Early Cities in Comparative Perspective, 4000 BCE–1200 CE. On CWH volume III

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The roughly chronological order of the starting dates of the periods dealt with by the series Cambridge World History cannot conceal the fact that the volumes have thematic rather than chronological foci. The period covered by this volume starts earlier and ends later than the following one, volume IV on "Empires".[1] It has a very clear focus on cities, in particular of the early and ancient empires of the regions and periods covered. Only very occasionally does it consider the second half of the first millennium CE or even beyond (e.g. with a view on the rather short-lived North American city of Cahokia). As such, it covers a wider area than the whole Cambridge Ancient History (with its still Mediterranean focus) in temporal as much as spatial terms. Geographically, the "Ancient Orient" and the classical Mediterranean world are covered by four chapters each (depending on attribution), Middle and South America are treated in six, Asia in three, and non-Mediterranean Africa and North America in one each.

How can such a focused volume function within a "world history"? The answer of the volume is by comparison across periods and regions. The editor obliged his authors make considerable efforts to not only claim a comparative approach by offering diverse material to be compared, but to also actually make comparisons explicit. The chapters are organized in six groups and all authors of each group wrote a common concluding chapter to this group, rendering explicit points of difference as well as shared features. For the sake of the reader, repetitions are not made by just referencing the relevant chapters, thereby driving important points home. Overall, the structure does not require that

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1   B. Craig (ed.), The Cambridge World History IV: A World with States, Empires, and Networks 1200 BCE–900 CE, Cambridge 2015.

the chapters and parts are read in sequence, but it does require continuous reading in whatever sequence (provided you keep "parts" together) as it involves significant arguing rather than just offering a series of "fresh perspectives".

This is not to deny that fresh perspectives exist – quite to the contrary. Above all, archaeological data are confronted with long-established perspectives as well as questions produced by recent cultural or historical research, which, in turn, are further developed in dialogue with new methods in material research, from geographical information systems (GIS) to modelling virtual sites. Rarely are chapters overwhelmingly descriptive or narrative. They mostly try to engage with the big questions of old and new research, thematizing services offered by cities, their function in power structures, urban imaginaries, and economic and technological innovation. To this end, the introductory chapter by Norman Yoffee and Nicola Terrenato (pp. 1–24) is very helpful, starting with a detailed analysis of Numa Fustel de Coulange's *La cité antique* (who, however, focused on social innovation) and reviewing sociological thinking from the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century (Émile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber) to sociological and geographical urban studies of the twentieth century. In addition to ecological, economic, and political factors, it is the question of the atmosphere of those cities and the imaginaries of the inhabitants that is foregrounded and leading to a focus on ideology and religion (pp. 17–18). It is the latter that will be followed with a particular interest in this review.

The introduction makes clear that the volume is not about origins or any "rise" of cities in early and ancient history (a short summary of the topic on pp. 3–4). Up to the very end, the volume denies the reader any "grand narrative" (p. 548). There is no definition of "early cities". Thus, it is principally a shared methodology that keeps the selected places together. They are all objects primarily of archaeological methods – even a city like Jerusalem is treated from that point of view.

The first group of chapters deal with cities as performance arenas, dealing with ancient Egyptian founding of cities as a performance of power in itself (pp. 27–47, John Baines), Classical Maya city building and permanent rebuilding with, among others, an interest in spectacular views by new buildings or orientation (p. 64, Stephen Houston, Thomas G. Garrison). It is economic function versus political power that is being balanced in these chapters and it is the latter's use of ritual performances, which is foregrounded (e.g. for Southeast Asian cities between 500 BCE and 1500 CE, p. 91, Miriam T. Stark). Agency is given to rulers and elites, and typically religion is seen as being involved, gods and the dead being relevant co-citizens (p. 95) – if not co-rulers. The comparative chapter (pp. 94–109) is rich in observations of the many dimensions of performance, including sound, smell, taste, atmosphere, duration, and embodiment. And yet, the model used for the interpretation of rituals is rather simple: These produce solidarity, even if many are observers rather than performers, even if the audience might comprise just a tiny fraction of the population, and even if the ritual roles and the demonstrative destruction of wealth – and lives – in such rituals signal and perform differences in power and instil fear. In ancient cities, rituals were staged by very different agents and

could mark competing claims to – for example, religious – authority, elite's rituals were frequently invisible, could be copied or ridiculed. Here, the potential of the performative approach to look at the very different experiences and appropriations of rituals by different actors is not taken advantage of. After all, literary and epigraphic texts from ancient Mediterranean cities demonstrate that very different groups could take to the street and that actors from different social layers or different genders had very different experiences and spaces for individual participation.[2] Despite the term, rather static interpretations of rituals are employed.

The second part (ch. 6–10) focuses on information technologies, arguing throughout that the vastly different techniques of storing information (phonological writing, iconographies, and knots) and the supplied materials were, above all, urban inventions, enabling the administration of growing social and economic complexity (pp. 156, 212), accountability of those in charge (p. 214), and, by means of standardization (p. 207), the production of "legibility" (pp. 178, 225) of the incipient states – in one word: producing control (p. 225). With characteristic differences, this holds true for fourth-millennium CE Uruk (pp. 113–130, Hans J. Nissen), second-millennium CE Chinese Zhungzhou and Yinxu (pp. 131–157, Wang Haicheng), lowland Maya cities of the first millennium CE, and second-millennium CE Andean Cuzco and its empire (pp. 181–206, Gary Urton). It is when – for a variety of reasons – these functions are also displayed that writing material was used, which was durable enough to be preserved for later research (p. 216). Thus, the history of information technology might be entangled with architecture as with education and social equality or inequalities (for instance, in the exclusivity of "a script community", p. 219). Any reference to the subversive or contra factual use of writing (widely attested in the Mediterranean) is lacking – experts collecting omens, prophets diffusing political and social critique (ancient Israel), historians or mythographers fixing *their* version of events, philosophers reflecting on better life and utopian cities, as well as the many opponents producing graffiti, the suppressed hiding curse tablets, and magicians impressing clients and themselves with meaningless pictograms.[3] Writing was

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2   See, e.g., A. Chaniotis (ed.), Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean: Agency, Emotion, Gender, Representation (Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 49), Stuttgart 2011; R. L. Grimes, Ritual, Media, And Conflict, New York 2011; U. Hüsken / C. Brosius, Ritual Matters: Dynamic Dimensions in Practice, London 2010; A. Michaels (ed.), Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual, Wiesbaden 2010; P. Van Nuffelen, Playing the Ritual Game in Constantinople (379–457), in: L. Grig / G. Kelly (eds.), Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity (Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity), Oxford 2012, pp. 183–200; G. Woolf, Ritual and the Individual in Roman Religion, in: J. Rüpke (ed.), The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean, Oxford 2013, pp. 136–160; R. Raja / J. Rüpke, Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the "Lived Ancient Religion" Approach, in: Religion in the Roman Empire 1 (2015) 1, pp. 11–19.

3   See, e.g., R. Gordon, Charaktêres Between Antiquity and Renaissance: Transmission and Re-Invention, in: V. Dasen / J.-M. Spieser (eds.), Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance (Micrologus Library 60), Florence 2014, pp. 253–300; R. Gordon, Negotiating the Temple-Script: Women's Narratives among the Mysian-Lydian "Confession-Texts", in: Religion in the Roman Empire 2 (2016) 2, pp. 227–255. For graffiti, see, e.g., T. Hillard, Graffiti's Engagement: The Political Graffiti of the Late Roman Republic, in: G. Sears / P. Keegan / R. Laurence (eds.), Written Space in the Latin West, 200 BC to AD 300, London 2013, pp. 105–122; R. Morstein-Marx, Political Graffiti in the Late Roman Republic: "Hidden Transcripts" and "Common Knowledge", in: C. Kuhn (ed.), Politische Kommunikation und öffentliche Meinung in der antiken Welt, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 191–217. For pro-

not confined to cities, but the chance to find actual readers was much higher. Cities were not only controlled by information technologies, they also offered a space for these new types of communication. Beyond being a neutral space for this that could be used by the owners or instigators of the built environment for display or hiding, such space could be illegitimately appropriated by others, for instance in the form of graffiti on the walls of private buildings or in temple interiors. Even more, urban space could be shaped in order to create space for such forms of communication (libraries) or ostensive storing or hiding (archives). Urban space could even be developed in order to conform to imaginaries stored in and communicated by such technologies; Jerusalem will offer an example in a later part of the volume (which might have been referred to already in this section). "Urban landscape" in the headline of the third part of chapters is ambivalent and is used to this end. On the one hand, focus is on the complexity, contingent on very different sets of agents, within cities. On the other hand, it is on the surroundings, a landscape sometimes even physically shaped, but in all cases, regardless of distances, influenced by cities. Ruralization is not the alternative to but a consequence of urbanization (p. 316). Chapters deal with the paired centres of Tiwanaku and Khonkho Wankane, which are dealing with the ecological challenges of the extreme altitude by also topographically and ritually attributing agency to the mountains and rivers around the second half of the first millennium CE (pp. 229–252, John W. Janusek). Mesopotamian cities (3500–1600 BCE) offer the interesting triangular constellation of a king close to a god and temples keeping wide-ranging economic functions and a sort of autonomy with regard to the king by reference to the same god(s). Again, shared identity is stressed by the chapter (pp. 258, 260, Geoff Emberling) in the face of significant traces of heterarchy and pre-urban forms of authority (p. 302). First-century BCE (and later) Teotihuacan (pp. 279–299, Sarah C. Clayton) also featured residential compounds that were even walled and must have had a high degree of independence (p. 288). The comparative chapter, written as always by the authors of these chapters (pp. 300–316), also offers a useful stocktaking in the middle of the book. It points to the fact that economic transaction (production-like exchange) were usually embedded in social and power relations (p. 301). Cities transformed not only spaces but also social relations. Providing safety (p. 301), they created new social divisions, even in addition to the continuation of earlier ones (p. 305). Walls were not necessarily among the first priorities or were never built (p. 309). Again, "most cultures" are credited with a close relationship between rulers and temples, even if they "had a variety of relationships" (p. 307).

It is the fourth part that brings the distribution of power centre stage and offers a broad range of cases judged exceptional in interpretations that primarily see the foundation and maintenance of cities as an exercise in central political control. Thus, the cities of the

phecy, see, e.g, D. S. Potter, Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle (Oxford Classical Monographs), Oxford 1990; M. Nissinen / C. E. Carter (eds.), Images and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, vol. 233), Göttingen 2009; R. R. Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, Philadelphia 1980.

Indus civilization (2600–1900 BCE) and the "Early Historic cities" of the alluvial plain between the Ganges and Yamuna are presented as places without clear differentiation of palaces in the first case and (resulting in much more problematic excavations) places reflecting a very complex economic and social composition and a high degree of resilience against the many changes in power holding (pp. 319–342, Carla M. Sinopoli). The widely proliferating model of the Greek city is presented as a place of concentration of capital, showing in later stages monumentalization without strong rulers (pp. 343–363, Ian Morris, Alex R. Knodell). Jenne-jeno, in the middle of the Niger, and East African cities like Nubian Kerma (from c. 3000 BCE onwards) again argue against the equation of urbanism and centralized power (pp. 364–380, Roderick J. McIntosh). Evidently, the authors argue, the often claimed nexus of kingship, religious institutions, and centralized administration does not work here (p. 383). In some instances, institutions were developed to fight division of labour and social differentiation, leading to hierarchies of power, for example by forging castes or guilds (p. 391) or by political and religious ideologies sanctioning the display of wealth (p. 388). The question whether cities built on such broadly based power structures are more resilient or more vulnerable has been discussed from very different positions by historical agents in defending "democracies" or broadly based "aristocracies" or in arguing for the effectiveness of monarchical rule and its centralized administration (p. 386).

The massive changes in eight- and ninth-century Baghdad (pp. 397–415, Françoise Micheau), five millennia of Jerusalem (pp. 416–436, Ann E. Killebrew) and eleventh- to fourteenth-century Cahokia on the Mississippi (pp. 437–454, Timothy R. Pauketat with Susan M. Alt and Jeffery D. Kruchten) are analysed in the fifth part as "creations" and "imagined cities". The histories of memories as well as of the built environments point – in the reviewer's opinion – to a sort of co-evolution of city and especially religion. "Cahokian religion" is even explicitly understood "as a dynamic component of urbanization, reinvented or reimagined during performances that ultimately altered the political, social, and economic lives of people in distant lands" (p. 453). And yet, the comparative conclusion of the part – despite its useful references to memory, sensory input, and narratives and the differences of imagined and built cities (pp. 458–459) – falls back to a position widespread in recent archaeological theory that considers built cities are above all an expression of cosmic order.[4] This is far from self-evident, as the "lived ancient religion" has demonstrated for the early cities (as understood in this volume). First of all, such cosmologies are far from stable and subject to change, sometimes even within a generation of rulers. Second, the rationalization and over-determination on part of the producers (bringing ecological conditions, technical possibilities, economic constraints, performative constraints of time, visibility and acoustics, and a variety of communicative interests in line) is frequently neither fully or even correctly decoded by users and

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4   See, e.g., T. Insoll (ed.), Archaeology and World Religion, London 2001; T. Insoll (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion, Oxford 2011. For a perspective on religious experience, see, in contrast, R. Raja / J. Rüpke (eds.), A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World, Malden 2015.

observers with their own "aesthetics of reception". Third, diverse instigators, financers, architects, and actual builders might bring very different interests and even patches of ideologies into their uncoordinated, competitive or replacing building or reworking (and of course simple use of space).[5]

The final part thematizes "early imperial cities", namely Assur (from 2000 BCE onwards) and neo-Assyrian capitals in the first half of the first millennium BCE (pp. 469–490, Adelheid Otto), Tenochtitlan before the sixteenth century CE (pp. 491–512, Gerardo Gutiérrez), and finally Rome (pp. 513–531, Nicola Terrenato), the latter chapter being a narrative of the rise and extension of the empire administered from the city. As could be expected, the comparative chapter (pp. 532–545) stresses the oversized quality of these cities, their accumulation of wealth (p. 535), and the urbanism and statehood in these cases. The analytical angle of the chapter is from top. Art and architecture are seen as expression of political ideologies and religion and rulership as indivisible (pp. 536, 541–542). The high diversity of the population of such an imperial city in terms of identities, ethnicities, and languages is acknowledged, likewise the social differences and degrees of specialization, even in the religious realm, under such conditions (pp. 539–540). Following the ideology of texts produced by rulers rather than recent research, however, "ideology and religion" are identified as an additional cohesive force beyond "coercion and threat" (p. 541). Again, the reviewer would have liked to see a more nuanced analysis, discussing the surprisingly restricted role of religion as a cohesive force in the Roman empire for instance[6] or raising the question whether religion was a disruptive rather than cohesive force, which demanded careful and maybe even expensive handling by the ruling centre, instigated rebellions (Palestine, Egypt), or enabled coherent counter ideologies (Gaul).

Evidently, "imperial cities" is intended as a bridge to the fourth volume of the Cambridge World History on empires and networks. Perhaps it is intentional that further questions about the relation between cities and empires are not on the agenda of this volume. Do certain types of empires further urbanization? Or presuppose urbanization? Do they simply extend urban networks or transform them into more hierarchical networks? How do the large, if not global, aspirations of empires relate to urban imaginaries putting a town at the centre of the world or conceptualizing that town as a microcosmos? It is with regard to these questions that the price to be paid for a thoroughly comparative approach becomes especially visible. Naturally, the comparison between units focuses analysis on these units instead of their diachronic or synchronic connections and their entangle-

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5   See, e.g., M. Arnhold, Sanctuaries and Urban Spatial Settings in Roman Imperial Ostia, in: Raja / Rüpke (eds.), A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World, pp. 293–303; A.-K. Rieger, Waste Matters: Life Cycle and Agency of Pottery Employed in Graeco-Roman Sacred Spaces, in: Religion in the Roman Empire 2 (2016) 3, pp. 307–339; J. Rüpke, The Horologium of Augustus (Review), in: American Journal of Archaeology 121 (2017) 3, www.ajaonline.org/book-review/3498.

6   See J. Rüpke, Reichsreligion? Überlegungen zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Mittelmeerraums in römischer Zeit, in: Historische Zeitschrift 292 (2011), pp. 297–322; J. Rüpke, From Jupiter to Christ: On the History of Religion in the Roman Imperial Period, Oxford 2014.

ments: How did cities react to cities? It has to be said in advance that beyond their role in economic exchange cities do not figure prominently in the subsequent volume.

The volume is rounded off by a concluding chapter on "the meaning of early cities" by the editor (pp. 546–557). Yoffee is pointing to the long-living or newly forming memory of many cities under scrutiny, a memory that is also shaping academic approaches (pp. 551–552). The final pages, however, are given to the fragility of such cities, their sometimes short lifespan, their inability to reconcile the complexity of cities, and the aim to reduce complexity, which is driving urbanization (557). It comes here to the fore that there is another, an implicit, definition of "early cities". These are past cities. The memories referred to are not the memory – which is the challenge and chance ("legacy", see the brief treatment, p. 461) – of ancient Athens in modern Athens (and Rome and Baghdad and Mexico City), but present memories of cities of a bygone past. This adds to the insinuation that frailty and the end of cities are properties of a past radically different from modern cities. Are modern cities not threatened by failure? And are past cities not resurrected by being included into growing present conurbations? Is not archaeological with its long-standing focus on ancient *cities* (Pompeii, Troy, Machu Picchu, etc.) a major tool in this very business? By rejecting any other grand narrative, *the* grand narrative of the radical break between the modern world (starting in Lord Acton's *Cambridge Modern History* with a volume on the Renaissance) is performed again.

Without doubt, despite all criticism, this book is not only an effort, but an achievement, highly readable and informative, and a model for historical comparison. And yet, the state of the art as presented in this volume is tainted by a pervasive divide, again implicitly hinted at in the volume's final sentences. Recent urban studies have focused on the very complexity of cities, not only in terms of functions and services offered or the diversity of their populations. From different angles this has been described as the overlapping of different networks, the different groups' differences in making urban space, and diverse agents' different appropriations of spaces as "espace vécu".[7] Diversity is also reflected in classical sociological theory focusing on the *individual* (Simmel) located in spaces and networks different from those of the other city dwellers who he or she is encountering. From a similar starting point, those approaches that are focusing on economic factors stress the diversity, the division of labour, and the hindrances of exchange that need to be overcome. In contrast, narratives focusing on the political dimension presume hierarchy instead of heterarchy as the default situation.

Religion, then, finds two very different places in such narratives. In the former, dominant in recent studies on today's cities, religion is a tool for the urban aspirations of inhabitants of or migrants to the city. By risking to enlarge the situative constellation of powerful agents by introducing a god or gods into social interaction, religious practices open up or recall horizons and resources beyond present power structures on a scale demanding redress to wrongdoing experienced through competition among equals up to globalizing

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7   H. Lefebvre, La production de l'espace (Collection société et urbanisme), Paris 1974; E. W. Soja, Postmodern Geographies, London 1989; see also M. Löw, Raumsoziologie (Wissenschaft 1506), Frankfurt am Main 2001.

or universalist projects.[8] In the second case, dominant, but not all-pervasive in the "Early Cities", religion is a resource administered by elites and rulers, enlarging their power by monopolizing the alliance with even more powerful agents – and strangely enough fully interiorized by the powerless so that they feel compelled to solidarity (to explain, this is what Fustel de Coulange's "Ancient City" was all about). Both perspectives explain some phenomena each.[9] But how to combine that? Answers are totally absent from handbooks of urban studies, never treating religion in a longer historical perspective nor as part of a city's legacy or as part of the contemporary appropriation of space.[10] City, likewise, is never a topic of handbooks of religious studies. For now, the answer can only be a negative one: There is enough evidence in the volume to question the easy way out, with the former position capturing the modern and the latter premodern or "early" cities. Urban religion is a phenomenon across periods.

If religion is a focus, it is not the topic of the volume. As far as I can see, beyond the notion of the city-state in early civilizations and the role of cities and port cities in regional production and transregional exchange, competing world or global histories do not give a similar prominence to cities. Against the backdrop of their paramount role in the present and the obvious evolutionary success of urbanization, this leaves a blank. Norman Yoffee has started to fill it.

8   See, in general, J. Rüpke, Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion, in: Religion 45 (2015) 3, pp. 344–366; used as an analytical perspective in the study of urban transformations in J. Rüpke, Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion, D.M.B. Richardson (trans.), Princeton 2018.

9   Cf. the short descriptive chapter by J. A. Baird, Religon and Ritual, in: P. Clark (ed.) The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History, Oxford 2016, pp. 181–196, pointing to diversity and expressing cosmologies.

10   See, e.g., G. Bridge / S. Watson, The New Blackwell Companion to the City (Blackwell Companions to Geography), Malden 2000.