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Early Cities in Comparative Perspective, 4000 BCE–1200 CE

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Edited by

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I

Introduction: a history of the study of early cities

NORMAN YOFFEE WITH NICOLA TERRENATO

M. I. Finley[1] provides the essential challenge to archaeologists studying ancient cities:

> It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to catch the 'feel' of an ancient city. What we see is either a ruin or a shadow overlain by centuries of subsequent habitation. Nothing can be deader than the models or reconstructions of ancient buildings and districts: they may serve to recreate the formal interactions of the architects but they mislead badly in recreating the living reality within a living community.

He could also have been talking about ancient historians whose data, in their own way, are as fragmentary as archaeological data, their reconstructions often elite-focused, formal, and drained of life. Texts shed dramatic points of light on ancient lifeways but give few clues as to how the points might be connected to form a picture of a vibrant community. And, if we have such urban textual lampposts and archaeological reconstructions of buildings and districts, how can we know why people came to live in cities, how cities flourished and/or collapsed, and how citizens understood their lives?

In the ancient world, from the fourth millennium BCE to the early second millennium CE (which is the timespan covered in this third volume of the *Cambridge World History*) the world was a world of cities. That is, the majority of the population lived in communities, not isolated farmsteads. Some of these communities were cities; and towns, villages, and the countryside, which was populated by pastoralists, were connected in various ways to cities.

But what is a "city"? The sages (some of whom are reviewed below) have replied: cities are permanent settlements that are rather large in area and

I thank Merry Wiesner-Hanks for inviting me to edit this volume. I also thank Roger Bagnall, Director of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, for hosting the conference of authors that led to this volume; Merry Wiesner-Hanks also contributed support for the conference. Finally, thanks to all contributors for their stimulating essays and goodwill for this project.

[1] Moses I. Finley, "The City," *Opus* 6–8 (1987–9), 309.

have quite a few people, several thousands of them, who live quite closely together and are socially diverse; there are leaders and their minions who keep track of people and things in the city and which leave and enter the city; cities have a center with impressive architecture that affords and/or restricts political, social, and/or ideological activity; cities depend on foodstuffs that are produced in the related countryside for the benefit of those in the cities; cities provide certain services and manufactured goods to people in the related countryside and acquire, through long-distance trade, luxury and utilitarian goods; cities provide a sense of civic identity to the people living in them (and related hinterlands), and they are the arenas in which rulers demonstrate their special connections to the high gods and the cosmos; and cities are containers of potential social drama and discontent among various competing/cooperating social groups and their local leaders; cities create and incubate significant environmental and health problems.

I won't be surprised if readers are not content with this smorgasbord-like "definition" of a city, whose parts are in fact gleaned from thinkers in many fields. Although I may be accused (rightly) of avoiding a simple and unambiguous definition of the city, I submit that, together, these partial definitions are in fact variables that can structure research into ancient cities. There will be many exceptions and qualifications to the variables in my sprawling definition. This definition is really a kind of "ideal-typical" model (in the Weberian sense) that authors in this volume amend, emend, and liberally qualify. For the still discontented who would insist on a simple and tidy definition of cities, I refer you to the wisdom of G. F. Nietzsche, who said: "You can only define things that have no history."[2] In any case, the search for a definition of "the city," so that archaeologists can identify it, as opposed to other forms of settlement, is a relic of disco-age social theory. Modern archaeologists study how early cities are structured, what leaders in cities do and also what they do not do, how people in cities worked and worshipped, why many early cities are fragile, many resisting incorporation into territorial units, as well as a host of other activities and behaviors that can be studied in light of the variables of urban life that are posited above.

The justification for this volume is that early cities (that is, those cities that evolved after the time when there were no cities – see the previous

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Definierbar ist nur Das, was keine Geschichte hat," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Geneologie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift. Zweite Abhandlung: "Schuld," "Schlechtes Gewissen," und Verwandtes*, O. Höffer (ed.) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), p. 820.

volume in this series) were not rare. The earliest cities appeared in Mesopotamia and Egypt at the end of the fourth millennium BCE, in South Asia in the early–middle of the third millennium BCE, and in China not long after that. These cities developed independently in their regions. Subsequently, in Asia and in the Mediterranean world, numerous cities appeared and multiplied. In Africa outside the Nile Valley, cities were founded in the first millennium CE. In the New World, cities appeared early in the first millennium BCE in Middle America, slightly later in South America, and at least one city emerged at about 1000 CE in the Middle West of the USA. This volume attempts to "catch the feel" of these cities and to do so it advances some distinctive and new approaches.

Before describing these new approaches, however, it is necessary to review how and why cities evolved, although this is not the focus of this volume.[3] Cities evolved as "collecting basins" in which long-term trends toward social differentiation and stratification crystallized independently all over the planet. The earliest cities in many regions, like Mesopotamia, Egypt, South Asia, North China, in the Maya area, and in the Andean region, were competitors; indeed, the first "states" were usually "city-states" that did not encompass large, territorial expanses within a single political structure.

The many and often differentiated social groups that lived in the countryside in modest villages and small towns were drawn into and became recombined in cities. These cities grew as nodal points of pilgrimages and ceremonies, exchange, storage and redistribution, and as centers for defense and warfare. In these cities, along with their associated and restructured countrysides, new identities as citizens were created but did not entirely supplant existing identities as members of economic, kin, and ethnic groups. In the earliest cities, new rituals and ceremonies connected leaders with citizens and the gods. These displayed and justified the supremacy and legitimacy of the new rulers and reaffirmed their command over the social order. The social roles and practices of citizens were routinized within the urban layout of monumental constructions, streets and pathways, walls and courtyards. The built environment itself demonstrated the superior access to knowledge and planning and control held by the rulers, ostensibly on behalf of all. Statecraft in the earliest cities involved providing an order to the

[3] See Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) from which this section is drawn.

present, which the rulers proclaimed in literature as timeless and the goal of history. Newly created urban landscapes overlay but did not eliminate the unruliness of a society composed of many groups, each with its own interests and orientations.

The growth of cities was often revolutionary, in the sense used by V. Gordon Childe (see below): early cities were not simply accretions on a stable rural base, nor were they simply the apex of a settlement pyramid. Settlements in the hinterlands now became "peripheries" of cities, and so in the evolution of cities, social life both in and outside of cities changed utterly, redefined in the process of urbanization and ruralization (as the countryside itself was recreated because of its new relation to cities).

A history of research, part one

If the above, generalized overview of the evolution of cities outlines important commonalities in the evolution of cities around the world, it does not foreclose an investigation into significant divergences in the history of early cities nor critical distinctions in the nature of urban life. The chapters in this book speak precisely to these differences. Furthermore, the variations in urban life can only be identified and explained through a comparison of cities and social institutions.

Before describing how the following chapters will employ the comparative method, I present a brief history of the study of early cities. This will provide perspective on the definition of cities and their evolution presented above. (This digest of studies can be supplemented by reference to the "further readings" to this chapter.)

Today archaeologists have renewed interest in ancient cities, just as their geographer, sociologist, and historian colleagues and the public are concerned about the plight of cities in the modern world. Today, cities constitute 50 percent of the world's population, generate about 75 percent of the world's gross national product, consume 60 percent of the world's water, and emit 80 percent of global greenhouse gases.[4] The number of books about modern cities is legion, and there are valuable companions to the study of cities,[5]

[4] Thomas Gladwin, "Doomsday Alert: Megachallenges Confronting Urban Modernity," *Journal of the International Institute, University of Michigan* 16 (2008), 14–16.

[5] Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds.), *A Companion to The City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

encyclopedias of cities,[6] evocative descriptions of modern cities,[7] and claims that cities are the "engines of innovation."[8] This last assertion is, of course, not new: to cite only studies by modern urbanologists, it was argued by Jane Jacobs[9] for the earliest cities, and she has been echoed by Edward Soja.[10]

The view of the city as locus of rational behavior and the good life harkens to the earliest works in the Western tradition on cities by Greek and Roman philosophers and historians, like Aristotle, Theophrastus, Pausanias, Strabo, and Vitruvius, and others. They contrasted urban life, which was ideally suited for political discourse, that is, as a place for self-government, and "civilized" behavior, and considered the countryside as backward, populated by simple rustics.[11] Of course, one can also find accounts of the city as the home of thieves, swindlers, tyrants, and malcontents. Mesopotamian literature, preceding the thoughts of Greeks and Romans by several thousand years, had much the same variety of views about cities and the countryside, as did early Chinese writers in the first millennium BCE. In the fourteenth century CE Ibn Khaldun wrote how urban life became corrupt and needed to be periodically cleansed by noble barbarians (nomads) from the countryside. There is not much new, it seems, in modern accounts of cities, only degrees of foregrounding social institutions and making moral judgments.

It is not necessary to review the history of evolutionary thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which speculations of laws of society and laws of nature were propounded. Ideas of progress and of the great chain of being did not, of course, rely on archaeological evidence. Cain and his son Enoch were the first city-builders according to the writer of Genesis, and the antiquities of Greece and Rome had little prehistory except that speculated in classical literature. The evolution of cities played little or no part in the discussions in the West that focused on the distinctions

[6] Peter Clark, *Cities in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Ray Hutchison, *The Encyclopedia of Urban Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010).

[7] Mark Kurlansky, *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell* (New York: Random House, 2007); and Mark Mazower, *Salonika, City of Ghosts* (New York: Knopf, 2004); Gary Wills, *Venice: Lion City* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

[8] Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

[9] Jane Jacobs, *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Random House, 1969) argued that the earliest cities (like Çatal Höyük in Neolithic Anatolia) evolved before farming, and domestication of plants and animals ensued to provide food for the cities.

[10] Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[11] Moses I. Finley, "The Ancient City," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19 (1977), 305–27 presents a digest of classical accounts.

between "community" (Gemeinschaft) and "society" (Gesellschaft) by Tönnies or between "status" and "contract" by Maine. The evidence, such as it was, came from travelers and colonials observing "native" people, those thought to be in a "state of nature" and without history, which by implication meant non-urban. Consideration of the evolution of cities changed in the middle of the nineteenth century when the great geological and evolutionary time-depth of the world was established, and ancient Mesopotamian cities, known only from garbled references in classical sources and the Bible, were beginning to be excavated. Arguably, the first modern attempt to understand the ancient history of cities as living communities was developed by Fustel de Coulanges in 1864. Whereas scholars today cite his work in inevitable homage to a scholarly ancestor, it is due more careful consideration than that.

Fustel's ancient city

It is a long-established commonplace, when discussing ancient cities (especially in the Mediterranean context) at least to mention Fustel, or even to take his volume *La cité antique* as the point of departure for a chronological review of the relevant literature.[12] Ancient historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists, however, typically pay little more than lip service to his work, which is generally seen as outdated, quirky, and somewhat at odds with the later discourse on cities in these disciplines. Significantly, his legacy is instead much more influential in historical sociology and in urban studies, where his work is considered seminal and his influence on figures like Émile Durkheim, Werner Sombart, and Max Weber is carefully retraced and analyzed. Considering how in recent years the disparate threads of scholarship on pre-modern cities seem to be in the process of being tied together again in holistic approaches, it is arguable (as well as desirable) that Fustel's views be more seriously taken into account by all those who study ancient urbanism.

Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges was trained in the 1840s and 1850s as a Greco-Roman historian at the École Normale in Paris.[13] His Latin dissertation was on the Roman hearth goddess Vesta as a powerful force in the emergence of political institutions. He expanded it and published it as his first major book in 1862, with the title *La cité antique. Étude sur le culte, le droit,*

[12] This section is written by Nicola Terrenato.

[13] François Hartog, *Le XIX^e siècle et l'histoire: le cas Fustel de Coulanges* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1988).

les institutions de la Grèce et de Rome (Paris 1864). In the meantime, he had been appointed to a chair of general history at the University of Strasbourg, and he progressively devoted himself almost exclusively to medieval and modern French history, which he later taught at the Sorbonne and at his alma mater, the École Normale, till his death in 1889. This appeared to him a more urgent and patriotic undertaking than ancient history. *La cité antique* thus stands in splendid isolation in Fustel's personal intellectual trajectory, as well as in the context of late nineteenth-century historiography of the Greek and Roman world.

Fustel's main thesis is that family and other kin structures are fundamental elements and building blocks of ancient cities and that religion in general and the ancestor cult in particular provided the initial cement for the aggregation of population in cities. Extended family groups developed private property as a result of the need to place their dead on land they controlled, so that their worship as deified ancestors could be officiated by the elder male as a high priest of the group. Several family groups would then come together to form a wider lineage, again under the rule of a leader with priestly prerogatives. The city was a natural transposition of this basic structure on a larger scale, with the king as high priest of the wider lineage system represented by the citizens, and the city's territory was the private property of the polity. The state, in other words, was a new entity of a higher order but structurally similar to the families and lineages that continued their existence within the new organization.

A formation process of this kind would explain the emergence of political institutions in all Greek and Italian states in the early first millennium BCE (and resonates, with qualifications, for many other states, too, as will be noted below). While this in itself amounted to a daring comparative stance for classicists of his time, it is clear that Fustel believed that the model could be applied at least to all the cultures that shared what was then called Indo-European (or Indo-Aryan) religion and possibly beyond. In letters and unpublished papers, he explicitly considered Indian and even Phoenician, Chinese, and Native American cities as potential comparanda, although he never expressed this in print.

La cité antique is beautifully written, and it had considerable success with the educated public, not unlike a number of other pioneering books in the social studies that came out in the same decades and dealt with pre-modern culture, such as Maine's *Ancient Law*, Morgan's *Ancient Society*, or, slightly later, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. While Fustel enjoyed high professional recognition – he was for a while the director of the prestigious École

Normale, and even taught history privately to the Empress Eugénie – his first book never really became a part of the ancient history curriculum, as it was considered too general and vague in its scope and too summary in its treatment of the primary and secondary literature. Fustel made no attempt at determining any chronological framework, nor did he detail the specifics of the process, an approach that was completely at odds with the dry philological historiography that was being codified at the time by the German school led by Mommsen (whom Fustel openly detested).

It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that some better-read classicists, such as Arnaldo Momigliano and Moses Finley, went back to Fustel in their search for a more interpretive ancient history, one closer to the social sciences than to the humanities. While they correctly reconstructed the intellectual milieu from which Fustel's vision had arisen, they generally failed to see much contemporary relevance for it. Meanwhile in Paris, academic filial piety had driven some *normaliens* to seek inspiration in his work, most notably Georges Glotz,[14] who explicitly tried to reimplant Fustel's ideas within the specialist discourse on ancient Greece.

At the same time as ancient historians were rethinking their discipline, social anthropologists were doing the same, developing evolutionary models to explain the emergence of states and cities. Like all revolutionary intellectual movements, they eagerly went back beyond the generation that had preceded them to look for early prophets of the new ideas. In doing this they were happy to recruit Morgan (who himself knew and referenced Fustel), as an early proponent of a stepwise succession of social organisms of increasing complexity. While some, like Clyde Kluckhohn, acknowledged the existence of Fustel, his scope seemed very narrow (mainly on ancient Greece and Rome) and its culture-historical approach too little concerned with the material conditions connected with the rise of political complexity. Fustel's insistence on religion and worldviews was enough to relegate him to a footnote in prefaces at best.

In sharp contrast with his reception among historians and anthropologists, Fustel was from the start hailed by the new discipline of sociology as one of its founding fathers. This was undoubtedly helped by Émile Durkheim, who was Fustel's star student at the École Normale – he dedicated his dissertation on Montesquieu to the memory of Fustel – but is also probably symptomatic of an intellectual bifurcation that happened

[14] Georges Glotz, *La cité grecque, evolution de l'humanité collective* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1928).

at that time and whose effects are still arguably current today.[15] Whereas theoretical reflections on urban life in all its cognitive aspects became a staple of sociological thought, archaeologists studying cities (see below) tended to ignore belief systems or regard them as epiphenomenal correlates of material conditions. Only occasionally cross-fertilization took place, as in the case of Max Weber (see below), who was originally trained as an ancient historian but who championed the new field of sociology and was also read by economists, anthropologists, and other social scientists. Weber certainly knew Fustel's work, to the point of paraphrasing extensive portions of *La cité antique*[16] in his *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922). While Weber explained urban processes in materialist and institutional terms, which Fustel never did, it is interesting to note that Weber too did not ignore questions of ideology and its role in shaping the urban experience.

Another discipline that revered Fustel as one of its cherished ancestors was the history of religions. This is not surprising when one considers the critical role that Fustel assigned to religious beliefs in urban life. It is also clear that the study of non-monotheistic religions developed into one of the very few disciplines whose comparative approach included the classical world (which was marginalized in anthropological archaeology). Roman religion was and is studied in the context of other religions, and this is exactly what Fustel had been advocating ever since his doctoral dissertation. Indeed, it has been suggested that Georges Dumézil's lifelong commitment to explaining Roman religion in terms of Indo-European beliefs and culture was a direct extension of Fustel's original vision, in line with what happened in comparative linguistics.

Now that, as this volume asserts, the time has come for a comparative approach to pre-modern cities, it is relevant to assess what lasting value *La cité antique* may have. What is striking in reading the book today is how it locates itself in a peculiar space above history, as it were, but below pure political science (or structuralist timelessness). There is no chronology and not enough actual events in Fustel's study to be anything like an historical narrative, and yet it is not completely atemporal or abstract. Fustel's overriding concern is to understand where the very idea

[15] François Héran, "L'institution démotivée: De Fustel de Coulanges à Durkheim et au-delà," *Revue Française de Sociologie* 2 8 (1987), 67–97.

[16] Max Weber, *The City*, Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth (trans.) (New York: Free Press, 1958).

of city originated and to reconstruct why participants in the process created cities in the form that they did, without relying on political abstractions. Fustel's city is made of actual people whose lives were structured by traditions and mentalities, but who also made decisions that led to social change.

There is much in *La cité antique* that is a harbinger of many current ideas. His insistence on the ideological sphere, for instance, certainly appears in many theories being applied to cities today. New discoveries about the central importance of religion in early and even pre-agricultural sites (like Göbekli Tepe in Turkey and Poverty Point in Louisiana) lend intriguing support to Fustel's theses about the importance of religion in early settled life.

Furthermore, Fustel's emphasis on religion as a way to shape relations between the natural world and the social world helps to frame the emergence of sociopolitical complexity in terms of the actual cognitive horizon of the actors involved. Fustel is also adamant that the *anciens* have nothing to do with the *modernes* and that any analogy with our time can only be grossly misleading. Such a perspective makes it impossible to think teleologically about political institutions.

Fustel arguably laid the groundwork for the concept of *mentalité* that would later be at the center of the historical and social thought of the Braudelian Annales school (ironically developed at his institution's arch-rival École des Hautes Études). He forces his readers to imagine what it would involve to be constrained by beliefs and behavioral norms that are very different from ours and still bring a city into existence. His most remarkable insight is that this is accomplished by taking an existing cultural element – the family – and recasting it on a different scale to create something that is new but still feels familiar and understandable to those who become a part of it for the first time. Moreover, he sees the family as the only *vrai corps* of ancient societies, rejecting any influence of modern individualism (a product of Christianity in his view).

Fustel's masterpiece is, like several other great essays of that glorious second half of the nineteenth century, a suggestive and engrossing read. It is certainly off the mark in many details – for instance, there is ample evidence against the notion that early Romans were buried on their private family land – but this does not detract from the fascinating cultural landscape it paints. *La cité antique* not only shaped modern thought about cities, but it also rings quite relevant in many modern studies of early cities.

A history of research, part two

Several strains of thought in the nineteenth century in Europe changed the way people thought about cities in the modern and ancient worlds. The first was in the new field of economic geography, which considered the formal spatial relation of the city (and cities) to the countryside. This led, indirectly, to a revolution in archaeological research, as we shall see. J. H. von Thünen in 1826 posited that rings of land use (the first ring being the production of fruits and vegetables, then rings of timber and grain farming, and finally ranching) surrounded a city. This analysis depended on an idealized landscape of no natural barriers and no roads or other means of transportation and the rational behavior of farmers, who seek cost-efficient ways to market goods and minimize expense. Von Thünen was himself a landlord, and his work was meant to be practically implemented. Alfred Weber in 1909 similarly studied the location of industrial processing plants in relation to sites of raw materials and markets in order to minimize costs for industrialists. These and other studies led to the later formulation of "central place theory" by Walter Christaller in 1933 and August Lösch in 1940. The translation of Christaller's book by English geographers in 1966 influenced American archaeologists in the late 1960s and early 1970s (to be reviewed below).

The second stream of ideas about cities that have impacted how archaeologists and ancient historians have oriented their studies of early cities is the philosophical and sociological concern with the nature of cities as spaces for new kinds of behavior. This is exemplified in Ferdinand Tönnies' typological distinction between "Gemeinschaft" (community) and "Gesellschaft" (society) in 1887, noted above. In considering the evolutionary difference between the two types, he specifically referred to the differences between rural-based and urban commerce, and drew on Marx's and Engels' analysis of class-based society in cities. This concern with life in cities and their associated hinterlands set him apart from Maine's typology of status and contract in 1861 and influenced Durkheim's distinctions between organic and mechanical solidarities.

Marx himself, though writing about the division of labor in cities, class distinctions in cities, and modes of production and industrialization that clearly had urban bases, did not specifically theorize, as it were, the city. Ancient cities were based on slavery and the ownership of agricultural land. Feudal cities and medieval European trade emphasized the division between cities and the hinterland and the distinction between modes of production. In modern times, however, both cities and the countryside were

characterized by the capitalist mode of production, and the city qua city is of lesser interest. Engels did excoriate the nature of the capitalist metropolis, but this is the nature of economics not urbanism per se.

Georg Simmel in 1903 wrote specifically about the nature of "mental life" in cities. From his observation post in Berlin, Simmel noted the crush of people in cities, the noise and smell of cities, and how individuals encountered each other as consumers and producers, strangers essentially, not as people sharing common interests.

Simmel not only influenced Walter Benjamin, who studied with him, but also Robert Park and thus the University of Chicago school of urban sociology, to which I now briefly turn, because of the quite clear link between the Chicagoans and the economic geography school of urban studies, founded by Von Thünen and Alfred Weber.

The Chicago school of urban sociology strongly influenced scholars from the university's departments of anthropology, such as Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, who posited a folk–urban dichotomy, and Robert Adams in anthropology and the Oriental Institute. Adams' students (especially Henry Wright) and students of his students greatly influenced urban studies in archaeology. Paul Wheatley, who moved from London to Chicago, was a later addition to the Chicago school of urban studies tradition, and, as we shall see, an important heir to the tradition of Fustel.

In the fascinating annotated bibliography in the collection of articles on the city (in the book entitled, *The City*[17]), Robert Park refers to Simmel as having contributed "the most important article on the city from the sociological perspective." Members of the Department of Sociology of the university were engaged in a number of studies on the city of Chicago itself. Ernest Burgess, resuming earlier studies of German geographers, discussed concentric rings of urban life, with businesses in the center and various residential areas radiating out from it. Various groups resided with people of their own economic status or ethnic origin, and the process depended on a continuous flow of migrants into the city.

Louis Wirth in 1938 wrote perhaps the capstone article of the Chicago school, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," in which he defined the city as "a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals."[18] In his discussions of the anomie of individuals and the

[17] Robert Park and Ernest W. Burgess (eds.), *The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
[18] Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," *American Journal of Sociology* 44 (1938), 1–24.

inequalities of city life, the competition for scarce resources among various social groups, the mix of ethnic relations and the breakdown of ethnic groups (and much else), Wirth attempted to produce "a theory of urbanism" and of "urbanism as a form of social organization."

For Wirth, Max Weber's long essay "The City" provided inspiration. It is well known that Weber's conception of society challenged Marxist tenets of economic infrastructure and the class analysis of society. For Weber, cities encompassed numerous constellations of political, economic, and social relations. These various groups – not only formed through economically determined kinds of stratification, but also through ethnicity, "race," occupation, and religion – interacted, negotiated, and struggled for dominance. For Weber, cities were loci of political struggle and social conflict. Through his studies of ancient China, India, Israel, Greece, and Rome, Weber placed value on the specific constellations of authority and conflict and coalition building that arose in different regions. Although some of Weber's larger-scale comparisons, of ancient cities as consumer cities, and medieval and modern cities as producer cities, have been overtaken by historical and archaeological research, his approach of identifying different modes of institutional control over different resources, including the production and distribution of information, has important dimensions in the studies of cities in this volume and the nature of sociopolitical change in ancient cities.

The beginnings of archaeological research on the nature of ancient cities

Although excavations of ancient cities have a relatively long history, at least as early as the mid-nineteenth-century work in Neo-Assyrian capitals (and of course explorations in classical cities), the first meaningful study of the development and nature of early cities by an archaeologist is acknowledged to be that of the Australian, V. Gordon Childe, in his article of 1950, which appeared in a non-archaeological journal but rocketed to archaeological fame.[19] Childe's work depended on significant new archaeological data on South Asian and Maya cities, and work at Mesopotamian sites, especially at Uruk. Although he vaguely notes Egyptian cities, he doesn't actually cite any such cities there.[20]

[19] Michael Smith, "V. Gordon Childe and the Urban Revolution: A Historical Perspective on a Revolution in Urban Studies," *Town Planning Review* 80 (2009), 3–29, with extensive bibliography.

[20] Most Egyptologists of Childe's time held that there were no cities in Egypt.

He forcefully and convincingly argued that one could compare and contrast the earliest cities; such a comparison revealed that the earliest cities represented "a new economic change in the evolution of society."

Childe called the generalized evolutionary trend an "urban revolution," by which he meant that the world of cities was dramatically different than the world of village life in a time before cities. Cities were many times larger than the largest such villages, and there was a different division of labor in cities than in any previous time. Childe does not specifically refer to the pace of the evolution of cities as being itself revolutionary, but recent research does give credence to the rapid development of cities from a time of modest village life.

Childe famously posited "ten rather abstract criteria, all deducible from archaeological data" that "serve to distinguish even the earliest cities from any older or contemporary village." One may arrange these "criteria" or, as they are usually described, traits, into groups. The *population* of cities was very large, and the neighborhoods of cities were not simply composed of kin groups but formed on economic or political grounds. The *economy* of cities depended on agricultural surplus so that some residents of cities were not occupied by subsistence pursuits but were supported by farmers. Foreign trade in luxuries and "vital materials" was of a different order than in villages. The *new division of labor* was the most important characteristic of early cities. The nature of the division of labor could differ among the earliest cities, but the great divide between the tiny number of rulers and all others held cross-culturally. In cities, *politics* was transformed by new leaders – kings – who instituted taxes, administered the economy and social structure through writing, mathematics, and the calendar, and erected large buildings. The kings were part of the ruling class, which included priests and "civil and military leaders." Thus, temples, it seemed reasonable to infer, were part of the political structure. Finally, in the earliest cities new *cultural forms* were invented. These included art, that is, sculpture and painting and seal-cutting. (Apparently Childe was greatly impressed by the work on Mesopotamian cylinder seals that appeared in the early levels of Uruk and other Mesopotamian cities.) Additionally, a new ideology was created to legitimize the control by the new ruling class in cities.

The importance of Childe was acknowledged by Robert Adams of the University of Chicago, who is the pioneering figure in the archaeological study of the evolution of cities. Indeed, it was Adams' citations of Childe's article that brought it to the attention of archaeologists. Influenced by the tradition of urban sociologists and social anthropologists of his university,

Adams launched surface survey projects[21] and with the use of aerial photography he was able to trace settlement systems and canals, how they changed over time, and further to specify the relation between cities and the countryside, other cities, and the development of such relations. Adams further demonstrated the effectiveness of controlled comparison (between Mesopotamian and Mesoamerican cities) in his book, *Evolution of Urban Society*, 1966.[22] Adams' magnum opus, *Heartland of Cities*, demonstrated how archaeologists could contribute original insights into the study of the development of cities and it has inspired archaeologists ever since.[23]

Walter Christaller's "central place theory" influenced archaeologists after his original work of 1933 was translated into English in 1966,[24] and a group of geographers from the University of Cambridge produced a volume of studies on the concept in 1967.[25] Christaller, a German geographer, constructed an idealized landscape of a system of cities in which consumers would visit those towns nearest to them that would supply needed goods and services, and in which progressively larger cities would offer those "functions" and additional rarer functions, too. The system of cities under ideal conditions (that is, with no barriers to transportation and an evenly distributed population) would be hexagonal in shape and multiple hexagonal systems would populate the entire landscape.

Archaeologists, using reconnaissance survey methods, could rank the sites by their areas (as Adams had done), construct histograms of site sizes and so detect hierarchies of villages, towns, and cities in a region. A four-tiered site-size hierarchy (three levels of decision-making, which doesn't include the lowest tier), in which the flow of goods and services was controlled by the major city, was – in the influential study of Henry Wright and Gregory Johnson in 1975 – a state.[26] Thus, archaeologists, relying on site-size hierarchies, sought to identify the first states in the archaeological record. Using rank-size distributions, furthermore, archaeologists like Gregory Johnson

[21] Gordon Willey is rightly credited as inventing regional settlement pattern survey in his work in Peru (published in 1953), which delineated the spatial distribution of cultural activities across a landscape.

[22] Robert McC. Adams, *The Evolution of Urban Society* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966).

[23] Robert McC. Adams, *Heartland of Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[24] Walter Christaller, *Central Places in Southern Germany*, Carlisle W. Baskin (trans.) (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966).

[25] Richard Chorley and Peter Haggett (eds.), *Models in Geography* (London: Methuen, 1967). Less influential, but cited by some archaeologists, was August Lösch's work, translated into English in 1954.

[26] Henry T. Wright and Gregory A. Johnson, "Population, Exchange, and Early State Formation in Southwestern Iran," *American Anthropologist* 77 (1975), 267–89.

could graph the nature of a settlement system as economically "mature," dominated by the first-ranking city in the system, or as a non-regulated system.[27]

In sum, archaeologists by the 1980s employed their new data about cities in regions and new tools for understanding the settlement patterns of cities (which were debated among geographers) to trace in sophisticated ways the development of cities and urban settlement patterns. However, they tended to ignore the challenge of Finley with which I began this chapter: how can archaeologists "catch the feel" of a city (that is, how people lived in cities) from all these formalized and quantitative data? How could cities as members of states be understood? How are early cities different from each other, and if they are, why is this the case?

Comparing early cities: why and how?

In the last decades an enormous amount of archaeological field work in and around ancient cities has been conducted all over the world. On the one hand, we now know a great deal about the earliest cities in China, which were the largest of all the ancient cities (with the site of Anyang at 1200 BCE extending more than 30 square kilometers and with perhaps 200,000 people),[28] and new work in China indicates the earliest cities may date even earlier, to the late third millennium BCE. In regions where cities have been known longer there have been new projects, and there have been thoughtful appraisals and syntheses of research. It would be impossible to list all of these fruitful studies here (but see "further readings" for some examples).

On the other hand, there have been few comparative studies of early cities. One theme in comparative research, however, has been new perspectives on a venerable concept, that of city-states. In 1997 Deborah Nichols and Thomas Charlton published *The Archaeology of City-States: Cross-Cultural Approaches*.[29] The authors, writing on Mesopotamia, Egypt, South Asia, China, the Maya, Mexico, and the Andes region, explored how the first states were indeed rather small, micro-states or city-states.

[27] Gregory A. Johnson, "Aspects of Regional Analysis in Archaeology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977), 479–508.

[28] In the mid-first millennium BCE, Babylon had a similarly large population and size, and imperial Rome was even larger.

[29] Deborah Nichols and Thomas Charlton (eds.), *The Archaeology of City-States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1997).

Authors pointed out that a city-state consisted not only of a city but a considerable amount of hinterland with resources and people that were tied to the social and political organization in cities as well. Many such city-states were "peer-polities," in that they were part of a larger cultural configuration, and battled each other with one city occasionally effecting hegemony over many others. Such hegemonic control, however, tended to be ephemeral, and "collapsed" into the autonomous city-states that preceded the larger territorial state. Using the term "city-state," of course, reflected (to classicists) on the ancient Greek concept of the *polis* and (to medieval European historians) on Renaissance city-states in Italy. This had previously been explored in *The City-State in Five Cultures* in 1981.[30] In 2000, Mogens Herman Hansen published *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures: An Investigation Conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Center* and in 2002 *A Comparative Study of Six City-State Cultures*. Although there are a few scholars who are suspicious of comparing anything with the Greek *polis*, other archaeologists, like Henry Wright,[31] now pursue the concept of the "polycentric" evolution of early cities and states, that is, *mutatis mutandis*, of "city-state cultures" (in Hansen's terminology).

Modern archaeologists have also moved from a time when the dominant questions about cities had to do with the extraction of surplus from the countryside and the unquestioned control in cities of kings and political leaders. Today one reads about councils, assemblies, oligarchies, factions, middle-level elites. One significant direction in new archaeological research is to reconsider the role of religion as an organizational principle in early cities and indeed in sites that precede cities. In this volume, we shall read cases of the ritual centrality in cities, an argument made forcefully by Paul Wheatley in 1971.[32] The work of Fustel is not simply a footnote in the history of research on early cities but an early step in such research.

We can now take up the challenges of Finley about the lifeways in ancient cities and explore the Weberian (and Fustelian) questions of the constitution of cities: How many kin and what kinds of ethnic groups are recombined in cities? What is the relation between city and rural countryside? How does

[30] Robert Griffeth and Carol G. Thomas, (eds.), *The City-State in Five Cultures* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1981).

[31] Henry Wright, "The Polycentricity of the Archaic Civilizations," in Vernon Scarborough (ed.), *A Catalyst for Ideas: Anthropological Archaeology and the Legacy of Douglas W. Schwartz* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2005), pp. 149–68.

[32] Paul Wheatley, *Pivot of the Four Quarters* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1971).

economic and political struggle exist in cities? And how is such struggle resolved (or not) by new ideological formations and new claims for legitimacy from sovereigns? How are ideologies created and challenged?

The most recent volumes devoted to the study of early cities are not conspicuously comparative.[33] Not only do they lack formal comparative studies, but also they make little use of modern urban studies by non-archaeologists. It is not necessary to hold that urbanism is a category that transcends time and space in order to concede that modern urban studies offer insights into and new questions about ancient urban life. The differences between modern cities and ancient ones – in industrialization, globalization, kinds of transportation and communication systems, and types of government, to name but a few of them – are clear. Still, there are similarities in such matters as the numbers of people and heterogeneity of social groups living in cities and the dependence of cities on their hinterlands.

The structure of this volume

The purpose of this volume is to delineate some distinctive features of ancient cities and then compare these features. The book is divided into six sections (apart from the introduction and conclusion), each section consisting of three or four case-study chapters. In presentations of new research and short discussions of why the evidence exists, who produced it, and for what purpose, each chapter discusses urban life in one or more ancient cities in a region and how the cities interacted. The section authors then co-write a chapter about how the features of their cities can be compared and why there are differences among them. This summary chapter in each section is an experiment in controlled comparison. That is, whereas the comparisons of each of the distinctive features of early cities cannot be artificially limited to the case studies presented (and references outside the case studies are occasionally mentioned), these restricted comparisons are the beginnings of larger-scale comparative research.

[33] Joyce Marcus and Jeremy A. Sabloff (eds.), *The Ancient City: New Perspectives on Ancient Urbanism* (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2008); and Monica Smith (ed.), *The Social Construction of Cities* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2003); Glenn Storey (ed.), *Urbanism in the Preindustrial World: Cross-Cultural Approaches* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006). See my review: Norman Yoffee, "Making Ancient Cities Plausible," *Reviews in Anthropology* 38 (2009), 264–89. Michael Smith offers important comparative perspectives on ancient cities in a series of essays that I list in "Further Readings."

The first section of studies concerns "early cities as arenas of performance," which includes studies of Egyptian, Maya, and Southeast Asian cities. The chapters show that the landscape of cities provided for large-scale rituals and celebrations of the gods. There were also ceremonies of governance, with leaders depicting their essential and special connections to the gods. In many cities there were processional ways through the city leading to plazas where ceremonies were performed, and some cities, as Wheatley thought, were themselves planned as cosmograms, that is, as earthly representations of the cosmos. The chapters consider who performed the ceremonies, what is the nature of the audience, and how the cityscape itself is a performance space.

The second section analyzes "early cities and information technologies." The chapters in this section consider the invention and use of writing in early Mesopotamian cities, in particular in the city of Uruk toward the end of the fourth millennium BCE, in China toward the end of the second millennium BCE, and in Maya cities in the first millennium CE (with precursors in earlier periods). One chapter is on the use of quipus (or khipus), a sophisticated system of knotted-ropes that encoded information, in the Inka Empire in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE. The focus of these chapters is on how leaders kept track of goods, services, and people in early cities. The media of writing include clay tablets, oracle bones, and stone stelae and pots. Who was responsible for record-keeping? How was the state made "legible," as James Scott has put it, in order for cities and states to be administered?[34] What sort of information was not encoded in writing systems or knotted-ropes?

Section three is titled, "Early Urban Landscapes." As noted above, when cities evolved they became the primary features, certainly in the visual sense, of their countrysides, which were restructured as the hinterlands of cities. The chapters in this section, on the Andean city of Tiwanaku in the late first millennium CE, Mesopotamian cities from the late fourth to the middle of the second millennium BCE, and the Mexican metropolis of Teotihuacan in the first centuries CE, discuss the process of "ruralization" (the restructuring of the countryside as an urban hinterland), as well as the structuring of the cityscape itself. The latter discussion pays particular attention to the construction of neighborhoods and their relation to administrative and ceremonial districts. The routinization of daily life in urban

[34] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998).

landscapes, as discussed by the archaeologist Adam T. Smith, and urban geographers and critics like Jane Jacobs and Edward Soja, is delineated.

In section four, "Early Cities and the Distribution of Power," chapters consider cities in the Harappan tradition (*c.* 2700–1900 BCE) and their successors in South Asia, Greek cities in the first millennium BCE, and Jenne-jeno and other early cities in Africa (excluding Egypt) mainly in the first millennium CE. There is a kind of "orientalist" argument (noted by Ian Morris and Alex Knodell) that cities and states before the Greeks were totalitarian monarchies, with palaces owning all the land and controlling all economic and political processes. Archaeologists and ancient historians have reassessed this view. These chapters discuss other forms of power and sovereignty in early cities.

In section five, "Early Cities as Creations," chapters consider the rise and fall of Cahokia, *c.* 1000–1300 CE, the great prehistoric city on the Mississippi, Jerusalem, which was created numerous times, including arguably the creation of the City of David around 1000 CE, and Baghdad, created as the Abbasid capital in the eighth century CE. The fates of these cities are related to the circumstances of their creation.

Section six concerns "early imperial cities" – Rome in the early centuries CE, the capital cities of imperial Assyria in the early to middle centuries BCE, and Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, in the fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries CE. These cities were centers of a military establishment, a state religion, massive constructions, and also a dependence on a far-flung empire for resources and labor. They were also population attractors, both voluntary and forced, and the new populations led to new problems in these cities. Clusters of people led to disease, violence, slavery, and subjugations of unprecedented kinds and scales.

These chapters offer new information on society, economy, and politics in early cities. They are not comprehensive reviews of the cities discussed, for which literature is provided in "further readings" (and which can take the reader to formidable amounts of references). The aim of this book is to introduce readers to the history of the world of early cities, to examine the interactions of cities in their regions and beyond, to explore similarities in early urban life, while delineating differences among cities, and to provide and plead for new kinds of comparative studies. It will not have escaped readers that comparisons of Rome to Tenochtitlan, Jerusalem to Cahokia, Athens to Jenne-jeno are not standard fare in the study of early cities. Discussions of the new research in the chapters and results of our comparative methods will be reviewed in the conclusion to this volume.

Archaeologists and ancient historians are confident that new data will constantly be produced and new models constructed to account for them. This volume reassesses old data in comparative perspective and provides room for new ideas, both of which can and will result in amendments, emendations, and utterly new views of the living past.

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