collection of review essays apprising recent archaeological research in eight important sites of early urbanization in the Old and New Worlds. As with any collection of essays, the success with which each individual writer fulfills this task varies greatly. This review will focus on the more successful essays in the collection and is primarily intended to indicate the utility of these essays to urban historians working in later periods.

The book is divided into sections on the Old and New Worlds. The Old is represented by Eastern Turkey, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China; the New by the Basin of Mexico, Valley of Oaxaca, Yucatan Peninsula, and the Andean Plateau. In her preface, the editor points out some of the “factors involved in the emergence and change in early urban societies” (p. ix) treated in the essays. The historian of more recent urban societies will note the unexpected themes that emerge and will perhaps be challenged to re-assess the “big questions” he or she is asking. These factors include “centralized storage and redistribution economies, agromanagement models, mercantile network control, conflict and conquest, conversion of military commanders into administrators, political power through monumental cosmic reproduction, and elite power through ideological change” (p. ix).

The urban historian curious about the tools and technologies currently in the employ of prehistoric archaeologists will find much of interest here. Besides the expected analysis of pottery shards, mural paintings, burials, and architectural remains, we are reminded that the archaeologist also uses data derived from ice cores, floral and faunal remains, sedimentary series, and fragments of ores and slag. In addition to the familiar Carbon 14, archaeologists now quantify “magnetic susceptibility, major cations [positively charged ions used to analyze clay], total phosphorous, carbon/nitrogen [ratios], carbon 13, oxygen 18, diatoms, pollen, and charcoal content” (p. 26).

Marcella Frangipane’s essay, “Arslantepe-Malatya:

External Factors and Local Components in the Development of an Early State Society,” signals a theme that will recur in subsequent chapters, the rise of the state. Frangipane’s work along the banks of the Euphrates in Eastern Turkey in the fourth millennium B.C. indicates that the emergence of an elite in the first complex societies in this region “appeared to be linked more to the control of a widespread movement of raw materials and craft products rather than to the actual appropriation of staple goods, unlike what seems to have occurred in the southern Mesopotamian Plain ...” (p. 43). Using evidence from architecture, wall paintings, clay seals, and pottery production, Frangipane finds traces of a complex administrative system (p. 51). She attributes the direction in early state development to “participation of the site in the new inter-regnal exchange network” that connected Arslantepe-Malatya to Mesopotamia (p. 56). She believes that some of the administrative innovations in Anatolia might have been imported through this link with the powerful civilization to the south.

Her article is illustrated with a well-drawn map of the region, which emphasizes the geographic unity of the drainage basin, instead of the modern political divisions, which would have obscured the importance of the landscape itself. Her essay is complemented by exceptionally clear and well-reproduced photographs of clay sealings, both as-found and in a reconstruction of their use on pots (pp. 52-53).

Kathryn A. Bard addresses the apparent paradox of a civilization without cities in her chapter, “Urbanism and the Rise of Complex Society and the Early State in Egypt.” She argues that since the late 1960s, although archaeologists have not believed early Egyptian civilization was one without cities, evidence for such agglomerations has been lost because the sites remain among the world’s most densely populated regions (pp. 60, 62). Linguistic evidence for larger predynastic settlements is also lacking (p. 62). She finds the geographic extent of the early state in Egypt, and the integration of rule over 1000 kilometers up and down the Nile to be “truly unique” (p. 78). She concludes that “urbanization was unquestionably part of the process of state formation and unification in Egypt” but that “the majority of the population must have continued to live in small farming villages ...” (p. 79). Her cautious language reflects her acknowledgment that even in Egypt, “the nature of early urbanism continues to be poorly known” (p. 79).

Walburga Wiesheu’s essay, “China’s First Cities: The Walled Site of Wangchenggang in the Central Plain Re-

gion of North China” turns our attention to the third millennium B.C. in Asia. The Yellow River Valley was the site of the first civilization in China, China’s earliest dynasty, and perhaps earliest state formation in China (p. 87). She notes that the origins of the cities present an important new research topic in Chinese archaeology (p. 88). Wiesheu argues that the siting of cities in China had to address both strategic and ecological considerations. Therefore they would often be close to a river, but above the floodplain on an easily defended site (p. 97). She notes that other archaeologists have argued for the importance of nearby mineral resources for siting capitals. She also mentions earlier work regarding religion, but notes that there is not much support lately for the role religious factors might have played (pp. 99-101). The reader wonders if the lack of emphasis on religion could have as much to do with current ideological constraints upon archaeological interpretations as the evidence itself.

Linda Manzanilla, in her essay “Teotihuacan: Urban Archetype, Cosmic Model,” delineates some of the major aspects of urban planning in the Valley of Mexico. These include: streets laid out on an orthogonal grid; a water supply and drainage system; a central administrative avenue; and special barrios that housed craftsmen and foreigners (pp. 113-114). Such features made Teotihuacan “one of the hugest and most important urban developments of preindustrial times” (p. 110). “Teotihuacan was thus the archetype of the Mesoamerican civilized city, the most sacred realm, and probably the mythic *Tollan* where crafts flourished. It inaugurated a new era in the settlement pattern of the region, an era that has not ended” (p. 125).

Arthur Joyce’s, “Ideology, Power, and State Formation in the Valley of Oaxaca,” takes us further west and south, to the period spanning 500 B.C. to A.D. 200, “a time of dramatic social change, perhaps culminating in the formation of the first state polity in the Americas” (p. 133). Joyce’s article is the most cogently theoretical in the collection, and among the most accessible to non-archaeologists. He defines his terms, lays out his opponents’ arguments, and walks us through his thesis concerning the use of ideological power as the basis for elite power in Oaxaca (p. 150).

William H. Isbell finds the first evidence of a provincial administrative center in the pre-Columbian Andes in his study “Reconstructing Huari: A Cultural Chronology for the Capital City.” As interesting as his findings are, the most welcome part of his essay is the careful exposi-

tion of debates raging between positivists and social constructivists in Andean archaeology (pp. 183-184). Because the results of such a debate can affect the interpretation of evidence in fundamental ways, the reader is especially grateful that the debate and the ideological stakes are out front.

One of the most striking features throughout the book is the humility of the authors who, despite the incredible arsenal of scientific tools, mounds of data accumulated over decades of research, and the use of powerful integrative theories, the authors admit over and over again how little is known about the first millennium of urbanization in their respective sites of study. Therefore, one of the greatest values of the book lies in casting doubt on all the grand syntheses upon which scholars who study cities tacitly base their assumptions. The corollary to this strength, of course, is that the reader hungers for a more explicit attempt to tie these disparate essays together than Manzanilla supplies in either her introduction or conclusion. Some of the difficulties preventing such a synthesis stem from the geographic and chronological range represented. Still, this reader wanted the loose ends tied together, and at the very least, some sort of statement of the state of the research. Instead, Manzanilla offers a succinct recapitulation of the authors' main points without any synthesis. I respect the editor's reluctance to make sweeping claims based on what

she argues are the increasing number of uncertainties regarding the data and the conclusions that can be safely drawn from them, but would have welcomed an attempt to speculate as to how the research she has presented will change our ideas about early urbanization.

Because the book seems to be intended for an audience of specialists, the general reader, unless fanatical in interest in a particular civilization, will find little here. The work is littered with the jargon of the field and with oblique references to earlier theories and periodizations opaque to outsiders. Nonetheless, many of the essays in Manzanilla's volume will prove useful to anyone wishing to update her lectures on the formation of cities in ancient civilizations or to graduate students preparing fields in urbanization or ancient civilization.

Notes:

[1]. Colin Renfrew, *Before Civilization: The Radiocarbon Revolution and Prehistoric Europe* (London, 1973), 253ff.

[2]. Ibid.

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