

PRINCIPLES OF ARCHAEOLOGY

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ANCIENT CITIES



GLENN R. STOREY

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ANCIENT CITIES

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Prepublication praise . . .

"Storey embraces a global approach to understanding what makes the city a unique social arrangement and connects the archaeology of ancient urban centers with contemporary concerns such as density, sociability, and planning. Anyone interested in the uniquely human phenomenon of urban life should read this lively and accessible book."

—Traci Ardren, *University of Miami*

"Most people live in cities but few students learn how this came to be. This book represents a first-of-its-kind resource; a highly readable and well-documented primer for courses dealing with the origins and variability of early cities. Provides students with foundational frameworks for understanding the deeply rooted human experience with urbanism."

—David M. Carballo, *Boston University*

"Storey has put together an original, well-constructed, and much needed primer on urban studies. The exercises that conclude each chapter serve as excellent foci for class discussion. I recommend this work as an excellent text in a variety of courses, and wish I had access to it when I taught cultural evolution."

—David B. Small, *Lehigh University*

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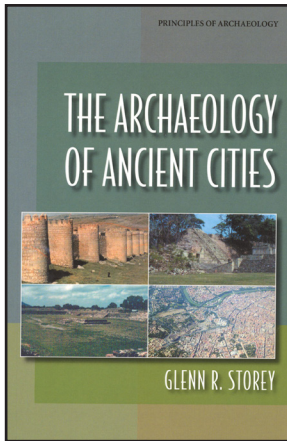
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Dr. Thomas E. Emerson, Illinois State Archaeological Survey

Ancient Cities is intended, according to its author Glenn Storey, to be a short introduction to “issues of ancient urbanism” via a cross-cultural perspective through an archaeological lens (p. vii). He accomplishes his goal and much more. He combines his years of experience in researching and writing about Roman urbanism, plus archaeological side-trips to Teotihuacan and Copan, with a truly world-

wide knowledge of early cities that not only introduces beginning students to archaeology and ancient urbanism but one that general readers and professionals in a number of fields, such as urban planning, history, architecture, and, more generally, the social sciences and humanities, will find enlightening. Such a wider appeal should be obvious when we reflect that over one-half of the world’s population resides in urban or urbanized settings. The story of urbanism is increasingly the history of humanity.

One of the approaches to these topics that makes Storey’s unique is his mixing of the past and the present. Throughout the volume, the challenge of identifying urbanism through time constantly rise to the forefront. The opening chapter guides the reader through the historical development of cities, both as an intellectual concept and as a physical entity. The structure of this chapter is symptomatic of his time-traveling analyses. While bringing forward the classical examples of the Greek city-states (*polis*) and Rome, we find their descriptions juxtaposed with discussions of the modern Dutch and U.S. classifications of urban places. These examples make a central point that pervades urban studies—that in the study of cities the devil is in the details. Most agree that, broadly, cities are formed when people nucleate within a defined, restricted space and this process has physical/material reality and generates significant social implications. This dilemma is reinforced by a historical survey of definitions of cities ranging from the Greeks and Romans to more modern authors such as Weber, Mumford, Wirth, Childe, Toynbee, and Southall. City origins are briefly discussed with modern examples of Chicago and Salt Lake City. Given the lack of consensus in defining cities, Storey contends, somewhat unsatisfactorily, that if there is unanimity among scholars that an entity is a city, it is one.

Regardless of how an urban setting is defined, all agree that key factors are population nucleation and density. Thus Chapter 2 deals with this important issue by examining both preindustrial and modern cities from across the world. Large ancient cities are found to have densities as high as 10,000 to 20,000 persons per km². Increasingly, researchers have focused on understanding the impact that such crowding has on human behavior through techniques of urban scaling and models of collective action theory. Storey presents a trenchant summary of new approaches that emphasize sociability and neighborhood relations as formative within cities. Urban studies of ancient cities have increasingly employed aspects

of modern city planning to understand spatial organization, the historical structure of “downtowns,” patterns of heterarchy and hierarchy, and the existence of moral communities. This discussion presents the recent trends in urbanism studies in archaeology that have focused on cities as social constructions, and somewhat shifted the focus from topics stressing economic, political, or religious origin stories.

Despite his stated reluctance to adopt a definition of urbanism, Storey puts forward a proposition that social complexity, as reflected in a tiered settlement hierarchy, is an essential ingredient of every city. It is his concern for recognizing the constituent parts of such hierarchies that leads him to promote the recognition of hyper-, micro-, and hypo-urbanism, emphasizing population density and nucleation as key variables. At the hyper end of this continuum are pre-industrial cities such as Alexandria, Tenochtitlan, or Rome. An early urban variant is represented by compact, densely occupied pocket cities (micro-urban) such as Monte Albán or Uruk. At the hypo-end of the typology are variants that have dispersed populations, often with multiple nodal clusters creating a disperse multicentered cityscape interpreted as suggesting heterarchical forms of political, economic, and social organizations. Well known examples include Mayan and African urban clusters. These spatially extensive, widely spaced “nucleations” that Storey calls *mbanzas* (after their African form), often enclosing large open spaces, are only now being acknowledged as urban in nature although their acceptance is not universal.

The second half of *Ancient Cities* presents a series of unusually diverse case studies of primary, secondary, and disputed cities. Primary cities include Hierakonpolis (Egypt), Teotihuacan (Mexico), and Copán (Honduras) and secondary cities, Rome (Italy), Gyeongju (Korea), and Great Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe). To ensure comparability, Storey discusses each example in terms of population densities and spatial dispersal; urban infrastructures such as neighborhoods and districts; public and ceremonial space; status and housing variation; ceremonial and political structural monumentality; and, origins and decline. This whirlwind tour of ancient urbanism is insightful and meaningfully portrays the tremendous variation that existed in the way humans organize themselves within urban contexts.

Urban variation and the difficulty that researchers have in grasping the essence of this ever-shifting phenomena is most clearly demonstrated in the discussion of cases involving “disputed” urbanism. The examples Storey bring to the fore involve several that should be familiar to MCJA readers—Cahokia and Chaco—as well as an exotic case from Polynesia. It is the examination of such borderline cities that brings the reader back to earlier ambiguities in urban definitions. Throughout the volume the reader can easily become overwhelmed by the demonstrable variation among entities called “urban.” Like earlier discussions of socio-political typologies (for example, *chiefdoms* or *states*) defining an urban polity with hard and fast boundaries in a world of shifting social patterns, population nucleation and densities, organizational structure, and so forth, is to a large degree a futile exercise. At one point, when discussing scholarly arguments as to urban definitions, Storey suggests that researchers are “going to have to agree to disagree.” After reading *Ancient Cities*, it seems clear if there was ever a research topic where the application of fuzzy logic would be both welcome and inescapable, the phenomena of urbanism is it.