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## **Other Perspectives on Urbanism**

*Beyond the Disciplinary Boundaries*

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Lawrence Durrell's experimental *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957–1961) uses four novels to show how the same sets of events can be seen and interpreted very differently by people with dissimilar experience, perspective, and sociocultural background. Mountolive, a staid British civil servant, relates the happenings in an ostensibly objective way and in the third person. The indigenous Justine gives a wildly different, spicy, and intensely personal account that also diverges from the Levantine Balthasar's tawdry but much more complex rendition. Finally, the voice of expatriate Clea expands the temporal frame, putting the story into an unexpected political context.

This skilled apposition of outsider-insider (etic-emic) readings can be usefully applied to the study of urbanism, to highlight the distinction between “Western” and alternative interpretations. Urbanism is many things, depending on the question, the scale of vision, and the cultural background of a respondent. But the continuing effort to find general criteria for urbanism (Childe 1950) misses the point in that it implies that there is a single, rational answer. It would be much more creative to explore multiple facets such as religion, social values, and ethnicity at greater depth. Several of the contributions in this book illustrate the point, including the linguistically based study on ancient Chinese cities (Falkenhausen, chapter 11). Islamic urbanism, which had

prehistoric roots and was in full bloom before the Maya Classic "collapse," represents another striking alternative to a single-mindedly "Western" perspective. Ethnographic or historical insight is a sine qua non to start a more eric investigation. Whenever possible, archaeology should be combined and contrasted with archival or historical research, as indeed many of the chapters in this book do. But there also has to be a greater cultural sensitivity, with regular recourse to cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparisons, if we are to grasp the insider perspective. To achieve that goal, we must transcend a preoccupation of urban archaeology with material evidence, something that will be possible only with a sustained, cross-disciplinary discourse among practitioners from all the subdisciplines concerned with early urbanism. As the short bibliography suggests, geographers are major contenders in historical and cross-cultural urbanism, and they contribute to identifying and understanding questions of contemporary relevance.

### ***Long-term Settlement Histories and Discontinuities***

Archaeologists who do not dichotomize town and country have recognized that within a particular region the number of settlements of all sizes increases and then decreases over time. In some instances, most of the larger and smaller places may appear to be abandoned. When the cycle waxes once again, many of the derelict sites may not be reoccupied, and the archaeological components may be different (Jameson et al. 1994; Potter 1979). Even when disjunctions are incomplete, such cycles of growth and decline are intriguing, if not challenging, to interpret (Enckell et al. 1979; Marcus 1998). They are common enough in European and Southwestern prehistory and find more dramatic analogs in the rise and decline of so-called high civilizations on different continents, where they involve urban sites, sociopolitical institutions, and possible ethnocultural identification.

In the more recent experience of the Modern demographic transition, explanations for growth would typically turn to a host of factors, both inputs and feedbacks, including disease; rural productivity; environmental resources and their management; urban market and labor demand; long-distance trade and economic integration; migration, insecurity, and war; and potential administrative incompetence or failed policies. The complexity of the issues may not even allow firm conclusions. In earlier ranges of historical or prehistoric time, these same factors remain material, but social unrest, dislocation, and cultural disillusionment probably weigh even more strongly. Nonetheless, a few archaeologists, historians, and even natural scientists have short-circuited these webs of reasoned explanation to assert "civilizational collapse" in response to mono-causal scenarios such as "abrupt climatic change" or environmental degradation. Never mind that co-occurrence or coincidence, even if it be true, does not prove causality.

"Collapse" is a very real part of urban prehistory and history, and it requires attention. Given the deductive proclivity of world-systems historians, who have a major interest in "rise and decline" (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997), it is fortunate that there is

a more cautious literature in geography about environmental vulnerability and social resilience (Bankoff et al. 2004; Endfield et al. 2004; Liverman 1999). But the critical facilities of anthropology must also be marshaled to challenge, rather than endorse, this new environmental determinism (Butzer 1997; McIntosh et al. 2000).

Long-term settlement histories serve to highlight a propensity for millennial long-waves in population history. We need only turn to the sixteenth-century demographic and social collapse of indigenous Mexico, in the context of earlier, archaeologically verified settlement histories (Sanders 1988), to see that population cycles are real. Such macroregional cycles deserve attention by more urban archaeologists and historians, reinforced by an explicit, cross-disciplinary discourse.

Population estimates pose a practical problem. Whatever their limitations, urban site sizes and site configurations offer the only semiquantitative access to prestatistical population aggregations, when used in conjunction with complementary data on smaller nucleated sites or dispersed settlement features (Butzer 1976, 1984), and their spatial relationships (Church and Bell 1988). Sometimes such non-urban sites are enumerated by religious or historical topographies (Timm 1984–1992), but more commonly they must be unraveled by regional archaeological surveys or related site-sampling procedures. As in the processual sphere of intensification and dis-intensification, with town and country tightly interwoven, ratios of urban to non-urban populations can sometimes be simulated from early statistics on preindustrial economic sectors.

Urban archaeology, in conjunction with archaeological survey and geo-archaeology, is uniquely equipped to address long-term settlement histories and discontinuities. These are of significant regional interest and help define the dynamic context of human settlement agglomerations. They also flag discontinuities that demand closer investigation. Such findings are relevant at a larger scale because both growth and decline foster questions about the range of factors that drive macroregional demographic change. This is interesting in historical terms and even more so in relation to the unprecedented global population expansion that began some 250 years ago. Will decline inevitably follow, and if so, why and how?

### ***Urban Geo-archaeology***

Switching from the regional to the site-specific frame, complex constructional histories are embedded in urban sites. In general terms, these will be picked up by traditional excavation methods. But specialized attention to urban sediments and their links to external, environmental processes may elucidate patterns of occupation within individual structures or in the course of changing urban land use, growth, and decay (Butzer 1982a). Surprisingly enough, such urban geo-archaeology still receives little attention. Beyond the standard issue of artifactual integrity, there is a microstratigraphy within and between structures that records accumulating “waste” under variable conditions of deposition and postdepositional transformation (Butzer 1981, 2005a; Butzer et al. 1982; Rosen 1986; Schuldenrein et al. 2004). This also has implications

for the links between an early city and its changing environmental context. For example, the construction of cities and chinampas in the lacustrine Basin of Mexico may have been in response to repeated changes of lake level, as suggested by the research of Cordova (1997), rather than a deliberate reclamation of marshland, in other words, an opportunity as well as a challenge.

The most obvious case in point is the urban mound or tell, composed primarily of mud-brick (adobe). Building materials are liable to slow attrition and periodic collapse or destruction, followed by replacement or abandonment. Rooms may be swept clean or fall into disuse, with intrusion of floodwaters or blowing sands. Collapsed structures are built over or first cleaned out, to be dumped elsewhere. The sediment matrix accumulates sufficiently rapidly that appropriate study can identify the human and non-human agents responsible for particular sediment layers and can be used to reconstruct a settlement microhistory of growth or decline. Extended from a limited number of structures to a selection of wards or neighborhoods, urban geo-archaeology can identify demographic trends of growth and decline and can offer resolution on the processes of decay or abandonment (Butzer 1982a:table 6–1).

In the “Lost City of the Pyramids” at Giza (Lehner 2002a, 2004), it is possible to identify episodes of mud-brick meltdown and liquefaction, resulting in lateral mass movements of mud, or of major flood events that wreaked havoc within the site (Butzer 2005a). As a consequence, a part of this site complex had to be rebuilt at least three or four times within no more than thirty or forty years. This not only illustrates the dynamic nature of sites but also shows that phenomenal desert rains did not deter the powers-that-be from rebuilding the same structures in the same places. However, later mud-brick walls were placed on elaborate, rough-stone foundations, possibly stabilized by mortar. Such foundations later protected the site from deflation. In effect, the location was reused because of its advantages, illustrating an early response (ca. 2500 BC) to environmental vulnerability.

With adjustments, similar criteria can be applied to sites built of cut or crude rock, such as Ethiopia's Axum, with its prominent and durable collapse rubbles (Butzer 1981). For example, sediment accumulates after abandonment, even before the last of the superstructure tumbles down; the interior is opened up to slope-wash or eolian sands. Alternatively, structures or burial shafts may be overwhelmed by eroded soils from upslope, providing signposts for local landscape histories and land management. On a much larger scale, floodplain cities are affected by catastrophic floods, across time ranges of several centuries. Salvage study of foundations exposed by construction in cities of eastern Spain thus yields insights into urban settlement histories, and the rhythm of severe flooding becomes a proxy record of effective watershed disturbance (Butzer et al. 1983).

Cities are open systems—economically, demographically, and environmentally. Yet the common practice is for archaeologists, in the Mediterranean world and elsewhere, to shovel out the matrix between the architectural alignments, after the artifacts have been removed. But that “dirt” may be diagnostic of which parts of a site

were or were not occupied at a particular time, and it can provide prima facie evidence for rise or demise. Sediments may also document direct links between site and environment, for example, down-slope of a settlement. All too many excavated urban sites are incompletely understood as a result of disciplinary introspection.

### ***Rulership and Bureaucratic Integration***

A different miscomprehension of early cities stems from a Eurocentric interpretation of how early states operated, namely, the assumption that hierarchical bureaucracies in capital cities were always effective in administering subordinate or distant towns. It is therefore helpful to draw attention to Ethiopia, a literate civilization with a history of precarious urbanism. Nineteenth-century kings traveled around the country, with their army and retainers, to collect tribute and live off the land (Kusimba, chapter 12; Pankhurst 1982). The pre-Modern written record of Ethiopia is largely limited to the religious chronicles of its kings (Tamrat 1972). Until the 1890s, there was nothing remotely similar to a civil service, a general accounting office, or an archive of decrees and other proclamations. Titles honored retainers of the negus at various levels, without creating regular officials or a permanent chain of authority. Any continuity was anchored in isolated monastic centers, in the physical projection of royal churches or residences (Butzer 1982b), and, above all, in oral tradition and its written transmission (Hable Selassie 1972).

Ethiopia is no analog for ancient Egypt, but this example suggests the need to reexamine some entrenched assumptions about institutional networking in early state formation (Lehner 2000). Until the second or third dynasties, tribute in Egypt appears to have been collected directly during periodic royal visitations to the provinces (Helck 1975; Martin-Pardey 1976:33–36). Some 2000 titles were awarded during the Old Kingdom, but almost none identify a function, implying that they were honorifics (Baer 1960). Bureaucratic delegation of authority appears to have been on a personal or idiosyncratic basis, raising legitimate questions about how authority was implemented, except within the pharaoh's residence and scattered royal estates (Quirke et al. 2001). Unfortunately, most of the preserved evidence for writing comes from mud sealings and stone inscriptions; little survives of the more explicit papyrus documents for the Old Kingdom.

In Egypt, the public religious realm was interwoven with the secular, and the early administrative role of the temples of the royal cult was quite unclear; the priesthood may, for example, have transmitted decrees to the provincial centers, while projecting the authority of divine kingship through temples and shrines and possibly keeping the accounts of the royal estates. Only towards the end of the Old Kingdom (Dynasty 6) is there evidence of secular agents supervising specific tasks (Martin-Pardey 1976:109–201; Quirke et al. 2001) or serving as intermediaries between the royal residence and the provinces. Officials for urban (as opposed to provincial) administration are not documented before the New Kingdom.

Although ancient Egypt does not offer a universal model for urban origins, it offers—as one of the very earliest complex societies (Lehner 2000)—an opportunity to rethink the accepted relationships between complexity and urbanism. Despite the belief that Memphis was the Old Kingdom capital, current evidence from both Giza (Lehner 2004) and Memphis (Jeffreys and Tavares 1994) suggests the presence of several large but short-term urban nucleations, linked to shifting royal residences, in proximity to different construction projects such as pyramids and their associated temples. This does not, of course, negate the possibility of a major, fixed ceremonial center, such as Ethiopia's Axum. Like the Boserupian dilemma, we do not know whether writing and putative administrative structures drove or were a consequence of rapid sociopolitical change and urbanization, restricted to the immediate proximity of the royal residence. Royal retainers and the priesthood may have been the two branches of an incompletely centralized but authoritarian, archaic state that probably depended heavily on kin relations. The phenomenal evolution of Egyptian artistic expression that began even before the unification of Egypt (perhaps ca. 3100 BC) appears to have been a function of royal prerogative. But royal power probably soon transcended provincial tribute and the agricultural production of royal estates, through monopolistic control of foreign trade for wine, oil, and timber, using Egypt's mineral wealth or military power (Butzer 1997; Warburton 2001:17–27).

We still do not really understand the emerging interrelationships between military power, official religion, writing, administrative institutions, a complex society, and urbanism during the millennium before the revival of Middle Kingdom Egypt. For Childe, the links were self-evident. Today, if we go beyond Eurocentric rationalism, we begin to recognize that explanation is far from simple. There is indeed much more to early urbanism than taxonomy.

### ***Classical and Islamic Urbanism***

City form, as a function of town planning, is of central interest to urban archaeology. At issue is not so much the economic relation of form and function, but the sociopolitical *momenta* that leave their imprint on urban morphology, as well as the ethnocultural tastes and imperatives that may limit formal geometries. Cityscapes project more than power, wealth, and style. They also reflect cultural values and the rituals of public social behavior, while accommodating the pushes and pulls of social segregation and neighborhood aggregation. These competing demands must be accommodated within optimizing solutions to economics and security. As a result, urban landscapes can be informative, even without explanatory texts, as to the many dialectical poles imprinted within an urban fabric.

After the death of Alexander the Great, the orthogonal grid-plan town bursts forth in the Hellenistic Near East, setting the tone for an "orderly" urban prototype that was perfected in Imperial Rome, dominating cities of the Mediterranean Basin for half a millennium; compare DeLaine (chapter 6), Fentress (2000), or Rich and Wallace-Hadrill (1991) with older taxonomies such as Grimal and Woloch (1983). We would

now say that the new Hellenistic cities in the former Persian Empire were designed to communicate a Western meta-narrative that was fundamentally secular, rational, and propagandistic.

Although based on existing Greek prototypes (Owens 1991), the Hellenistic city was designed to project a New Order of enlightened polity and Greek civilization in non-Hellenic areas. The axial layout and formal architecture represented dynastic power, the official cult, and the centers of cultural and social interaction. Ethnic and assimilated Greeks clustered around the city core, lending prestige to the adjacent streets. The main body of indigenous people lived in peripheral “neighborhoods” that played only a subordinate role in urban life. The Hellenistic city was, in fact, designed to impress and to acculturate these indigenous, Near Eastern peoples.

Nonetheless, the planned Hellenistic or colonial model remained only one of two basic possibilities because indigenous urbanism reflected different principles. Traditional Near Eastern societies placed an inordinate emphasis on privacy. Family life was not exhibited on the street, nor were civic activities conducted in an agora or piazza. This is born out by the painstaking French excavations at Ugarit (Ras Shamra, Syria) (Yon 1997), where the Late Bronze site plan closely approximates that of an Islamic city of two millennia later. Ugarit was tightly packed, with narrow, winding streets and multiple blind alleys that provided semiprivate access to houses that were focused on home courtyards. Residential districts were based on social, primarily kin, groupings (Schloen 2001). Ugarit does not stand by itself, but as a well-studied prototype of cities emerging in greater Mesopotamia during the fourth millennium BC.

In Egypt, emphasis has been placed on top-down urban models, such as Lahun, Amarna, and Elephantine, which vaguely conform to Western expectations. The impression obtains that some orthogonal organization was imposed at certain times, but where organic evolution was possible, a different picture emerges. In the craftsmen’s town at Deir el-Medina (McDowell 2001; Valbelle 1985), opposite Luxor in Upper Egypt, houses had air vents rather than windows facing the street, and during the town’s final expansion, doorways began to open on new cul-de-sac alleys. Exteriors were plain, and whatever wealth there was, was displayed in the interior. Peaking shortly after 1200 BC, Deir el-Medina suggests that residential quarters in pre-Islamic Egypt may have been similar to the crowded, egalitarian Coptic settlements of a later time that were never recorded by excavators. Long before the Hellenistic era, indigenous Near Eastern neighborhoods already reflected different cultural values and rules. Given the compartmentalization of urban archaeology according to period, this fundamental characteristic has been essentially overlooked.

During the reign of Augustus, the city of Rome underwent a major makeover, with official investment and private wealth driving a frenzy of building activity, designed to glorify the deified emperor and to represent the power of the primate city. But the complex topography of the Seven Hills and existing architectural features precluded anything approaching an orthogonal grid. Contrary to widespread opinion, the architect Vitruvius (approximately 25 BC) played no tangible role in this rebuilding,

other than as a conservative critic. New provincial cities sometimes implemented the norms of a chessboard geometry, but at least some of these were transformed military camps; even so, orientation with respect to the cardinal points was not the rule. The importance of Vitruvius is that he is one of the few surviving sources to document the architectural activity of a period in which architects planned on a large scale and helped create distinctive urban landscapes.

During the third century AD, the population of Roman provincial cities was declining rapidly as a result of epidemics, warfare, and economic disintegration. The original propagandistic role of the city to acculturate native peoples (see Jones, chapter 7) was forgotten as citizenship was extended to almost everyone. With the advent of Christianity under Constantine, the first churches were built outside the walls of Rome, creating new parish modules of nucleated settlement, while the core of Rome became a museum and decayed (Krautheimer 1983). Provincial cities of the fourth and fifth centuries AD saw a building-over of public spaces and conversion of elite residences into warrens of squalid slums (Carver 1996; Kennedy 1985). Piece by piece, all across the empire, the administrative structures that had once maintained city spaces and urban order failed.

The new Christian ideology certainly contributed to this transformation, as baths, circuses, and theaters were closed, temples razed, and administrative buildings converted into basilican churches. Commerce was unwelcome. Great cities such as Antioch did not recover after Justinian's plague of the 540s. The comprehensive architectural schemes of the Classical city were abandoned. Instead, rulers now sought to identify and glorify themselves through church construction on a monumental scale. Wherever cities did not die but evolved, they became differently grounded, in the transcendental symbolism of Christian redemption. This is clearly reflected in the Madaba mosaic map (ca. AD 550) of Jordan (Donner and Cüppers 1977), which shows a topography with few secular signposts but dominated by churches and focused on the city of Jerusalem.

The emergence of a Christian-Byzantine metropolis (Krautheimer 1969) in newly founded Constantinople remains to be comprehensively studied. Constantine's axial esplanade of power, pomp, and entertainment was modified under Justinian by construction of the "great" and "little" Hagia Sophias at either end. By 1204 the palace complex had been abandoned and only the churches remained, with the seat of government moved to modest buildings at the other end of town. As represented by city views drawn before 1453 (Manners 1997), Constantinople's hallmark was a host of parish churches at the center of neighborhood communities, possibly forming semi-autonomous social modules, that included foreign colonies. Neighborhoods or barrios form the building blocks of urban social living in many cultural contexts (Kaluzny 2004) and call for more explicit attention by urbanists. After the Ottoman conquest there mainly was continuity in the residential quarters, but with Muslim *maballas* (quarters or sectors) of related kin groups clustered around their neighborhood mosques, interspersed among Orthodox, Armenian, and Latin modules.

The death of Muhammad, a millennium after that of Alexander, crystallized a

counter-urban experience without formal geometries; it was nurtured in the Islamic "East," to remain characteristic well into the Industrial Era (Abu Lughod 1987). This city proclaimed the greatness of God, next to whom rulers and wealthy elites were insignificant. There was no division of the secular and the sacred because the existential realm was one and the same as the cognitive and religious. The urban environment was variably structured, for men and women, between what was forbidden and closed and what was open and accessible. It was a radically different city, the logic of which was based on religious tradition (Abu Lughod 1987; Eben Saleh 1998; Face 1984; Hakim 1986; Kaluzny 2004; Wheatley 1976; Wirth 1992), but its cultural roots were firmly embedded in its Near Eastern heritage. Small wonder that it was difficult to understand in Eurocentric terms.

In the Islamic city of the new Arab world, public buildings had to remain subordinate to mosques, and the spirit of egalitarianism did not tolerate ostentatious elite residences. There was little corporate identity (Lapidus 1984[1967]), and secular power was suspect, so public display of authority could lead to a negative backlash (Lindholm 1996). Bath houses were essential for personal cleanliness, rather than as sites of social intercourse. Commerce was a meritorious enterprise, and central spaces were used for semicovered *sucs* (bazaars). Open market places were likely to be found in outlying or extramural areas, to accommodate livestock and sometimes unruly tribal people. Commercial travelers were accommodated in prominent inns (*kbans*). Family life was focused on the sequestered home courtyard, and streets were narrow and winding, possibly to accommodate camel rather than cart traffic. Alleys, stairways, or obstructed streets further served as an impediment to mounted raiders.

Religious schools (*madrasas*) extended the religious sphere beyond the mosque, which was surrounded by gardens and ablution facilities, whether modest or imposing. In many early mosques, the courtyard replaced the agora or forum as a center for discussion and legal decisions. The axis of the mosque was pointed towards Mecca, a sacred orientation (*qibla*) that could influence urban layouts as much as it did Islamic cartography.

The Islamic city as described here was an archetype best represented in conservative North Africa, and there were many regional and structural exceptions, for example, early Islamic, grid-plan military settlements. There also were planned cities, such as Abbasid Baghdad (circular) and Samarra (rectilinear) (Creswell 1958), but Islamic orthodoxy was always quick to condemn the trappings of secular power and such initiatives soon died. Interpretations of the *sharia* or even its prevalence varied a great deal, however, and Turkish Islam was more flexible in regard to the segregation of public and private space, which also may have been true for Islamic Spain. Whatever its ethnic variants, the resulting Islamic urban landscape, so often described as chaotic, is eminently logical but clearly non-Western.

But Islamic segregation of public and private spheres—and the view that women should be hidden—sustained a bottom-up dynamic based on kinship. The resulting neighborhood associations and households generated an irregular street plan, from a primary concern for the needs of the household and its immediate neighbors rather

than for citywide organization (Schloen 2001:111). Mark Lehner (personal communication, 2000) argues that the nonlinear, nongeometric urban agglomeration reflects local impulses, constraints, and perceived needs, based on shared ideas and ideology. Islam put a significant spin on otherwise self-generating and self-regulating systems, in the sense of Schaur (1992).

In emphasizing alternative urbanisms, we are not dealing with academic esoterica but highlighting fundamental misconceptions about the “other” that have contemporary relevance. Some architectural historians or cultural geographers continue to equate adobe technology with Islamic urbanism, confusing material culture with a finely nuanced way of life. The misconception that New World adobe construction derives from Egypt via Morocco and Spain is commonplace (Butzer and Butzer 2000). Yet mud-brick was once used worldwide, wherever suitable muds were readily available. Large buildings of rammed earth were built in Medieval central Europe, yet four decades of Islamic archaeology in Spain reveal only cut-stone or rock construction in residential quarters, whether rural or urban (Butzer et al. 1986; Delaigue 1988; Valor Piechotta 1995). Such stereotypes and misrepresentation underscore the need for a better understanding of Islamic civilization and its visible manifestations. Given that Google, in 2007, had 40,000 hits for Islamic urbanism and 560,000 for Islamic archaeology, it is apparent that the cultural introversion of our dated, Western academic structures is out of line with the potential receptivity of an educated public.

### ***Aix-la-Chapelle and Timbuktu***

Rightly or wrongly, most of us are probably attracted to the idea that urbanism is somehow linked to artistic expression and intellectual activity. Childe saw it that way, and oft times that association was true. Limiting the issue to scholarship, I would argue that the preconditions are economic growth, enlightened patronage, and opportunities for scholarly exchange—through mobility and access to library sources or other prototypes (Butzer 1994).

Two examples may make the point. The Carolingian Renewal began under Charlemagne during the 780s and in a very unlikely place, a long abandoned Roman spa, which became the German city of Aachen, or Aix-la-Chapelle. Although there was no more than a set of sulfurous mineral springs on one of the scattered Carolingian dynastic properties, the emperor came here to “take the waters.” A decade later, the site had been embellished by a strong keep, a small residential complex, and an innovative octagonal church that was modeled on Ravenna. There was no town. But Charlemagne managed to attract some of the best scholars of Britain, France, western Germany, and Italy to this isolated woodland site. Here they discussed education and the seven liberal arts, renewed inquiry into astronomy and mathematics, and obtained Classical manuscripts from Italy that were copied in monastic scriptoria and commented on or embellished by individual scholars (Butzer and Butzer 2003). By all accounts, this modest intellectual revival was driven by the emperor’s penchant for dis-

course and the improvement of monastic education. He was fluent in Latin yet could neither read nor write. But he had the power, resources, and vision to make the Renewal possible. He became the first royal patron to sponsor scholarship since the Roman emperor Titus discussed science on power walks with Pliny during the late first century.

My second improbable case is the West African city of Timbuktu, or Tombouktou, near the River Niger in the unforgiving Sahel of modern Mali. Long synonymous with the end of the known world, Timbuktu nonetheless had 137,000 Google hits in 2007, reflecting its fame as a center of Islamic learning across 300 years, until the Moroccan conquest of 1591. To this gateway city connecting West Africa with the Saharan caravan routes to North Africa, Timbuktu's rulers—despite repeated dynastic and ethnic changes—attracted clusters of scholars from the Near East (Benjaminsen and Berge 2004; McIntosh and McIntosh 2003; Winters 1981). Its wealth of perhaps close to a million Medieval and early Modern manuscripts, now being gathered and preserved by an international effort, represents an inestimable resource for future research. In its time, this adobe city was very populous, its three grand mosques still visible today and its Islamic university revived.

The common threads with Aachen are wealth, mobility, and a critical mass of scholars, but the remarkably sustained patronage enjoyed by Timbuktu was beyond the vision of the last Carolingians. Even so, Charlemagne's image of a New Jerusalem still continues to define a palpable sacred space, visited daily by busloads of visitors from three countries.

Just as an international exchange sustained Timbuktu, our perspective on Medieval urbanism in Western Europe (Vance 1990) should emphasize the importance of *multiculturalism* in what is easily mistaken for an inchoate jumble of backward principalities. During a long wave of population growth, which began with the end of the Viking and Magyar depredations, European craftsmanship was stimulated by the misguided Crusading enterprise, which brought all walks of society into indirect contact with Islamic civilization. With the new flourish of specialized crafts came a demand for raw materials that was first met during the late 1100s by the market fairs of Champagne, attracting suppliers and merchants from all over Western Europe and Italy (Abu Lughod 1989). Trade became so lucrative that town charters followed, sometimes purchased from bankrupt local lords, emancipating the nascent cities from aristocratic interference. The common thread of such charters included market privileges, institutionalized craft guilds, and elected town councils that represented a first step to participatory government. By 1250, new town charters began to attract craftsmen and merchants to hundreds of small and large places all over east-central Europe (Quirin and Trillmich 1956:75, 86). Mining towns conferred more specific privileges, leading to an upsurge of mining activities.

Little appreciated is that most late Medieval towns of eastern Europe were multi-ethnic, drawing their new citizens from hundreds of kilometers away, with skilled weavers coming from distant Flanders or Wallonia (Quirin and Trillmich 1956:82–83).

The new cities provided safe havens not only for guilds of craftsmen but also for ethnic enclaves. The granting of urban privileges was economically profitable, and by 1300 the Serbian king was welcoming foreign merchants and craftsmen and especially the “Saxon” miners (Drennon 1998). Under Ottoman rule, craft guilds also became ecumenical, with adherents of different religions working together in a single confraternity (Inalcik 1993).

Like trade fairs, international pilgrimages, such as those to Compostela, Rome, or Jerusalem, further served to stir the ethnic pot, exposing people to new places, new people, and new ideas in an era without intercity trains or television. Grain from the Baltic helped feed the populace of Mediterranean cities. Bankers from Italy or Germany provided letters of credit in Paris or Bruges. Europe on the eve of 1492 was a surprisingly cosmopolitan place.

How can urban archaeology without written records do justice to the multicultural components of the urban experience? My former student Christine Drennon (1998) was able to show that traditional dress identified the “status” of women in multiethnic Macedonia, rather than their ethnicity. Kenoyer (chapter 10) points to a similar function for women’s bangles in Harappa. Archaeological strategies to identify differences in burial practices, skeletal anomalies, or (isotopic) diet are not guaranteed to identify ethnic difference unless there were distinct belief systems and effective social segregation.

### **European and Mesoamerican Cities**

Urbanism in Europe during the High Middle Ages was vibrant and diverse. There was no single master plan as cities evolved organically to accommodate new social and economic needs that transcended older defensive modes in the shadow of a strong fortress (Vance 1990), such as Prague, Brno, or Kraków. Larger cities might become multinodal, accommodating existing church-oriented quarters but also requiring a spacious marketplace. New city walls were added after the fact. It was around the market that leading citizens built their elaborate houses and where the most prominent buildings were to be found: guild halls, the mercantile exchange, and the council house. Many cities also embarked on ambitious church construction, beyond the ambit of traditional parishes, to provide both a religious and secular landmark that would signal the prestige of the city.

A similar diversity was found in the countryside, where the packed village nuclei of the earlier Middle Ages gave way on new sites to several kinds of linear villages, depending on the topography or economic function (Engel 1970:95–98). Here, too, spatial configurations were dictated by pragmatic priorities. Monasteries continued to be built or expanded, but the emphasis now was on display rather than redemption. The transcendental *mappaemundi* of an earlier time were being replaced by practical navigation charts or by illuminated maps of a wondrous, wider world inferred from travelers’ rumors or the imagination (Harley and Woodward 1987). Religion mattered very

much, but it had to take its place alongside secular pursuits. Church spires dominated the skylines, but most urban activity centered on the here and now. Unlike Islamic cities, which remained timeless except on the peripheries of Islam, West European urbanism continued to evolve and change without the anchor of a restraining ideology.

Historians of architecture are fascinated by the reemergence of the grid-plan town, parallel with the rediscovery of Classical architecture, towards 1500. Some attribute this to Leon Battista Alberti, writing in 1452, but the facts are otherwise. The first of the new chessboard towns were founded on new sites much earlier, after the reconquest of Valencia, in the mid-1200s. They were conceived by James I of Aragón, presumably as a compromise between a rectangular, defensive perimeter and a unified urban plan focused on a large plaza, where a main church stood across from the buildings of administration and commerce (Rosselló Verger 1987). The complementarity, rather than separation, of church and state was so proclaimed. Streets were broad, to accommodate religious processions and floats, and formed a perfect grid. James probably knew little of Classical antiquity and presumably had the plans for Castellón and Villarreal drawn up on rational and pragmatic grounds.

The grid-plan town, later attributed to Alberti and hailed as a product of the Italian Renaissance, had actually been born amid Medieval heterodoxy. The idea must have persisted in Spain as a strategy for building new towns, because in 1502 Santo Domingo was laid out in this manner, without instructions from the court. General directives, however, were given for the laying out of Panama City in 1513, and Puebla was planned in 1531 according to similar principles (Butzer 1992). Then, in 1538 Viceroy Mendoza had much of Mexico City razed and rebuilt on a rigid grid plan, and, indeed, he is known to have pondered Alberti (Tóvar de Teresa 1987). The colonial New World town had been born (Butzer 1989, 1992).

With the benefit of hindsight, it is ironic that the main cultural thrust of Spanish colonial policy was centered on *policía* (civilized behavior), which was to be exemplified by Mediterranean-style social ambience in properly planned new towns (Licata 1981). These were to be the model for relocated indigenous settlements, where the built environment and its social institutions were to “civilize” and acculturate the natives (Tacitus redux!) so that they might learn from the orderly temporal and spiritual living of their mentors. This all seems like a replay of the discussion on the new Hellenistic city.

Nonetheless, the imposed grid plan had more structural and functional similarities with Mesoamerican cities than differences. Indigenous urban centers in central Mexico were arranged according to astronomical bearings dictated by cosmological criteria (Hirth, chapter 14; Marcus 2000 [1983b]; Pyburn, chapter 13; Tichy 1991; Tyrakowski 1989). They were focused on great squares that served ceremonial, as well as commercial, needs or functions, close to prominent temples and palaces to project a particular social order and proclaim dynastic power. As the visible markers of wealth and status dissipated with increasing distance from the city center, crowded residential quarters for commoners were organized around more modest, sacred places. At the

urban perimeter, the landscape dissolved into less structured villages and hamlets surrounded by market gardens (Butzer and Butzer 2000).

No major urban center in Spain had conformed to the unified grid-plan town imposed on the New World. That colonial model, whatever its thirteenth-century roots, was first applied in Mesoamerica during the early 1500s. It was to replace indigenous grid towns that had been laid out according to more exacting and regular criteria than any urban center in Western Europe. This is yet another example of Eurocentric arrogance and illusion.

## **Concluding Discussion**

This commentary examines a half-dozen focal points or dichotomies that represent neglected questions, troublesome assumptions, or alternative perspectives on early urbanism. These can now be summed up and briefly elaborated.

(1) Cities have always been open, rather than closed, systems. I have singled out population growth and decline, as reflected in regional settlement histories, as a productive avenue to study long-term change. This, in turn, may be related to the articulation or integration of exchange systems. Such a macro-interpretation suggests world-system applications. It can also support or set strictures to the current cross-disciplinary interest in civilizational "rise and demise," especially the subject of discontinuity or collapse. Among other possible factors in such cyclic rhythms are abrupt climate change and environmental degradation, so today the metaphorical intersection of urban with environmental systems takes on even greater significance. This is where urban geo-archaeology comes in, as a methodology that can interrelate urban and environmental processes or identify growth or decline within the city, as at Giza or Axum. Urban geo-archaeology can deal explicitly with diverse and properly grounded, environmental perspectives. These would be germane to larger questions of sustainability (Butzer 2005b).

(2) Everyone seems to agree that religion is important in the study of urbanism. The question is, which kind of "religion"? Long after Buddhism disappeared from India, the city of Gaya in Bihar State continues to attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims annually to the site of the Enlightenment of the Buddha. Many of the pilgrims are Buddhists from abroad, but most are Hindus who repeat a ritual without understanding its meaning. Nominally, this is an example of the imprint of formal religion, officiated by a Hindu priesthood, but its heterodox and bicultural roots make it a celebration of popular religion. How would one deal with such a city in strictly archaeological terms, without the advantages of tradition and written records? What analogs are there with the official cult of Old Kingdom Egypt? Did the eschatological shifts of the official Egyptian cult between Dynasties 4 and 5 affect or reflect popular religion? Could it be that the animal cults, especially of the Late Period, capture the spirit of Egyptian popular religion? Were the official cults of the Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors more than projections of authority or legitimacy designed to channel and regiment loyalty?

The Islamic city is not just an alternative cityscape but at once a physical, experiential, and transcendental realm that has no other counterpart in the ethnographic present. It draws heavily on prehistoric roots and on different cultural traditions from those of the Greco-Roman or Medieval Germanic city and requires a different epistemology. That is so not only because of distinct top-down ideologies, but also because of cultural preferences for the articulation of public and private space, which favor bottom-up self-organization and are expressed by diverging spatial configurations.

Further, in each kind of urbanism, the line between the secular and religious is differently conceived and expressed, as an indivisible duality, as an explicit complementarity, or even as a formal "separation." There is, then, a variable dialectic between the cultural and the political, with profound social, economic, and spatial implications. This has not yet been effectively recognized by comparative historical urbanists, despite its importance for understanding convergent or divergent urban evolution.

(3) The Early Modern model of a secular civil service (cleptocratic or not) is difficult to shake. A formal and rational bureaucracy centered at the pharaoh's court lagged behind state formation or urbanism by at least a millennium. The Egyptian case further suggests that the institutional structures responsible for administration and the channeling of power are particularly difficult to grasp. Entwined with the religious sphere and at once improvisational and culturally grounded, they also varied widely in time and space. Understanding such nuanced interrelationships is essential for hermeneutic purposes. In didactic terms, they are critical to model the energy and information flows within a city, to identify the positive and negative feedbacks of urban adaptation, and to explicate the rank-size hierarchy of urban networks. Economics and power are insufficient as the primary variables to interpret urbanism.

(4) Several examples developed here stress that urban centers commonly were multiethnic or at least bicultural. That pluralism applies to the population at large and the professional sectors represented, as well as the elite merchants, artists, and scholars. Ethnocultural complexity introduces different sets of tensions that may affect routine urban behavior, periodic social ferment, or decision making at the top. While the resulting behavioral patterns may find material expression, that is not necessarily so. Working models need to incorporate more experience from other kinds of historical, urban investigation.

My own dissatisfaction with an exclusively archaeological paradigm reflects a Medieval archaeology project that I directed in the Sierra of eastern Spain during the 1980s (Burzer et al. 1986). While I excavated a Muslim hamlet and two Islamic castles, Elisabeth Butzer searched the relevant archival records in Valencia. We found that the latter were biased and thematically incomplete, yet these archives added flesh to the bare bones of archaeological resolution, offering humanistic dimensions for the lifeways and hardships of an oppressed minority.

Unexpectedly, the archives also required different interpretations of deductions suggested by the archaeology. Some people from our mountain hamlet of twenty-some households had privileges to travel and trade, including Jusef Bar-Robe, a resident

Jew. The same food staples were sometimes bought and sometimes sold at market, questioning the assumption of self-sufficiency. Local craftsmen performed contract work in downtown Valencia. Our, supposedly simple, villagers did not just acquire their good tablewares by down-the-line trade or at local markets; they had close contracts with potters at an elite production center 50 km away, one of them even posting bail for such a potter.

If the goal is to understand a dynamic urban community in space and time, it is imperative to draw archival documentation into the discussion whenever possible—rather than shrink from studies that might be considered as “historical archaeology.” In the absence of such documents, we should be sensitive to ethnographic experience and reluctant to engage in positivistic speculation.

(5) Last but not least, I am concerned about the Eurocentricity that partially blinds almost all of us, myself included, making it difficult to fully grasp alternative values and rationales or to give them their proper due (Marcus 2000 [1983b]). Urban archaeology should not be part of a Western meta-narrative. But unless we broaden our educational system to include more sophisticated study of non-Western civilizations or incorporate more non-Western practitioners into both discourse and praxis, there is a very real risk that we may fail to bridge that gap. Historical and comparative urbanism have significant applicability in an era of conflictive globalization and cultural incomprehension. Effective, cross-disciplinary collaboration could and should keep matters of contemporary relevance in focus.

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