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VOLUME III

Early Cities in Comparative Perspective,  
4000 BCE–1200 CE

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*Edited by*

NORMAN YOFFEE



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## Conclusion: the meanings of early cities

NORMAN YOFFEE

At 4000 BCE Mesopotamian settlements were hardly a ripple on the alluvial plain of southern Iraq or in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains to the north in Syria. At 3000 BCE and thereafter a traveler on the roads or by boat in the rivers of Mesopotamia would have seen massive urban places surrounded by walls, with temples built on raised platforms, palaces, ceremonial precincts, and houses densely packed in neighborhoods. There were also gardens and orchards in the cities, and fields stretched beyond the city walls, flanked by canals and ditches. Our traveler would have been awed by the sight of an early Mesopotamian city, and the same can be said about a visitor to any of the early cities discussed in this volume. To the list of variables that "define" early cities<sup>1</sup> must be added one more: cities must be awesome.

Cities transformed the physical landscape of Mesopotamia, and they transformed the lives of Mesopotamians, citizens whose activities were routinized by streets, neighborhoods, plazas, work areas, ceremonial areas, temple and palatial complexes, and by the need for some, but not all, citizens to commute to outlying fields to cultivate crops and tend to animals. Mesopotamian cities were normally independent, fighting with neighbors over good land and water and access to transportation and trade routes, and were the central places in city-states, which consisted of several towns, villages, and farmsteads. There were rulers and ruled, local neighborhoods with community councils. People in the hinterlands came to cities for festivals, to submit required goods, and to receive materials produced by urban workshops. Elite Mesopotamians owned estates in the countryside and even houses in other cities.

Mesopotamian cities were very large, some of them over several hundreds of hectares in size and with several tens of thousands of inhabitants.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, this volume.

Since archaeologists are reverse architects, painstakingly destroying buildings in order to understand how they were built and what was left in them, they work with surgical care. Thus, only small fractions of Mesopotamian cities have been excavated, perhaps a good thing since techniques of excavation improve with time, and understanding of urban life grows as interpretations are refined and as material increases and analyses are sharpened.

But do Mesopotamian scholars know Mesopotamian cities if they know Mesopotamia only? Today Mesopotamian cities are doubly ruined. First, mudbrick, the basic building material in Mesopotamia, doesn't last and must be constantly renewed or replaced. Cities rose as structures were leveled, and new buildings were erected on the foundations of older ones. When these early cities were abandoned, as they all eventually were, their remains stood on the plain as large hills, occasionally with modern constructions surrounding them or new settlements perched on them.

Then, as archaeologists have sorted through the layers of cities, destroying the remains of cities through meters of debris, they replicate the activities of the past. Ancient cities themselves were scenes of ruin, constantly crumbling, being rebuilt, and they contained many sites of abandonment.

Large-scale horizontal exposures of Mesopotamian cities are nearly impossible due to the size of the cities and the mountains of stratified remains in them. If only fragments of the Mesopotamian past survive, can comparative studies contribute to the understanding of urban life in Mesopotamia? And can studies of Mesopotamian economics and politics, attested in tens of thousands of cuneiform texts, which are found in the ruins of cities, aid in the understanding of other early cities?

It is no surprise that the study of early cities, in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, is in a beginning stage. Excavating a city is the hardest thing an archaeologist can do. By definition cities are areally large and stratigraphically complex. Although Teotihuacan<sup>2</sup> can be mapped in a way that fills Mesopotamian archaeologists with wonder and envy, only a small part of Teotihuacan or any early city is or will ever be known. Can comparative studies help us understand what early cities are like without essentializing the concept of "early cities" or denying their distinctive qualities and histories?

The chapters in this volume highlight certain characteristic features of early cities and how people lived in them. Thus, we trace the unmistakable

<sup>2</sup> See Sarah C. Clayton, this volume, Chapter 13.



and key importance of ceremonial events, procession ways, and sacred areas in cities, of information technologies, of transformations of urban landscapes, and how cities transformed their countrysides and their economies, and not least of how new forms of power relations and inequalities of all sorts were invented in early cities. Although most of the chapters are quite detailed, much that archaeologists know about early cities cannot be depicted in this volume. We have not explored in detail urban topographies, the nature of class and social relations in neighborhoods, the forms of households and houses, agricultural practices and water systems, sanitation, the incidence of disease and morbidity, and the smaller and larger social and political changes over time, and the reasons for the collapse and abandonment of cities (although the persistence of some early cities, for example, Rome, Jerusalem, and Baghdad<sup>3</sup> are considered), and much else.<sup>4</sup>

This volume does provide hard-earned observations on important principles of organization in cities, and chapters compare the structures and functions of these principles across time and space. The comparisons are limited to the cities chosen for examination. The choices are imposed by the editor, whose purview is necessarily constrained, in part by cities where good information exists. Whereas some of the comparisons within the sections are traditional, others are meant to be provocative. Comparison, it hardly needs to be said, also implies contrast. By comparison one can ascertain how early cities differ and thus ask questions and structure research into why this is so. This volume is avowedly experimental; it seeks to know if we can compare cities and on what basis these comparisons are meaningful. It does not pretend to be the last word on the subject; indeed, it is practically the first attempt at comparing early cities on a global scale.

Scholars are normally well-advised – and so advise their students – to limit their research: to ask questions that can be explored with good data and to leave few loose ends that other scholars (such as reviewers) might say should have been considered. It is obvious that this volume about early cities and the comparative method does not exhaust our subject of comparing early cities. Those expecting a conclusion that is a “grand narrative” will be disappointed.<sup>5</sup> In the next section, I interrupt this

<sup>3</sup> See Nicola Terrenato, this volume, Chapter 25; Ann E. Killebrew, this volume, Chapter 20; and Françoise Micheau, this volume, Chapter 19.

<sup>4</sup> But see section in Chapter 21 on Cahokia on “Why was it abandoned?” For notes on collapse and persistence, see further in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Penelope J. Cornfield, “Conclusion: Cities in Time,” in Peter Clark (ed.), *Cities in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 828–45.

synthesis, such as it is, with a meditation on the meaning of early cities in the present. I return in the final section of this chapter to our goal of comparing early cities without trivializing their distinct evolutionary trajectories and dismissing their characteristic institutions as epiphenomenal or uninteresting.

### The meaning of early cities in the present

In the 2004 Olympics in Athens, the opening pageant included a dramatic display of the evolution of Greek history.<sup>6</sup> The show began with a gigantic "Cycladic figurine," at least 30 meters tall and made of plastic and other perishable material. "Real" Cycladic figurines, which date to the late part of the third millennium and early second millennium BCE, have been found in the Cyclades and other Aegean islands and are about 45 centimeters tall. They are light-colored, stylized representations in marble (mainly) of nude women, often with arms crossed at the waist, and have a flat geometric quality that reminds onlookers of Picasso's cubist figures. They became in the 1930s a focal point for the construction of Greek identity, promoted to replace in part Byzantine grandeur and the memory of Constantinople. The fame and affect of the figurines, embodying light, clarity of form, and even small scale served as a concise aesthetic concerning Greekness.

In the next scene at the pageant a centaur examines the beauty of the huge figurine, which then bursts open to reveal a Classical Greek torso. Finally, in the next scenes the torso is beheld by an actual human agent, a hero in a loincloth, who then jumps in a boat that travels center-stage. The implication is that the torso represents the birth of sculpture, mathematics, and logic, which the Classical Greeks delivered to the rest of the world. These scenes depict the unbroken line from the humble fishermen of the Aegean through Classical Greece (and especially Athens, where the pageant took place) to the present.

I owe the images I have described and their interpretation to a Greek archaeologist, Despina Margomenou, who is also interested in what the Olympic pageant leaves out of Greek history: the prehistory of northern

<sup>6</sup> I've developed some of this section, which I had been intending to use in this chapter, in a series of lectures, including an Astor Lecture at the University of Oxford. The bulk of that lecture now appears as Norman Yoffee, "The Earliest Cities and the Evolution of History," in Elizabeth Froom and Angela McDonald (eds.), *Decorum and Experience: Essays in Ancient Culture for John Baines* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2013), pp. 299–304.

Greece (Margomenou's field area), the Roman rule of Greece, and the period of Ottoman Turkish hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the cities in this volume loom important in the modern world today because they instantiate the images that form historical imaginations. Indeed, Susan Sontag wrote about history in terms of imagination and memory:

What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is a story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images of significance and trigger predictable thoughts and feelings.<sup>8</sup>

These "collective memories" include what Johan Huizinga meant by his definition of history as "the way people render account of the past to themselves."<sup>9</sup>

In Mesopotamia, Uruk is the first city whose character we know in considerable detail.<sup>10</sup> Around 3200 BCE several tens of thousands of people lived in Uruk; it was the scene of extreme social stratification, high art, temple complexes, and writing. Although the evolution of cities in Mesopotamia also took place in the north, and just as early as in the south, the south was the heartland of high Mesopotamian culture. The evolution of Uruk and other southern cities was explosive, at least in archaeological terms. A few hundred years before Uruk there were only modest villages dotting the countryside. When the first cities (among them Uruk) appeared in southern Mesopotamia<sup>11</sup> at the end of the fourth millennium BCE, the countryside was effectively depopulated and villages were restructured as hinterlands of cities.

Cities became the locations of strangers, nodal points for military protection, homes of the most important shrines, as well as other things.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> See also Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Johan Huizinga, "A Definition of the Concept of History," in Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton (eds.), *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Nissen, this volume, Chapter 6; and Emberling, this volume, Chapter 12.

<sup>11</sup> See Emberling, this volume, Chapter 12, for the development of northern Mesopotamian cities.

<sup>12</sup> As I have expressed it in Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See Baines, this volume, Chapter 2.

state, that is, the administrative machinery of government in cities along with an ideology and its accompanying rituals, ceremonies, and materials was created in the evolution of cities. Cities, rulers, slaves, and inequality were not only natural but also timeless in the creation of this ideology.

After they were first excavated in the nineteenth century CE, the very name of Babylon and the glories of Assyria<sup>13</sup> have served as the images of historical greatness of modern Iraq. One remembers the many images of Saddam Hussein dressed as a Mesopotamian king.<sup>14</sup> The northern part of Iraq, now under Kurdish administration, is the scene of an international brigade of archaeologists who are investigating (among other things) the Assyrian Empire, which was "Mesopotamian," but also hostile to the Babylonians in the south. The meaning of Assyria for Kurds as opponents of southern Iraq is clear.

In modern India, culture wars (sometimes bloody ones) are waged over the meaning of Harappan/Indus Civilization cities.<sup>15</sup> According to certain parties, the original Aryans can be traced to the cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa (and others that are in modern India). This claim, of course, intends to cast Indian Muslims as invaders in the original and timeless Hindu homeland.

Teotihuacan,<sup>16</sup> like Uruk and other Mesopotamian cities, grew explosively from modest village predecessors and became the dominant, primate city in its region. In the 2010 celebrations of the 200th anniversary of Mexico's independence and the 100th year of the Mexican revolution, Teotihuacan, as well as Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital,<sup>17</sup> were depicted as the roots of the modern nation.

In Guatemala, at the site of Tikal,<sup>18</sup> there is a fire pit near the base of the great Northern pyramid. It is a modern installation where modern Maya commemorate their historic connection to the Maya cities of the past.<sup>19</sup>

I can cite many other instances of how ancient cities form the historical memories and understandings of modern peoples and governments. But it is perhaps less obvious that these "memories" are not unbroken – in fact they are not memories at all. Uruk, Mohenjo Daro, Tikal, Yinxu,<sup>20</sup> Cahokia,<sup>21</sup> and

<sup>13</sup> Adelheid Otto, this volume, Chapter 23.

<sup>14</sup> Yoffee, "The Earliest Cities and the Evolution of History," p. 302.

<sup>15</sup> Carla M. Sinopoli, this volume, Chapter 15.

<sup>16</sup> Clayton, this volume, Chapter 13.

<sup>17</sup> Gerardo Gutiérrez, this volume, Chapter 24.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas G. Garrison and Stephen Houston, this volume, Chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Danny Law, this volume, Chapter 8.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Haicheng, this volume, Chapter 7.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy R. Pauketat, Susan M. Alt, and Jeffery D. Kruchten, this volume, Chapter 21.

other cities were unknown (or nearly so) to modern local people. They were discovered by archaeologists, and so archaeologists have been and continue to be the midwives in the formation of collective memories. They have furnished the images in which history is told and contested.

### The fragility of early cities

In this section I return to the “social drama”<sup>22</sup> that existed in early cities. In Chapter 25, on Rome, by Terrenato and in Chapter 26, Terrenato and colleagues discuss the contrast among imperial cities. In Rome, conquered peoples were drawn into the orbit of Rome, and many people became Roman citizens. In the Neo-Assyrian case,<sup>23</sup> conquered people, such as the “Ten Lost Tribes” of Israel, who did not pay their tribute to the Assyrians, were deported in the tens of thousands to various parts of the Assyrian Empire. These workers built the new capitals of Neo-Assyrian kings and worked in the latifundia of Assyrian high officials and generals. There was little attempt to integrate these deportees into Assyrian society. Indeed, Assyrian rituals of state were embedded in the inner recesses of palaces and temples, increasingly remote from the people of Assyria, both Assyrians and others. As Assyrian kings were progressively concerned with becoming the center of Mesopotamian culture, for example by importing all manner of texts from repositories in Babylonia, they distanced themselves further from the overwhelmingly non-literate population in both cities and the countryside. Consequently, when Assyria was conquered by its enemies, and its capitals and other cities were destroyed, there was no reason for those in the countryside to rebuild Assyria, either physically or ideologically.

Many of the cities discussed in this volume were “fragile” in spite of the indisputably great power of kings and their courts. In China in the second millennium BCE, great cities emerged. Erlitou encompassed more than 300 hectares in area, flourished from c. 1900–1500, and had around 30,000 inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> Even larger was the subsequent city of Zhengzhou, 25 square kilometers with perhaps 100,000 inhabitants, in the time 1600–1400 BCE. In both cities there are palace compounds, craft workshops, elite cemeteries.

<sup>22</sup> Yoffee, this volume, Chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> Otto, this volume, Chapter 23.

<sup>24</sup> The data are from Liu Li and Chen Xingcan, *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Finally, the last capital of second millennium BCE China, Yinxu, spread over more than 30 square kilometers and according to its excavator had a population of more than 100,000. Much is known about Yinxu,<sup>25</sup> since there have been large-scale excavations in several precincts, especially in craft workshop areas and in various cemeteries, including royal precincts in them. Also, as Wang makes clear, the oracle bone inscriptions document the power of a series of kings, c. 1275–1050 BCE.

The growth and extent of these early cities, the appearance of palaces and highly stratified workshop areas and cemeteries, and the vast extent of the walled cities (especially visible at Zhengzhou) have led archaeologists and historians to depict that enormous power of the kings and cities (and as capitals of states). Whereas this is not wrong, it does not follow that the power of the kings was uncontested or that such power led to the stability of the governments and the cities. Indeed, the short lives of the cities, and the records of the late Shang king at Yinxu, which show continuous campaigns of kings to control the hinterlands, indicate that the political structure of second millennium cities in China was highly unstable.

Can we pursue this scenario of instability in early cities in China by surveying other cities discussed in this volume? For those who read popular accounts of the Spanish Conquest of ancient Inka and Aztecs,<sup>26</sup> it may come as a surprise that both empires were riven by cleavage planes and that Native allies of the Spanish joined in the conquest of both empires. Gutiérrez<sup>27</sup> documents the growth of Tenochtitlan and the vast tribute exacted by the urban center on its hinterland that depleted the countryside. Tenochtitlan itself was the scene of intensive agriculture in chinampas and the large-scale construction of canals and bridges. Causeways marked the procession routes to the ceremonial center to which people streamed and tribute flowed. In the “collapse” of the empire, Native armies from conquered provinces allied with Spanish conquistadors to sack the city. Like Yinxu, Tenochtitlan was spectacular but short-lived. It was founded in 1325 CE and fell in 1521.

A roughly similar story accounts for the fall of Cuzco and the Inka Empire. Established in 1438 CE Native armies joined the Spanish to demolish

<sup>25</sup> Wang, this volume, Chapter 7.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999); and Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Gutiérrez, this volume, Chapter 24.

Tawantinsuyu.<sup>28</sup> As Urton shows<sup>29</sup> the Inka rulers meticulously recorded the flow of people and goods in their empire. These “integrated” populations, however, quickly turned into Native armies that helped swiftly bring down the massively centralized and powerful but ultimately fragile political structure of the Inka state.

Cahokia was another city whose duration was brief, from the “big bang” of about 1050 to its virtual abandonment 200 years later.<sup>30</sup> Cahokia was a city in terms of its areal size, large population, and central place in its hinterland and wide influence in its region. Its ceremonial significance is undoubted. However, what kind of a city was it? Following Pauketat and others, Cahokia did not have a king or central government with specialized bureaucratic managers. Rather, leaders owed their power to their place in a kinship and ceremonial system. One is tempted to infer that Cahokia, home to various immigrant populations, did not develop state-like institutions and that attempts to integrate its diverse populations by traditional means didn’t work. Although there are echoes of Cahokian rituals in later Native populations in the Cahokian sphere of influence, it seems that the actual memory of Cahokia did not survive. Might this suggest that Cahokia was a project that failed in the memories of later generations? In the “Chaco phenomenon” of the American Southwest, the great pilgrimage site that appeared as a “big bang” in the late ninth century CE and was abandoned in the early twelfth century, was remembered in modern Puebloan oral histories, but as a place cursed by the gods for the hubris of centralization.<sup>31</sup>

In Mesopotamia Nissen<sup>32</sup> discusses the development of the city from a modest place at the end of the fifth millennium BCE to the metropolis in which writing was invented at about 3200 BCE. Although Nissen does not continue the story, he has written elsewhere<sup>33</sup> that immediately succeeding

<sup>28</sup> David Cahill, “Advanced Andeans and Backward Europeans: Structure and Agency in the Collapse of the Inca Empire,” in Patricia McAnany and Norman Yoffee (eds.), *Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 207–38.

<sup>29</sup> Gary Urton, this volume, Chapter 9.

<sup>30</sup> Pauketat, Alt, and Kruchten, this volume, Chapter 21. The phrase “big bang” is Pauketat’s.

<sup>31</sup> Steve Lekson, *A History of the Ancient Southwest* (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2008), p. 200.

<sup>32</sup> Nissen, this volume, Chapter 6.

<sup>33</sup> Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Mario Liverani, *Uruk: The First City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); and M. van Ess (ed.), *Uruk, 5000 Jahre Megacity* (Petersburg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2013).

the phase in which the ceremonial precinct of Eanna flourished, the area was violently destroyed. Uruk became one city among many in the early third millennium BCE that struggled for independence and hegemony.

This story repeats for other Mesopotamian cities. In the middle of the third millennium BCE the city of Kish was supremely powerful in central Mesopotamia. There were palaces, ziggurats, royal cemeteries, and massive buildings that lined a presumed processional route in one major part of the site. A bare century later Kish was conquered by Sargon of Akkad, and it became a provincial outpost to other centers of power for the next 2,500 years. Otto<sup>34</sup> discusses the enormous constructions but rapid abandonments of several capital cities in the Neo-Assyrian period of north Mesopotamia.<sup>35</sup>

In a recent essay, Patricia McNany and co-authors have studied the fragility in Maya cities<sup>36</sup> and their “collapse.”<sup>37</sup> In particular they note that the royal courts in Maya cities in the southern Lowlands in the Late Classic period (c. ninth and tenth centuries CE) were abandoned, after which, in one to three generations, the sustaining populations migrated to other Maya cities, especially to the north, where new forms of less hierarchical political systems were invented. The authors focus not on factors of overcentralization or overpopulation in Maya cities, nor on increased warfare between cities in the Late Classic period, but on the “dynamics of diaspora.” In fact there was a “staggering range of variation” in how the Maya cities were “de-peopled” and an equally “complex, multi-causal, multi-phased process of collapse.” Although in some Maya regions the Late Classic was a period of climate change, in other regions there is little evidence of drought, deforestation, soil depletion, or overpopulation. McNany and her colleagues suggest there was a “cascading effect” of local populations migrating from the collapsing Maya cities. If the royal courts could no longer command resources from tropical farmers in urban islands of low-density populations, each city with its focus on large-scale ceremonial constructions, including procession ways and ritual complexes, became increasingly fragile. The

<sup>34</sup> Otto, this volume, Chapter 23.

<sup>35</sup> Further reflections on the collapse of these cities in Norman Yoffee, “The Collapses of Ancient Mesopotamian States and Civilizations,” in Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill (eds.), *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 44–68

<sup>36</sup> Houston and Garrison, this volume, Chapter 3.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia McNany, Jeremy A. Sabloff, Maxime Lamoreux St-Hilaire; and Gyles Iannone, “Leaving Classic Maya Cities,” in Geoff Emberling (ed.), *Counternarratives: Agency and the Long-term in Archaeology and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).



remaining sustaining population in each city-state chose to migrate to areas more resilient to environmental changes. The demands of a political system, with its interlocking system of fractious alliances between royal courts and recondite royal rituals, grew increasingly remote from the concerns of farmers and merchants.

This scenario of collapse as emigration from unsustainable courts may suggest similar choices that were made by the people in Harappan/Indus cities. Although the evidence of "royal courts" is not so apparent as in Maya cities,<sup>38</sup> some cities (or at least Mohenjo Daro) had large centralized ceremonial precincts and required substantial agricultural support for the elites of the densely packed urban complex. In Angkor, another region of low-density urbanism, as in the Maya area, and characterized by an enormous array of ceremonial structures and with complex water systems,<sup>39</sup> exacerbation of the delicate political and environmental system may have led the sustaining population to abandon support of the religious and political elites. Can this scenario be extended to the city of Tiwanaku with its large-scale ceremonial constructions that were ultimately unsustainable when encountering environmental stress?<sup>40</sup>

Guy Middleton has refreshed the truism that "nothing lasts forever"<sup>41</sup> and argues that, "ancient polities were fragile entities."<sup>42</sup> This is particularly true of ancient cities. Their very size and complexity have led archaeologists to believe that early cities were "integrated" by rulers and by religious cosmologies, which were also ideologies of the state. Our survey of early cities in this volume questions the notion that such integration implies that everything was going well and that collapse occurred only when something bad happened, usually because of climate change (which scenario is clearly influenced by modern concerns with environmental degradation). Although archaeologists tend to talk about the "evolution of social complexity," as if complexity were the same as cooperation and integration, our examination of early cities shows that attempts at integration, which were really struggles for establishing control over the several social parts of a city and society, were the prelude to and often the cause of disintegration.

<sup>38</sup> Sinopoli, this volume, Chapter 15.

<sup>39</sup> Miriam T. Stark, this volume, Chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> Janusek, this volume, Chapter 11.

<sup>41</sup> Guy Middleton, "Nothing Lasts Forever: Environmental Discourses on the Collapse of Past Societies," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 20 (2012), 257–307.

<sup>42</sup> Middleton, "Nothing Lasts Forever," p. 286.

The nature of fragility is highlighted by the appearance of the cities of Jerusalem, classical cities, and Baghdad. These cities were grounded in new kinds of continuities and were characterized by new kinds of overarching ideologies. These ideologies were not simply part of political systems and often were opposed to domestic politics. New kinds of elites, who did not owe their status to transient leaders, royal courts, and centralized bureaucracies and armies but to transcendental systems of values and beliefs, made these cities very different than the earliest cities. One might also ascribe the lack of extreme centralization in some of the cities portrayed in this volume, notably the Greek cities<sup>43</sup> and Jenne-Jeno,<sup>44</sup> and, perhaps in Harappan times, as a factor in the longer duration of these cities.

In the earliest cities, complexity was an irony; that is, these cities were products – with many variations – of the goal of reducing complexity, of making complexity into simplicity.<sup>45</sup> And thereby lay their fragility. Perhaps we should be studying not the “evolution of complexity” at all, but the “evolution of fragility.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ian Morris and Alex R. Knodell, this volume, Chapter 16.

<sup>44</sup> Roderick J. McIntosh, this volume, Chapter 17.

<sup>45</sup> As James Scott has put it, making societies “legible” and so controlled by rulers: James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> And, of course, the exceptions to fragility.