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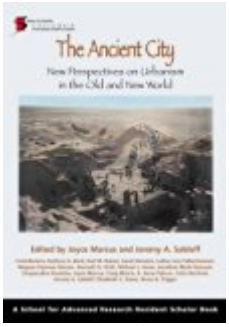

Joyce Marcus, Jeremy A. Sabloff, eds.. *The Ancient City: New Perspectives on Urbanism in the Old and New Worlds.* Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008. 422 pp. $34.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-934691-02-1.

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The editors open the volume with an observation that cities are so common today that we take them for granted. Hence a world in which the city was a less usual phenomenon is a phenomenon worthy of discussion. This volume on the ancient city in a wide variety of cultures focuses on the city, not as an unusual phenomenon of these cultures, but as their defining feature. What we have is a comparison among cities of the ancient world/s. Following the introduction, there are four thematic chapters (by Bruce Trigger, Mogens Hansen, Karl Butzer, and Colin Renfrew) introducing/commenting on the nine case studies focused on Rome, Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, East Africa, and pre-Hispanic Mexico, as well as the Indus, Mayan, and Inka cultures. (Hansen adds classical Greece in his commentary on the case studies.) This review will focus on the general patterns that emerge from both the commentators and the individual chapters on urbanism in quite different cultural contexts.

The editors' introduction and the thematic chapters address the issue of how to compare cities across cultures. The editors open this debate with a section explaining what a city is and is not. Their review of thought on the subject may be familiar to readers, but there is also a sense by which none of these definitions quite does the job of defining both the complexity and variety of urban form across the cultures presented later in the book. We can consider the frequently alluded checklists: density of settlement, heterogeneity of population, a monumental core, a skyline or city profile, a central focus, and a specific spatial organization, such as a grid plan (compare Renfrew's list on pages 46-47, Hansen's on pages 68-70, and Butzer's rejection of this approach on pages 77-78). How we place the emphasis in part is a function of the archaeological remains we have before us. There is, it has to be said, much disagreement, and of a quite fundamental nature, over whether state formation is a prerequisite to urban formation or vice versa--an irresolvable chicken and egg situation. The stress in the volume as a whole is on a data-led approach that

seeks to reveal patterns and definitions of the nature of ancient urbanism.

Attempts at the definition of urbanism lead to the exclusion of some settlements from the discussion. This is revealed in the concentration of Renfrew, Hansen, and others on what is *not* a city. Cities exist in relationship to other settlements and should be analyzed alongside those forms that authors in this volume consider to be monumental but not a city. This takes us beyond the city and hinterland model (at the center of Hansen's discussion) and toward a more global perspective of intercity and inter-landscape relations. The argument that 90 percent of the population lived in the countryside, so focusing on the 10 percent in the city should be avoided, ignores the obvious fact that the concentration of 10 percent of the population in one place produces a different form of social interaction: that of a city. It is the activities of this 10 percent that produce the city, whereas those of the 90 percent contribute to the city but do not determine its materiality in space and time (here I part company with Hansen).

My own feeling reading this book's case studies and commentaries was that the sheer variety of cities prevents definition. More important, for cross-cultural studies, we need to find a way of making comparison between intensities of urbanism that are somewhat different--say from prehistoric Orkney with its Ring of Brodgar (monumental but nonresidential), discussed by Renfrew, to the cities of Roman North Africa (monumental and residential). Both of these landscapes are defined with reference to monumental centers and concentrations of activities. Perhaps it is the relative differential surfaces of urbanism within a culture that will elucidate comparative data. Butzer, in the fourth thematic commentary, rejects the debate over the definition of urbanism stating clearly that "urbanism is many things, depending on the question, the scale of vision and the cultural background of a respondent" (p. 77). Hence, for Butzer, the attempt to find general criteria that define the ancient city is flawed, and, instead, we should be taking a multifaceted approach to reveal matters relating to religion, social values, and ethnicity. This shifts the balance from a data-led study of material culture of urbanism toward a combination with--or a contrast to--text-based perspectives on urbanism.

Renfrew and Butzer raise an important issue for the study of the ancient city that can very effectively be addressed by archaeology. Both commentators suggest that we need to focus on the developmental cycles of cities, and this implies that we should view urbanism as having a life span, or a life cycle or life course. This, of course, needs to avoid the Eurocentric origins narrative of growth and collapse (see Butzer on page 92). Instead, we might pay greater attention to the neglected parts of the life course of cities: the middle phase and their collapse. This would mark a shift away from our current preoccupations with origins and urban formation, which are stratigraphically the deepest and as a consequence archaeologically the most difficult to access, as well as the most fragmentary. The whole question of the origins of cities is one pursued in the case studies, but as Trigger points out, hominid relationships with the material world might be explained with reference to the cross-cultural phenomenon of cities and brain cognition. His focus is on the formation of cities, but it could equally apply to the abandonment of cities. It raises another variable (overall population size) for which we have estimates (that could be incorrect) only, but needs to be considered as Hansen does with reference to other societies. This places the city within a network of variables: migration, disease, warfare, economic integration, and success or failure of administrative policies, to refer to just a few of Butzer's themes. Perhaps this conception might lead to an assessment of the environmental vulnerability of cities in various cultures of antiquity as seen within the development or the collapse of cities. At present, explicit reference to the long-term history or life course of cities is inexplicit for

antiquity. Such a study could be aided by the full evaluation of sediments in an urban context, to date understudied or even ignored within Mediterranean archaeology.

Overall, the four commentators raise points of importance, but their discussions at times seem hampered by the legacy of the study of urbanism that continues to dictate the discussion, whether it is V. Gordon Childe or Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges or the Chicago School of Sociology in the early twentieth century. However, what the commentators point to are ways forward that open new questions and new approaches to the wide-ranging and quite distinct forms of the ancient city.

It is an impossible task to comment on all of the essays individually. Instead, some wider issues can be raised with reference to the varied case studies. Looking at the Roman Empire, Janet DeLaine identifies a common concept of the city existing together with variation at a local level. She addresses local preferences and cultural differences through a discussion of Ostia, Leptis Magna, and Ephesus. I must say I worried over the concept that "Ostia represents the purely Roman idea of a city" in contrast to the cultural origins of Ephesus as Greek and Leptis as Punic--since the framework suggests that origins (cultural/historical/mythical) continue in the twenty-first century to be a preoccupation in Mediterranean archaeology at the expense of other variables (p. 96). However, it would seem that origins are a major concern for those studying the city in other cultural contexts. Michael Jones, discussing the city in northwest Europe, sees its origins in the Iron Age as a form of "proto-urbanization" that was accelerated through contact and conquest by Rome. Interestingly, proto-urbanism crops up in Lothar von Falkenhausen's discussion of the city in China, where he suggests that we need to shift our focus in discussing these settlements to a somewhat wider perspective than those settlements that have walls.

In the case of early African cites, Chapuruka Kusimba raises our awareness that urbanism can exist in two quite different forms: one associated with relatively high density habitation and another associated with a lower density of occupation--both are urban. This broadens the definition of "urbanism" and shifts discussion away from an "evolution" of the city from proto-urban to urban that is a characteristic of the study of the city in other eras and regions. In connection with the Indus Valley civilizations, Jonathan Kenoyer puts forward a model of development from origins through a regionalization era, followed by an integration era, and finally a localization era. The arc of urban history here is that the explanation of urbanism requires interaction within a network of cities over time. This kind of system is implicit in Delaine's and Jones's assessments of urbanism in the Roman Empire, but over a shorter timeframe than the thirty-six thousand years proposed by Kenoyer. A key aspect is identified for explanation: the expansion of urbanism as a social phenomenon that created the city as a central place. Whether this defines the city as distinct from a central monument from the Neolithic in Britain remains uncertain. However, there is a point at which the city becomes associated with what might be termed "our culture" in cases of the Chinese, Egyptian, Inka, and Roman empires or the city-states of Greece. This process may also coincide with the articulation of a society's urban origins that underpins some of DeLaine's explanation of urban form in the Roman Empire. Most authors are concerned with the regional integration of cities with the state. However, the role of the state in the promotion of cities is quite variable from culture to culture. Clearly, there is a role for the state in creating a regionalist or integrationist mode of urbanism, yet it is difficult to define the role of the state through the archaeological data presented in this volume.

Reading the case studies and thinking back to my own preoccupations with Roman urbanism, I felt there is a challenge in every chapter to my

own perspectives, and also a challenge to every chapter within my own experience of studying the city. These are, in short, case studies that allow others working on ancient urbanism to think and evaluate their own preconceptions. This role may be more important than that of elucidating a definition of the ancient city that Hansen was seeking in his own commentary on the chapters. In fact, the case studies allow us to redefine the form of urbanism that we as practitioners study, by saying what it had and did not have in common with other forms of urbanism in other ancient societies. Similarly, we, as practitioners, might wish to move further away from questions of zoning that occupy the editors, who wish to align the ancient city with spatial patterns as defined from the empirical study of the early twentieth-century city and its historical predecessors.

At the end of the book, the editors draw out ten central themes and future directions for the study of the city by archaeologists: analyzing the diversity of city plans; documenting the multifunctional roles of city walls; establishing the stratigraphic history of the city's center and its associated monuments; linking building plans to institutions and personnel; assessing the division of labor and evolution of specialized workers; determining the city's ability to attract and control mobile populations, who came to work and to attend festivals in the city; documenting the subdivisions or building blocks of a city (i.e., houses, residential clusters, neighborhoods, craft wards, business quarters, manufacturing quarters, etc.); assessing the independence or complementarity of urban and rural populations; studying the roads and trade networks that linked cities to one another across the landscape; and connecting written documents to archaeological remains.

Clearly, these are all concepts to think with, but it is interesting that some of the major observations of the commentators are not included in this list (e.g., the middle and late phases of the life course of cities). However, there is a sense that something else is missing and a look at the bibliography allows it to be identified. There is little sign of engagement with what has been characterized as postmodern geography, a field associated with a diverse set of writers but championed most vocally by Ed Soja and David Harvey, with the structural support of Henri Lefebvre. Another key element that is also absent is reference to space syntax and the influential work of Bill Hillier. Another set of topics not fully discussed in the book are the categories of age and gender that structure urbanism in many societies, a theme that might be subject to considerable variation across the societies discussed in this book. I do not wish to diminish the editors' achievement by mentioning these omissions, but feel these need to be considered and included. Overall, the volume provides a snapshot of the key concepts involved in the study of ancient cities and aids the reader in the redefinition of the form, relationships, and idea of the city in the past.

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