

The
Preindustrial
City

P A S T

A N D

P R E S E N T

THE

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Designed by Sidney Solomon

PREFACE

SO TO END a ten-year journey. Looking back, it seems that the further I have traveled, the further I have strayed from the traditional pathways in American sociology. But hindsight leads me to believe that it could not have been otherwise. For I have come to entertain grave doubts concerning many generalizations in sociology and have attempted some reformulation of these.

Ostensibly this is a book about cities. Yet it is much more, for through the medium of the preindustrial-urban center I have sought to analyze the structure of preindustrial civilized societies. In turn we seek in the preindustrial city and its society, now retreating from the world scene, a standard for measuring—and, consequently, understanding—the impact of industrial-urbanization, a truly revolutionary force in this the twentieth century.

Anyone who hazards to place his own work in perspective is beset by pitfalls. Yet this much can be said. Most sociology today focuses upon industrial-urban societies, above all the United States. Reflecting upon the problems inhering in a mature industrial-urban complex, sociologists tend to be preoccupied with contrasting the “real”—in the realms of social class, bureaucracy, and the like—with the “ideal” norms and values. Yet such a frame of reference will have little utility for scientific observers of the transformations wrought upon traditional systems by the encroaching industrial-urbanization. For this we must hark back to an older, more strictly Euro-

pean tradition, some of whose representatives, however, survive in the American sociological fraternity. Here the concern is contrasting the past with the present—for example, as in this study, the preindustrial city and the society that supports it with the industrial city and its society.

Admittedly a generalizing study of this sort encounters special problems. One is how to deal with the spelling of foreign names and terms when divergent usages abound. I have attempted for each cultural area or region to follow the general practice of specialists therein, but this has not always been possible. Then too, it is difficult to regularize the names of authors of, say, Chinese descent. Generally speaking, I have used the form employed by the author himself, even though this has led to some inconsistency in the citations.

Acknowledgments: it is easy to know where to begin. With my wife, Andrée F. Sjöberg. A scholar in her own right, she temporarily set aside her current research in linguistics and anthropology to assist in this venture. She is, as indicated, co-author of Chapters II and III. But her contributions do not end there. As a linguist, she has written on such languages as Uzbek and Telugu and has command of the major languages of Europe, including Russian, a fair knowledge of Sanskrit, and some familiarity with Arabic and several languages of India not mentioned above. Her special skills opened up to me previously unknown realms of social data. Moreover, our friendly, though sometimes heated, arguments over specific issues, continuing into the wee hours of many Texas mornings, illumined many difficult areas. In the end, I marvel at her patience when I consider that she is temperamentally unsympathetic to sociology and what she considers its evasive generalizations. Thus, I bear full responsibility for the theory and its failings.

I also wish sincerely to thank Pat Blair, Leonard Cain, Jr., and Richard Colvard for reading selected chapters, particularly for calling attention to some unclear thinking on my part. And I am most grateful to Badruddin Sharafi, whose

discerning comments and objective analysis of his own pre-industrial-urban milieu clarified many a sticky problem. Then too, may I note that a grant from the Graduate School, University of Texas, freed me from teaching duties during one summer (1958), making it possible for me to devote more time to this venture.

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INTRODUCTION

THE CITY and civilization are inseparable: with the city's rise and spread, man at last emerged from the primitive state. In turn, the city enabled him to construct an ever more complex and, we would like to believe, more satisfying way of life. Some scholars regard the city as second only to agriculture among the significant inventions in human history. We shall not quibble over the proper ranking due the urban community in man's storehouse of great inventions. It is sufficient to recognize that it is worthy of intensive treatment.

We propose to describe and analyze the social and ecological structure of the preindustrial, or non-industrial, city. That this is the first such effort is astonishing, given the existence of cities of this type from early antiquity down to the present day. Most emphatically, this is not just a historical study, nor is it directed solely to the urban sociologist. It has pertinence for any social scientist concerned with the structuring of complex societies. In fact, knowledge of the preindustrial city and of the society that enfolds it—standing as they do in dramatic contrast to the modern industrial-urban community and society—illuminates these latter, not only in areas where industrial-urbanization is well advanced, but where it is just now emerging.

Only recently have an appreciable number of American sociologists evidenced interest in the comparative analysis of

cities and societies. Sociologists have too long been steeped in the positivistic tradition that stresses fact-gathering and absorption in particulars at the expense of broader generalization. And the demands of various bureaucracies in America for the assistance of sociologists in resolving their particular, and sometimes unique, social problems merely accentuate this trend. Such inner-directedness seems likely to continue as sociology's contributions in this area are increasingly recognized.

Sociologists, especially of the urban variety, are apt to dismiss as sheer speculation the works of the traditional comparativists—Hobhouse, Spencer, Sumner, and even Max Weber.¹ Admittedly these writings can be criticized on a variety of counts. Many of the propositions they present demand reformulation; others must be discarded outright in light of recent findings. But to reject in the process the comparative approach—particularly when treating large-scale social systems—is to ignore a compelling fact. Just as the generalizations of the older comparativists frequently fail us today, many of the recent generalizations of sociologists derived solely from evidence in American society, and then for only a short time-span, are certain to prove inadequate and must ultimately be abandoned. Granted that much cross-cultural comparison necessitates “loose” theories or hypotheses, it has the major advantage of imparting meaning to a complex set of data and serving as a corrective against the ethnocentric bias that inheres in so much intrasocietal research. If sociology is to justify its self-concept as a “science of society,” it must establish propositions that have cross-cultural validity.

Nowhere is the need for comparative analysis more apparent than in the study of the city. Many propositions, once widely accepted as true, are coming to be recognized as excessively culture-bound. Consider the concentric zone theory of ecology originated by Burgess and elaborated upon by numerous writers.² According to this view, cities generally arrange themselves into a series of well-defined circular zones,

one within the other, the focal point of them all being the central business district. Our chapter on ecology demonstrates that cities of the preindustrial type display quite a different spatial arrangement. Or take the generalizations of many sociologists concerning organizational units such as the family. Among some writers it has been fashionable to attribute the emergence of the conjugal family that is the norm in present-day urban America to the urbanization process per se. Such a narrow view could not have developed in a climate that stresses cross-cultural research. The conjugal unit, as the family form toward which urbanites strive, is a consequence of industrial-urbanization; it most decidedly is not the ideal pattern in the preindustrial city. In succeeding chapters we shall have occasion to discuss the weaknesses of a number of other generalizations now popular in American sociology.

Of course, not all urban sociologists have been indifferent to the comparative approach. Sorokin, Zimmerman, and Galpin in their review of the history of rural-urban studies suggest that interest in this area can be traced far back into antiquity; however, they consider Ibn Khaldûn, the fourteenth-century Arab social theorist, "the founder of rural-urban sociology."³ But the sixteenth-century Italian, Giovanni Botero, seems to us the first truly comparative urban sociologist. In his work, *Greatness of Cities*, Botero offers some penetrating observations, albeit highly impressionistic ones, concerning the relationships between social power and the rise and development of cities that contemporary social scientists may still find pertinent and challenging.⁴ Unfortunately, his insights were not improved upon by scholars in the immediately succeeding centuries. Although writers since Botero have somewhat haphazardly dealt with aspects of individual cities, or with cities in particular societies, for really substantial contributions to comparative urban research we must await the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the sociological discipline, more narrowly defined. Among the early sociologists who studied cities cross-culturally Adna F. Weber and Max Weber loom

paramount.⁵ Adna Weber's comparative work on urban areas, primarily demographic in character, concentrated upon the expansion of urban communities in nineteenth-century Europe. Max Weber, much more enterprising, and drawing upon his impressive fund of knowledge, gained some important insights into urban social organization. Although his study of cities was a fragmentary one, and his perspective diverges from that of the present writer, Max Weber's influence upon this book is nonetheless apparent.

In recent years, Kingsley Davis⁶ has led the field in the comparative analysis of cities. He and his co-workers, however, have focused their attention upon the demographic aspects of the urbanization process. Such other American-based scholars as Philip Hauser and Bert F. Hoselitz have also advanced our knowledge of comparative urban social structure and ecology.⁷ Their writings manifest a growing uneasiness concerning generalizations about urban life based solely upon data from American society—generalizations that unfortunately are widely accepted in current sociological literature. Our study of the preindustrial city, embodying a comparative approach on a global scale, pushes the re-evaluation process still further and seeks to revise many thought-ways in urban sociology and in related fields as well.

Statement of Purpose

Our aim is to describe and analyze the structure of the city, both in historical societies and in surviving literate non-industrial orders, before its transformation through industrialization. We also seek to provide background data on the origins of city life and the growth and spread of cities around the world.

Our principal hypothesis is that in their structure, or form, preindustrial cities—whether in medieval Europe, traditional China, India, or elsewhere—resemble one another closely and

in turn differ markedly from modern industrial-urban centers. Most writers have failed to distinguish the industrial and pre-industrial types. As a result, the data on preindustrial cities negate many popular sociological generalizations based solely upon evidence from modern industrial American communities.

The most non-industrial cities today are those like Andkhui and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan and Katmandu in Nepal, where the populace continues its preindustrial mode of existence quite unaffected by industrial forms. Still largely pre-industrial cities abound in other parts of Asia, in North Africa, and in sections of southern Europe and Latin America.

Not only do preindustrial cities survive today, but they have been the foci of civilization from the time of its first appearance in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium B.C. The "ancient" cities of Athens and Rome, familiar to almost every school child, are in actuality relatively late creations and merely two out of a vast number scattered over much of Eurasia and North Africa around the beginning of the Christian era. Even when Europe entered the Dark Ages and city life waned over much of the continent, the Eastern Roman Empire and Spain experienced a vibrant urban life. Contemporaneously, cities were flourishing in Meso-America, North Africa, and Asia.

To return to our main thesis: preindustrial cities everywhere display strikingly similar social and ecological structures, not necessarily in specific cultural content, but certainly in basic form. Admittedly the idiosyncratic values of any given culture do induce some unique urban patterns. But all too much emphasis has been given to the aberrant, especially by writers imbued with the humanistic tradition.⁸ In many instances, elements that are assumed to be unique to particular cities or peasant communities are not so at all.⁹ Strictly speaking, the unique can be established only in contrast to predetermined universal reference points.

We seek to isolate for preindustrial cities structural universals, those elements that transcend cultural boundaries.

These cities share numerous patterns in the realms of ecology, class, and the family, as well as in their economic, political, religious, and educational structures, arrangements that diverge sharply from their counterparts in mature industrial cities.

The industrial-urban center is the standard against which we contrast the preindustrial city; the succeeding chapters continually emphasize the differences between these two types of communities. Unlike many historians, our intent is *not* to compare the preindustrial cities of one historical epoch with those of another within the same society. Nor are we concerned with contrasting the non-industrial cities of one time period, on a global scale, with similar cities from another era. Rather we are comparing the typical preindustrial with the typical industrial city. Failing to state explicitly just what is being contrasted leads to much unnecessary confusion in social science literature, a situation referred to on a number of occasions in this work. By making our reference points explicit we have sought to avoid misunderstanding.

Awareness of the numerous shared features of preindustrial cities lends clarity to the structural arrangements not only of industrial cities but of those currently undergoing industrialization—those partly preindustrial, partly industrial. Conspicuous in the writings on underdeveloped countries, a literature now assuming notable proportions, is the attempt by many social scientists who lack any real comprehension of the traditional social structure to delineate the contours of social change that stem from industrialization. Without a yardstick for measuring this change such efforts are doomed to failure.

Some will take exception to the foregoing, contending that preindustrial civilized societies are quite well understood given the rather numerous studies of peasant villages. But though the peasantry forms the bulk of the population in these societies, the focal point of activity is the city. The vital institutional apparatus is urban, not rural. It is the city dwellers who

have staffed the key positions in this type of social order, who have perpetuated the society's learned heritage. Rural-urban contrasts, though differing from those in industrial societies, are observable in most fields of social activity. The failure of numerous writers on so-called "agrarian" societies to distinguish between the rural and urban areas makes suspect their generalizations as to life in these societies.

Having reviewed this study's purpose and potential significance, we now examine its theoretical framework.

Theoretical Orientation and Clarification of Terms

For analytical purposes we distinguish three types of societies: the folk, or preliterate, society; the "feudal" society (also termed the preindustrial civilized society or literate preindustrial society); and the industrial-urban society. Only the last two contain urban agglomerations: the preindustrial and industrial cities, respectively.

To achieve this typology of societies, and consequently of cities, we take technology as the key independent variable—i.e., associated with varying levels of technology are distinctive types of social structure. Technology both requires and makes possible certain social forms. This viewpoint does *not* commit us to technological determinism, however, for recognized is the impact upon social structure of other variables—the city, cultural values, and social power—all of which can affect the patterning of technology itself. Nor do we, like sociologists of the "ecological school," conceive of technology as part of the "biotic," or subsocial realm.¹⁰ Technology is not some materialistic, impersonal force outside the socio-cultural context or beyond human control; technology is a human creation par excellence.

Technology, as employed in this study, refers to the sources of energy, the tools, and the know-how connected with the