URBAN SOCIETY IN ROMAN ITALY

Edited by

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Preface

The majority of papers in this volume were initially presented at a conference on Urban Society in Roman Italy, which was held at the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London, in July 1991. This took place as part of a continuing research project on cities and urbanism in ancient Italy, which is funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The editors would like to thank the Director and Secretary of the Institute of Classical Studies for their assistance in hosting the conference, and the Leverhulme Trust for their financial contribution.

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Abbreviations

AC *Archeologia Classica*

AE *L'Année Épigraphique*

AJA *American Journal of Archaeology*

Ant. Afr. *Antiquités Africaines*

BAR British Archaeological Reports

BCH *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*

BEFAR Bibliothèque de l'École Française de Rome

Bull. Comm. *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*

CAH². *Cambridge ancient history*, 2nd edition

CEFR Collection de l'École Française de Rome

CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

DdA *Dialoghi di Archeologia*

GdS *Giornale degli Scavi*

ILLRP *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae*

JBAA *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*

JRA *Journal of Roman Archaeology*

JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*

IG Inscriptiones Graecae

ILS Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

L'Ant. Class. *L'Antiquité Classique*

MAAR *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*

MAL *Monumenti Antichi dell'Accademia dei Lincei*

MAMA Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiquae

MDAI (R) *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*

Mem. Linc. *Memorie della Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche, Filologiche dell'Accademia dei Lincei.*

MEFRA *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française de Rome*

NSc. *Notizie degli Scavi dell'Antichità. Atti dell'Accademia dei Lincei*

ORF². H. Malcovati, *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, 2nd edn.

PCPS *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*

PdP *La Parola del Passato*

RE *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, eds A. Pauly *et al.*

Riv. Stud. Pomp. *Rivista di Studi Pompeiana*

SCO *Studi Classici e Orientali*

SEG *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum*

TAPA *Transactions of the American Philological Association*

TLL *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*

YCS *Yale Classical Studies*

ZPE *Zeritschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

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Introduction

Kathryn Lomas

The city is one of the central phenomena of the ancient world, and one which has generated an unparalleled level of scholarly debate. From Marx, Sombart and Weber to the more recent analyses of Finley,[1] the essential nature of the ancient city and its relation to later European urbanism has been dissected by specialists from many disciplines in an attempt to build a single coherent model of urban development.

The ultimate impossibility of creating a valid model for urban development at all times and in all places, the stated aim of the Chicago school of urban studies, was exposed by Moses Finley in his review of the history of urban theory.[2] However, this has not deterred historians and urban sociologists from constructing global models for the origins and development of the ancient city, based on the Graeco-Roman town, but sometimes including urban settlements in the ancient Near East. Economists, sociologists, historians and archaeologists have contributed to the debate about the nature and economic basis of the city, and its relationship to its surroundings, ranging from Marx, through Sombart, Pirenne, Weber and Childe. Most recently and influentially, Moses Finley, influenced by Weber's notion of ideal types, has sought to identify types of city in accordance with their economic rôle. The ancient city, he argued, was almost entirely a consumer city, living off the resources of its territory, trading its surpluses, manufacturing on a small scale with the needs of the locality principally in mind, and always dominated by a *rentier* class. In contrast, the medieval and early modern city was a producer city, less immediately tied to the countryside and with a much greater emphasis on the mechanisms of large-scale trade and production.[3]

One aspect, however, which all these disparate views have in common is that they are based much more on the Greek than the Roman city. Finley takes the classical Greek *polis* as the purest representation of the ancient city – an independent political unit with a fully autonomous existence and, in most cases, a high degree of economic self-sufficiency based on domination and

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exploitation of the surrounding territory.[4] The Hellenistic and Roman city, a unit which retained a high degree of local autonomy while ceding overall control of its affairs to a central authority – a monarch, or during the Roman republic, the senate – receives much less emphasis, both from Finley and from the principal object of his discussion, Weber. Indeed, the extent to which the perceived dichotomy between the nature of the 5th century Greek (primarily Athenian) *polis* and that of the Hellenistic city has shaped modern perceptions of the ancient city as a whole, has recently been highlighted by Oswyn Murray.[5]

While it is understandable that the type closest to a Weberian ideal type should receive most emphasis, it also represents, at least for Roman historians, a major omission. Over 80 years ago, Nissen[6] identified 400 urban sites in Italy in his classic account, *Italische Landeskunde*. Since then, evidence for Italian and Roman urbanism has been augmented even further by a vast, and ever growing, body of archaeological material. Although the Roman city shares many of the characteristics of the Greek *polis* (and of the Hellenistic Greek city), it is, nevertheless, a distinct entity which deserves to be studied in its own right. It emphatically should not be regarded as a watered-down version of the Greek city. The development of urbanism in Italy also raises the complex question of whether there is an Italian type of city, distinct from both the Greek *polis* and the Roman, legalistically defined, city.[7] The papers in this volume cannot claim to be a definitive reassessment of urban theory, but instead seek to explore and illuminate aspects of the Italian city in the light of the most recent research.

Having said that this volume is not intended as a challenge to the theories of the ancient city, it is perhaps paradoxical to begin with two papers which concern themselves with precisely this. However, this is highly necessary, given the recent upsurge of interest in theoretical models of urbanism. Over the past five years, there has been an explosion in the number of books concerned with the ancient city, including Rossi's *Modelli della città* (Turin, 1987), a collection of papers on the work of M. I. Finley, edited by Andreau & Hartog and published as *Opus* 1987–89, and Rich & Wallace-Hadrill's *City and country in the ancient world* (1991). Many of these illustrate the extent to which the debate, particularly in the English-speaking world, is still dominated by Weber's ideal type of the city, emphasizing the producer/consumer city, at the expense of Durkheim's model (described by Murray as "holistic") which takes ritual and social behaviour as its starting point.[8]

A strong recent trend has been towards expressions of scepticism over the possibility, and indeed the value, of attempting to construct unified models of the ancient city. However, the debate on the consumer city has reopened with a vengeance as a result of Donald Engels's construction of a model of the ancient city not as a consumer, but as a service city. In his view, ancient Corinth functioned not as a consumer city but as a centre for providing services and administrative functions for its hinterland, generating wealth by provision

of services for a wider clientele.[9] Even the supporters of the service city must admit that a model based on Roman Corinth – which was a more overtly commercial and less agrarian community than most – may not necessarily be valid for all cities. Whittaker also casts doubt on much of the economic data from which the model is evolved, and reasserts both the validity of urban theory and the notion of the consumer city. Nevertheless, the model of the service city does suggest ways in which the Weber-Finley duality of the producer versus the consumer city may be developed.

There has also been renewed interest in the evolution of Weber's ideas on the city and of the notion of an ideal type as the basis for modern urban theory. Capogrossi highlights the extent to which *The city*, much the most influential and widely read of Weber's works, is a late and unrepresentative essay, which does not accurately reflect his views on urbanism. He traces the development of Weberian thought on the agrarian economies of ancient civilizations and the ways in which an understanding of how Weber's views changed can influence our understanding of his ideal type.[10]

The primary concern of this collection of papers, however, is not theory but examination of the actual nature of urban society in Roman Italy. Evidence, particularly archaeological evidence, for the Italian city has grown enormously over the last 20 years, and the imposition of some structure on this material is essential if we are to avoid the descent into antiquarianism which was condemned by Finley.[11] Archaeologists and historians have increasingly turned, in recent years, to techniques drawn from other disciplines. Some of the most exciting and innovative research in recent years has been in the field of urban space.[12] The analysis of space and its functions in the ancient city, frequently using techniques developed by urban geographers, has proved very illuminating for the study of social structures and interactions. Spatial analysis has already borne fruit in studies of domestic architecture and the functioning of the Roman household as a social unit,[13] but it is proving increasingly useful as a tool for dissecting the social structures of cities. Wallace-Hadrill re-evaluates the evidence for the distribution of bars and brothels in Pompeii – as a means not only of clarifying use of space, but also of exploring the ways in which moral values, in this case the opposition between the honour of participation in public life and the shame attached to establishments associated with vice, modified use of urban space. Another study of the ways in which layout of space affects social interaction, that of Laurence, uses a different technique. Distribution of features such as different types of Pompeian doorway may act as an indicator of house function and of ways in which inhabitants interacted with the community as a whole. On a wider level, distribution of graffiti can be an indicator of the function and frequency of use of particular streets.[14]

The importance of both interdisciplinary techniques and a stringent re-evaluation of material first published earlier in the 20th century cannot be overstated. However, it is all too easy to err towards too much theorizing and lose sight of the realities of urban development and its impact. DeLaine

produces an architectural study of the Insula of the Paintings at Ostia, illuminating construction techniques, cost, source of materials and manpower, and changes in function. This enables a more realistic reconstruction of the probable form of the insula, in contrast to the extravagant suggestions of Calza,[15] and gives valuable insights into the nature of urban renewal at the most fundamental level.

Inevitably, it is tempting to concentrate on the urban development of Pompeii and Ostia, indubitably the best preserved and most extensive urban sites in Italy. However, any serious analysis of urban society must come to grips with aspects of that society in general, not confining itself to a small number of cities. Italy is so strongly regional in character, even as late as the 2nd century AD, that it is difficult to justify the privileging of a particular site as typical. It is hard to see how conclusions drawn from Pompeii can be regarded as having greater universal significance than those from any other region of Italy, or even from the sprawling metropolis of Rome itself. A recent (as yet unpublished) paper by Mouritsen has highlighted major differences of social and political structure even within Campania, between the neighbouring cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Having said this, the sheer quantity of evidence from Pompeii and Ostia makes these sites invaluable for study of the Italian city.

The rôle of the elite and its behaviour is an inescapable element in any study of urban society. It is undoubtedly a disproportionate element, but the lack of reliable evidence for popular culture, particularly in the literary and epigraphic record, makes this weighting difficult, if not impossible, to avoid. The central rôle of military matters in both the cultural and political world of the Roman elite is well known,[16] but this can be extended to cities other than Rome. The demands of virtually constant warfare and the military needs of Rome in terms of troops, supplies and support given by her Italian allies, played an important part in city formation and city development in republican Italy. The economic and social structures required to support such a military machine provide an additional tool for evaluating the consumer city model.

In terms of social structure, study of the elite should not be the beginning and end of the study of urban society, but the balance of evidence is strongly tilted towards the upper end of the social scale, and there are also some questions which can be usefully approached by a consideration of elite behaviour. In a post-conquest situation, such as existed in Italy during the republic and early empire, urban elites and their ideology are vital to our understanding of the processes of acculturation within the cities of Italy.[17] In any city, they are the group most exposed, and receptive, to external contacts, but also the group with the greatest need to control these outside influences. In the Greek and Hellenized cities of southern Italy, this can be observed with particular clarity, as the Romanized elite developed ways of manipulating the Greek heritage of the region to validate its own position and relations with Rome.

One of the areas of greatest research interest in recent years has been the

relationship between the city and the surrounding countryside.[18] The central-ity of this subject to the study of urbanism is powerfully articulated by Strabo,[19] who defines the distinction between civilized life and barbarism as lying in the adoption of settled agriculture and urban life, and is fundamental to the mind-set of most other Greek and Roman authors. In modern terms, the theme of urban/rural relations reappears in the work of Adam Smith and continues to be central to that of Marx, Sombart, Weber and many other his-torians of the ancient city.[20]

In recent years, the increasing use of survey archaeology, both in Italy and in other parts of the Mediterranean, has enabled scholars to study patterns of rural habitation and land use with much greater precision, illuminating, amongst other things, the processes of city formation and dissolution and the economic interaction of city and country.[21] However, despite this wealth of evidence, the whole concept of a division between the city and its territory is a problematic one. The essence of the ancient city-state is that there was a symbi-otic relationship between urban centre and outlying countryside. This renders the idea of a division between city and territory in terms of economic and social structures largely meaningless. Nevertheless, the moral values attached to a perceived urban/rural divide by the Romans themselves, and the need to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which a city related to its territory, mean that this subject is still central to the study of Roman urbanism.

As the most visible sign of elite activity and urban exploitation of the coun-try, the villa has received a great deal of attention. Excavation of a number of villas over recent years has given us a substantial body of evidence to work from, but there is considerable tension between this archaeological data and the pattern suggested by ancient writers on agrarian matters. Purcell attempts to resolve this by considering the villa as an embodiment of urban elite values, a phenomenon which must combine agricultural productivity with conform-ity to moral and cultural expectations of the elite about rural life. Thus the elite villa is a productive estate, but cultural expectations lead to the prioritization of some activities – notably wine and oil production – over oth-ers. The rôle of urban expectations in shaping understanding of the country-side is also reflected by North's discussion of the rôle of rustic cults in a substantially urbanized Italy, revealing the exploitation of such cults by the urban population and the lack of any meaningful division between urban and rural religious practices.

One of the most notable features of the ancient city is the powerful influ-ence which it has exercised over the development of architecture and concepts of urban form in more recent times. Since the Renaissance, quotations from classical culture and iconography have been used to validate contemporary issues. Goalen illustrates the powerful influence of the rediscovery and excava-tion of Pompeii in the 18th and 19th centuries. This transformed ideas about the ancient city and was instrumental in changing the very idea of the city in the architecture and town-planning of 19th and 20th century France. On a

similar theme, Quartermaine discusses the manipulation of Roman history to validate Mussolini's imperialism and programmes of social and moral reform. Key themes from Roman history were integrated into both popular culture and public architecture. In particular, references to the Augustan period were used to validate social reforms, and the art and architecture of imperial Rome provided inspiration for his creation of a new – fascist – imperial city.

Inevitably, any series of papers of this type raises many questions as well as, it is hoped, providing some answers. The debate on the producer versus the consumer city is far from over. Despite Whittaker's optimism over the possibility of developing a globally valid theory of the ancient city, some scepticism must remain, but there are many avenues still to be explored. The ever increasing body of archaeological data and new techniques of analyzing it give us the possibility of new insights into the relation between city and territory, and into social structures and interactions within the city.

Notes

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 6; J. Burchard & O. Handlin (eds) *The historian and the city.* (Cambridge, Mass. 1963), p. 2.
3. Finley, The ancient city, pp. 12–13.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.
5. O. Murray, Cities of reason, in *The Greek city: from Homer to Alexander,* eds O. Murray & S. R. F. Price (Oxford, 1990), pp. 1–25.
6. H. Nissen, *Italische Landeskunde* (Berlin, 1902).
7. E. Gabba, La città italica, in *Modelli di città*, ed. P. Rossi (1987), pp. 109–26; K. Lomas, The city in south-east Italy: ancient topography and the evolution of urban settlement, 600–300 BC, *Accordia Research Papers* **4**, 1993.
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9. D. W. Engels, *Roman Corinth* (Chicago, 1990).
10. M. Weber, *Die römische Agrargeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1981), crit. edn J. Deininger (ed.) (Tübingen, 1986); M. Weber, *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum* (Tübingen, 1909) tr. R. I. Frank as *The agrarian sociology of ancient civilizations* (London, 1976); M. Weber, *Die Stadt* (Tübingen, 1921), tr. *The city* (New York, 1958).
11. Finley, The ancient city, p. 20.
12. D. L. Clarke (ed.), *Spatial archaeology* (London, 1977); Y. Thébert, *L'urbs: espace urbain et histoire* (Paris & Rome, 1987); D. Perring, Spatial organisation and social change in Roman towns, in *City and country in the ancient world*, eds J. Rich & A. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1991), pp. 273–93.
13. Thébert, *L'urbs*; A. Wallace-Hadrill, The social structure of the Roman house, *PBSR* **56**, 1988, 43–97.

14. On the distribution of electoral *progammata* as a tool for studying Pompeian political life, see also H. Mouritsen *Elections, magistrates and municipal elite: studies in Pompeian epigraphy* (Analecta Romana Instituti Danici, 15) (Rome1988).

15. G. Calza, La preminenza dell' "insula" nella edilizia romana, *Monumenti Antichi*, **23**, 1914 pp. 543–608.

16. W. V. Harris, *War and imperialism in republican Rome 327–70 BC* (Oxford, 1979).

17. W. V. Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* (Oxford, 1971); P. Bruun (ed.) *Studies in the Romanisation of Etruria* (Rome, 1975); P. Castren, *Ordo populusque Pompeianus: polity and society in Roman Pompeii* (Acta Inst. Romani Finlandiae, 8) (Rome, 1975); J. R. Patterson, Settlement, city and elite in Samnium and Lycia, in *City and country in the ancient world*, eds J. Rich & A. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1991), pp. 147–68; Lomas, The city in south-east Italy.

18. J. Rich & A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *City and country in the ancient world*.

19. Strabo, 4.1.5.

20. Finley, The ancient city, pp. 6–7.

21. J. Rich & A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *City and country in the ancient world*; G. Barker & J. A. Lloyd (eds) *Roman Landscapes: archaeological survey in the Mediterranean region* (London, 1991).