1 The End of the Ancient City?

> Yet do you think, brothers, that a city consists in its walls not its people?
>
> (*An putatis, fratres, civitatem in parietibus et non in civibus deputandam?*)
>
> (Augustine, *de excidio urbis Romae*)[1]

The sack of Rome by Alaric and his Gothic troops in AD 410 sent ripples of horror round the Roman world: it may be seen to symbolise if not the end, then at least the beginning of the end of Rome, both as a city and as the centre of an empire. Augustine of Hippo, in his reflections *On the Sack of Rome* written shortly after the event, struggled to make sense of the wrath of God.[2] Why, if God promised Abraham to save a city from destruction for the presence of fifty, or even of ten just men, did he allow Rome to be sacked? His answer is that Rome was in fact spared. The news was horrendous: slaughter, burning, plundering, and the torturing of people (2.3).[3] But it was not like Sodom, which was entirely destroyed: many left Rome and would return; many who remained escaped or took refuge at altars (2.2). We should rather give thanks to God that he spared the city from a far worse destruction. You should realise, he insists, cities are about people, not about walls.

Augustine's reflections may introduce two of the central concerns of this book. One is that cities are, in modern terms, resilient, capable of recovering from disaster. A good proportion of the population, and indeed of the buildings, survived the three days of ransacking by Alaric's Gothic troops. Rome recovered, to be sacked again in 455 by Gaiseric's Vandals, and to recover and be sacked again, perhaps most damagingly, in 472 in civil conflict by Ricimer's Gothic troops. Worse was to come in the following century in the protracted struggles between Belisarius and the Ostrogothic forces under Totila. The cumulative impact on the imperial capital was severe, but the city showed the capacity

[1] Translated in Atkins and Dodaro, *Augustine: The Political Writings*, pp. 205–213.

[2] See, eloquently, Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 287–298; 'his whole perspective implied a belief in the resilience of the empire as a whole' (p. 295).

[3] See Salzman, 'Apocalypse then?', for the exaggeration of reactions.

to recover.[4] A central aim of this book is to explore the capacity of cities to survive the multiple shocks that came with the collapse of Roman imperial power in the West and to remain the basis of the urbanism of the early medieval world.

The second theme implicit in Augustine's reflections is that to understand a city, you must look beyond its fabric. That 'men not walls make a city' was an ancient proverb, as Augustine flags. The proverb, as we will see, can be traced back to archaic Greece and the lyric poet Alcaeus. It was intentionally paradoxical, for it was the defensive circuit of the city that defined its image (Chapter 2). The agreed definition of the city was in terms of human society, not urban fabric. Augustine developed his understanding of the city at length in his *City of God* (*de civitate Dei*), discussed here in Chapter 3. His definition of a *civitas* started from Cicero's definition of the state in his *Republic* as 'a multitude of humans bound together by shared justice and common interests' (*de Republica* 1.39). That contrast between physical fabric and human society is reflected in the snappy definition offered by Isidore, writing in Visigothic Spain in the seventh century: 'the town [*urbs*] is the walls themselves, the city [*civitas*] is not stones but inhabitants' (*Etymologies* 15.2.1).

This point brings out a fundamental ambivalence that affects all discussion of the city, ancient or modern. Are we talking about the urban centre and its physical structures, which in the case of antiquity leave such imposing remains, but which are subject to destruction and decay, or are we talking about the human community and the whole bundle of ideas, social hierarchies, legal and institutional structures, economic practices, and shared beliefs and customs which define it? It is tempting to treat the cities of antiquity as a case apart, on the grounds that the *civitas*, as opposed to the *urbs*, comprehended the countryside and its inhabitants, farms, villages, and small towns in a way not always true of the medieval and modern European city, though elsewhere globally the pattern is widespread.[5] But even if you restrict your focus to the built-up centre, the same ambivalence is there. As Henri Lefebvre taught us, space is constituted not only physically, but by the practices and activities within it.[6] A city as an empty stage is nothing: it is defined by the human activities it supports, places of work, places of meeting, the rituals and processions that

[4] The successive sacks of Rome are discussed by Salzman, *The Falls of Rome*, with an emphasis on the theme of resilience.

[5] See Zuiderhoek, *The Ancient City*, p. 43 citing Marcus and Sabloff, *The Ancient City*, pp. 3–26. I am grateful to the author for this point.

[6] Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*; see Filippi, *Rethinking the Roman City*, pp. 3–4.

make it not rigid but a 'moving city'.[7] But the relationship is mutual and continuous: the stage set is constructed for the drama to be performed on it and to facilitate action, and as the drama develops, so the set is changed. The city is an ever-changing stage set for the performance of an ever-changing drama. Action defines physical setting, and physical setting defines action.

In this sense, it is hard to draw a clear line between the city as physical structure and the city as idea, or complex bundle of ideas, practices, institutions, economic forces, social relations, and beliefs. The lamentations over the decay and destruction of cities in Late Antiquity focus on the physical because it makes a powerful symbol.[8] But to destroy a city effectively requires not only the demolition of its structures, but the extermination or displacement of its inhabitants, as Chosroes knew when he destroyed Antioch (ineffectively, as it turned out).[9] Even inhabitants can be replaced if the city has an ongoing function in a wider network, and cities always form part of a network.[10]

The focus of this book is on the idea of the city, not its fabric. This is not remotely to suggest that the physical realities of the city are less interesting or important. Thanks, above all, to the urban archaeology of the last generation, we have a far clearer picture of the processes of physical transformation which cities across the former Roman Empire underwent in the period after its collapse. This book simply addresses a different question: whether the entire idea of the city changed forever at the end of antiquity, or whether it in some form continued to underpin the cities of the post-antique world.

Liebeschuetz and the Fall of the Ancient City

To speak of 'the end of the ancient city', as many do, is not only to point to the crumbling or transformation for other purposes of its fabric, but to the dismantling, or transformation to other forms, of its ideas, institutions, social and economic structures, and ideological systems. The most explicit argument along these lines was developed by Wolf Liebeschuetz in his

[7] See the chapters in Östenberg, Malmberg, and Bjørnebye, *The Moving City*; processions are also a central theme of Dey, *The Afterlife of the Roman City*.

[8] Lamentations over cities were memorably discussed by Cracco Ruggini and Cracco, 'Changing fortunes'; see also a balanced discussion by Brogiolo, 'Ideas of the town'.

[9] Brogiolo, 'Ideas of the town', pp. 111–112; on Antioch, see Chs. 5 and 10.

[10] Cf. Osborne and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Cities of the ancient Mediterranean'; on Greek cities as a network, Malkin, *A Small Greek World*.

Decline and Fall of the Roman City. Building on his earlier study of Antioch, his book is outstanding for its deep scholarship, the rare attention given by a historian to archaeological as well as written evidence, and its coverage of both the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean. As a survey of the post-antique city (in what he defines as 'late Late Antiquity') his work will continue to command respect. For Liebeschuetz, the evidence of decay or transformation of the physical fabric runs parallel with the abandonment of the institutions which for him define the ancient city, which he identifies as the rule of cities by municipal councils drawn from a hereditary elite of landowners, together with the rise of an intolerant religion, in the form of a particular brand of Trinitarian Catholicism, seen most starkly in the political power of the bishop.[11] This book takes a very different perspective.

Liebeschuetz's title, with its deliberate echo of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, was designed to be provocative, a pushback against the emphasis on 'transformation' most closely associated with the inspiring works of Peter Brown.[12] Over that choice there is continuing controversy, though in his text Liebeschuetz speaks of 'transformation' so frequently that one may doubt his paradigm is incompatible with that of Brown.[13] But where his argument has been a good deal less controversial, and is entirely in line with previous scholarship, is in the assumption that the ancient city did indeed come to an end. Here he agrees with Max Weber, Moses Finley, and his own doctoral supervisor, Hugo Jones, only parting from them in their analysis that the causes of the demise were economic rather than political.[14] Rejecting the characterisation of the ancient city as a 'consumer city', in contrast to the 'producer city' of the Middle Ages, he uses archaeological evidence both to reinforce the role of commerce in antiquity and to counter the picture of economic decline at the end of antiquity. For Liebeschuetz, the underlying causes were political: the collapse of a landowning class (the 'curials'), spurred by local patriotism to lavish their wealth on the embellishment of the urban centre.[15]

In the pages that follow, I wish not merely to challenge this analysis and the importance it attributes to the supposed demise of a 'curial' elite, but to

[11] Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*; *Decline and Fall of the Roman City*. His ideas were promptly debated in Krause and Witschel, *Die Stadt in der Spätantike*.

[12] Here his argument is partially akin to that of Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome*. Ward-Perkins' principal target is Walter Goffart: see esp. pp. 7–9 and 174; reference to Peter Brown (pp. 3–4) is altogether less polemical.

[13] Admirably surveyed by Humphries, *Cities and the Meanings of Late Antiquity*; for earlier surveys, Lavan, 'The late-antique city'; Grig, 'Cities in the "long" Late Antiquity'; see also Salzman, *Falls of Rome*, pp. 13–16.

[14] Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, p. 8. [15] Ibid., p. 4.

question the assumption which he shared with Weber, Finley, and Jones – and, indeed, the mainstream of ancient historians – that the 'ancient city' (in the sense used in classical scholarship of the city of Greco-Roman antiquity) came to an end at a certain point, whether for economic, political, or other causes, and that the cities of the world after antiquity belong to an entirely different category. As Moses Finley put it with characteristic force in what is perhaps the most influential single paper on the ancient city:

> Unless and until the kind of concrete investigation I have suggested demonstrates that, allowing for exceptions, Graeco-Roman towns did not all have common factors of sufficient weight to warrant their inclusion of a single category and their differentiation from both the oriental and the medieval town, I hold it to be methodologically correct to retain the ancient city as a type.[16]

Alarm bells should start ringing when he speaks of 'the oriental town' as a type. 'Oriental' is only too easily a code-word for 'Islamic'. Naturally, writing today, nearly half a century later, Finley would never have fallen into the trap of speaking of 'the oriental', in which he was following the lead of Max Weber. Those working on the Islamic world have stressed how unhelpful it is to see 'the Islamic city' as a category and how unhelpful is Weber's idea of the 'Oriental' city.[17] It is neither the case that cities across the Islamic world and across time have been typologically similar, nor that any characteristics they have in common have been the result of Islamic religion, except quite obviously in the presence of mosques. Islamic cities have often been characterised by their willingness to accept the presence of religiously diverse communities within them, something that cannot always be said of the 'Christian' city. In a word, the assumption that the oriental or the Islamic is typologically other risks being an exercise in Orientalism of the type decried by Edward Said.[18] But if we cannot share Finley's confidence that the ancient city was typologically different from the oriental city, is it any more helpful to make a type out of the medieval?

My question is not how or whether the city of antiquity declined and fell, but how it informed and shaped the cities that followed. What does it mean to speak of 'the Roman city' or 'the ancient city'? Cities are subject to

[16] Finley, 'The ancient city', p. 23.

[17] Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic city'; Raymond, 'The spatial organization of the city'; Bennison and Gascoigne, *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*; Liverani, 'Power and citizenship'.

[18] Weber's observations on 'the Oriental city' have attracted particularly sharp criticism: see Zubaida, 'Max Weber's "The City" and the Islamic city'; Turner, 'Revisiting Weber and Islam'.

constant change, and there is no doubt that the period we now call 'Late Antiquity', between, say, the fourth and eighth centuries AD, is one of profound change. The Roman Mediterranean before this period may be characterised as a world of cities.[19] But the Christian and Islamic worlds after this period are also worlds of cities. In antiquity, the idea of the city was the principal way of thinking about human society; did it remain so after antiquity? My focus will be not on the physical structures, though these undoubtedly mattered, but on the idea of the city – that is, what contemporaries thought the city was and how and why it mattered.

The Invention of 'the Ancient City'

These questions require that we go back to basics and interrogate the modern historiographical invention of 'the ancient city'. Where does the idea of 'the ancient city' in the abstract, as a sociological phenomenon that can be studied as such, come from, and why do we still cling to it? The answer seems to be that it is a nineteenth-century invention. It is not the sort of idea you can find in Edward Gibbon.[20] He may have entitled his great work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but in many ways the story he told suggested that in fact there was no end: the narrative proliferates into the stories of the successor kingdoms in the west, of Byzantium and Islam in the East, and then of the Renaissance in the West. His story was of the fall of an empire, not of a city, though on this he was remarkably ambivalent. His inspiration, he tells us, came from sitting on the steps of the Capitoline in Rome and listening to the chants of 'the bare-footed friars', and his first idea was 'circumscribed to the decay of the city rather than of the empire';[21] his last chapter (71) is an account of the fate of Rome in the Middle Ages and early modern periods. Even here, despite the laments of the humanist Poggio with which he opens his picture of decay, he is unwilling to join others in blaming 'the Goths and Christians', despite his story of 'the triumph of barbarism and religion', and prefers to blame 'the domestic hostilities of the Romans themselves' in

[19] This much is standard: see, most recently, Woolf, *The Life and Death of Ancient Cities*, which has the merit of placing the cities of antiquity in a broader and longer timeframe.

[20] Cited here in the seven-volume edition by J. B. Bury (1896–1900). The last part of chapter II of *Decline and Fall* (vol. 1, pp. 43–50) enumerates the cities of the empire, but stops short of offering 'the city' as an abstraction, or as a phenomenon peculiar to the Roman Empire.

[21] Gibbon, *Memoirs of my Life and Writings*, vol. 1, p. 82; cf. the last sentence of his work, ch. 71, vol. 7, p. 325: 'It was among the ruins of the Capitol that I first conceived the idea . . . '

more recent times.[22] The City of Rome may stand in Gibbon as a metonym for the empire; but for the City, as for the empire, the story goes on. Gibbon's greatest achievement was to show the limitations of his title.[23]

In the nineteenth century, antiquity acquired a new relevance for the city. The rapid expansion of European cities brought by industrialisation and colonialism also brought crises of health and social order. One response was in transformations of the infrastructure: the opening of broad avenues both to improve air circulation in densely packed urban plans and to make social control more easy, associated with the name of Baron Haussmann; at the same time, water supply was improved by new aqueducts, and sewage disposal transformed by the creation of new drainage systems, as by Bazelgette in London or Haussmann in Paris.[24] In both cities, as in Naples, the Romans were felt to provide a model of a better-ordered city. Naples built a new aqueduct to save itself from the horrors of cholera,[25] and though in both construction and route it was significantly different from the ancient Roman aqueduct, it was advertised as a recreation of the Roman. What was now perceived as tangled chaos was laid at the door of the 'medieval city', or 'the Islamic city'. The liberation of Greece from Ottoman domination was rapidly followed by a conscious policy of 'de-Ottomanisation': tangled quarters were replaced by the new model of well-ordered city plans. Thessalonike is a late but spectacular example of this process: after the great fire of 1909, blamed on the narrow and crowded streets of the Ottoman city, a new rectilinear plan was introduced by the French archaeologist and urbanist Ernest Hébrard, which 'recreated' the plan of the classical city.[26]

It is possible, even likely, that the new way of thinking of 'the ancient city' as an abstract conception with a strongly positive value originated not among historians but the architects, engineers, and planners concerned with their contemporary cities.[27] Nevertheless, as far as the historical profession is concerned, it had a precise moment of formulation. In his fundamental essay on the ancient city, Moses Finley pointed to Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges and his *La Cité antique* of 1868. Fustel was a historian equally at home in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The teacher

[22] Citations from ch. 71, vol. 7, pp. 308, 313. [23] Fowden, 'Gibbon and Islam'.
[24] See Greaves, 'Roman planning as a model'; 'Ildefonso Cerdà and the Eixample grid plan'.
[25] Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera*.
[26] See Cormack, 'Exploring Thessaloniki'; Bakirtzis, 'Perceptions, histories and urban realities of Thessaloniki's layered past'.
[27] See Greaves, 'Ildefonso Cerdà and the Eixample grid plan'.

of Durkheim, he pioneered a sociological approach: he wanted to analyse 'the ancient city' as a phenomenon with specific characteristics and an internal coherence. He identified the key factor as religion.

Religion and the Ancient City

Religion is the first of the four elements that have been variously identified as giving 'the ancient city' (of the Greco-Roman world, that is) a distinctive identity that separates it from later cities; each of these four – religion, the economy, politics, and topography or urban fabric – has its own history. It is not easy to see whether in his formulation of a '*cité antique*', Fustel de Coulanges was drawing on earlier authors.[28] He consciously favoured ancient sources and rarely cited modern ones. He was an admirer of Aristotle's *Politics*, and his ability to set out analytically the components of the *polis* and the variants within a pattern. Indeed, in one sense it might be said that it was Aristotle who invented 'the ancient city' as an abstraction. But Aristotle did not regard himself as examining a culturally bounded phenomenon – the city of the Greeks at a certain time – but a universal in human experience. He sees the city as a natural human phenomenon: the family arises naturally from the bonds of affection between man and woman; the family generates the village (*kômê*), and the *polis* is formed by the association of neighbouring villages to form a self-sufficient unit (*Politics* 1.2). Aristotle thought indeed that the city had a beginning (in the family), but does not conceive the possibility of an end.

Fustel, on the other hand, very much sees the ancient city as a time-limited phenomenon, with a beginning, like Aristotle's, but an end produced by a change in certain crucial parameters. The idea of his that has attracted the most attention is the attempt to isolate an 'Aryan' tradition of family and property, in which India is deployed as evidence for the structures that Greece and Rome had in common. The city originates with the family, which is based on ancestor worship and the claim to ancestral property; family units aggregate into Greek *genê* and Roman *gentes*; these aggregate into larger groupings (*phratriai* or *curiae*), and these, in turn, into tribes, until eventually, like a set of Russian dolls, these aggregate into the city. Each of these groupings is characterised by a form of ancestral religion that marks it apart from others at its level, until you reach the *polis* with a form of religion that is unique to itself and exclusive of the members

[28] See the essay by Momigliano, 'The ancient city of Fustel de Coulanges'.

of any other *polis*. This is Aristotle with an important twist, not least because religion plays so small a part in the Greek philosopher's picture.

Modern study of the tribal divisions of the Greek city has inverted Fustel's picture of the relationship: tribes and the like are now seen not as the origins of the city, but as subdivisions formed by the city to organise itself.[29] To that extent, Fustel's thesis cannot be said to command assent today. But independently of his account of the origins of the city, which forms the first two 'books' of his exposition, he offers in the third book an analysis of the elements that comprised the city; unlike in Aristotle, these are seen not as universals of the city in general, but specifics that set apart the ancient city from anything modern. Indeed, he goes out of his way in his opening pages to spell out the danger, caused by classical education, of supposing that the institutions of antiquity can be revived and imitated today, including ancient ideas of 'liberty'. Looking back from the perspective of the Paris of Napoleon III to the French Revolution, he attributes the problems of the last eighty years to a misguided use of the past: 'To understand the truth about the Greeks and Romans, it is wise to study them without thinking of ourselves, as if they were entirely foreign to us' (pp. 3–4). His strictures would apply as much to Haussmann's sewers and avenues as to the revolutionary invocation of Roman *libertas*. It is precisely this urge to look at the ancient city as an alien phenomenon that turns it into a typology with an end as well as a beginning.

For Fustel, all the characteristics of the ancient city flow from its origins in the family and ancestor cult (chs 3–17). So, he claims that the city is formed deliberately, not by a process of growth: 'We are not to picture ancient cities as anything like what we see in our day. We build a few houses; it is a village. Insensibly the number of houses increases, and it becomes a city; and finally, if there is occasion for it, we surround this with a wall' (p. 126). This city is founded at one moment in time, as a religious act, and the founder, whether mythological or historical, is remembered and celebrated in cult. Each city has its own religious practices, its own calendar, and its own priesthood. Political power is founded in priestly roles. The city demands absolute devotion from its citizens, and the municipal spirit of patriotism is the highest duty.

What makes Fustel's analysis so fascinating is that it scores some good hits in pinpointing the distinctiveness of the ancient city, including his insistence on the importance of religion, while at the same time pushing his hypothesis to the limit and beyond. No historian today would subscribe to

[29] Starting with Roussel, *Tribu et cité*.

his characterisation of the *polis* even in archaic Greece, let alone the city throughout antiquity. He does so because he is indeed creating an ideal type. His ancient city is not to be confused with the reality of the ancient city, because he believes that it was undermined from the very start. A series of revolutions, which he discusses in the following 'book', demolished the basic principles on which both city religion and social structures were based. These revolutions go back to the archaic period of both Greek and Roman history. Religious ideas changed fundamentally, under the influence, first, of philosophy, and then of Christianity. Christianity is seen as the diametric opposite of city religion: it is universal in nature, so that it no longer matters to which city you belong, only what religion you practise. Simultaneously, the Roman Empire terminally undermined the independence of the cities that made it up. So, in the end, while the ancient city definitively comes to an end with Constantine's adoption of Christianity as a state religion, it only really existed in its purest form at some undefined moment in the Iron Age or the Archaic period. Ancient history is not so much the history of the ancient city as the history of its long dissolution.

While no ancient historian today takes Fustel's account of the origins of the city seriously, the enduring legacy of his work is the idea that there was such a thing as a typologically distinct ancient city. His vision of Christianity as the antithesis of city religion also lingers, as is apparent in Liebeschuetz. So, he can speak of 'a Christian sense of identity which replaced the older civic pride based on secular history and links with Rome' (p. 18): this could be Fustel, except that antiquity is now characterised not by civic religion but by secularity. Again, in his Summary and Conclusions, he put it like this:

> Plato and Aristotle wrote of the city as an institution that educated its citizens. The Christian late Roman city certainly produced a different kind of person from the classical city. The change can be summarised as an expansion of the sphere of religion at the expense of the secular. (pp. 414–415)

Here, too, we are offered a vision of a classical city defined not by city religion but by secularity. The common factor is the assumption that Christianity must radically change the classical city. Yet (as Liebeschuetz was well aware), the flood of imperial rulings of the fourth and fifth centuries which are used to define and shore up the municipal elite issue from emperors with a strongly Christianising agenda. Christianity thus plays an ambivalent role as what undermined the classical city, and what gave it new life.

The Economy and the Ancient City

Where Fustel had seen religion as the field in which the distinctive character of the ancient city could be isolated, Max Weber, in his essay of 1921, saw it as being the economy, and more particularly the relation between town and country. Weber makes use of Fustel, and invokes from time to time his ideas on *phylae* and such subdivisions of the *polis*.[30] But for Weber the only critical element was the economy, something Fustel gave space to only in so far as he was concerned with the religious origins of private property. From the outset, Weber's definition of the city was an economic one:

> Economically defined, the city is a settlement the inhabitants of which live primarily off trade and commerce rather than agriculture. (p. 66)

Such a definition could never have come out of Fustel, but Weber was talking about the city as a historical phenomenon, and about antiquity only as a subset of that. Above all, he was concerned to explain the rise of capitalism and the modern state:

> Yet neither modern capitalism nor the modern state grew up on the basis of ancient cities while medieval urban development, though not alone decisive, was a carrier of both phenomena and an important factor in their origin. (p. 181)

The explanandum is simultaneously why the medieval city led to modernity and why the ancient did not.

Weber's thinking is notoriously complex and dense, and Moses Finley warned that his views were not easily extrapolated from his text.[31] Yet paradoxically this leads Finley to simplify Weber's position, which is highly nuanced. Weber has a great deal to say about variations, particularly in the case of the medieval city, for which he gives an enormous amount of well-researched detail (far more than for antiquity). Finley was only interested in the broad contrast drawn between the ancient and the medieval – hence his emphasis on the Weberian 'ideal type'. Weber starts by establishing the contrast between the consumer and the producer city,

[30] Weber, *The City*, p. 96 on fraternal associations; 101 on clanless *plebs*; 144–149 on clans and noble families in a cultic community; 170–172 on tribes, curiae, etc.; 175 on tyrants fostering new cults; 205 on divisions into demes and tribes replacing phylae and phratries; 214 on clients, etc. On Weber see among much bibliography Wilfried Nippel, 'Webers "Stadt". Entstehung–Struktur der Argumentation–Rezeption'; Michael Sommer, 'Max Webers Fragment Die Stadt'.

[31] Finley, 'The ancient city', 13–14.

though at once he flags that individual cases do not necessarily conform to the types:

> Moreover, it hardly needs to be mentioned that actual cities nearly always represent mixed types. Thus, if cities are to be economically classified at all, it must be in terms of their prevailing economic component. (p. 70)

Having already defined the city as 'living off trade and commerce rather than agriculture', his producer city, typical of the Middle Ages, fits the profile comfortably. It is the ancient city that creates difficulties, because of the integration of city and landscape into a single unit and the presence of landowners living in the city. The 'rather than agriculture' element is in question, so the consumer city is introduced as what is almost an aberrant form of city.

A great deal of the rest of his essay is dedicated to nuancing the contrast from which it starts. In particular, he nuances the generalisation that the medieval city was primarily mercantile and not the residence of the landowning aristocracy by pointing to Italy and the Mediterranean:

> The presence of large acreages accessible to the urbanite is found more frequently as one turns attention *to the south or back toward antiquity*. While today we justly regard the typical 'urbanite' as a man who does not supply his own food need on his own land, originally the contrary was the case for the majority of typical ancient cities ... The full urbanite of antiquity was a semi-peasant. (p. 71 [emphasis added])

So far it is the exceptionality of antiquity that is stressed, but 'the south' hints at a medieval exception, later spelled out:

> In many Mediterranean area such as Sicily a man living outside the urban walls as a rural worker and country resident is almost unknown. This is a product of century-long insecurity. By contrast in old Hellas the Spartan polis sparkled by the absence of walls, yet the property of being a 'garrison-town' was met. Sparta despised walls for the very reason that it was a permanent open military camp. (p. 75)

Here roles are inverted: medieval and modern Sicily and unspecified other zones of the Mediterranean become cities inhabited by landowners, ancient Sparta an example of the opposite. These are offered more as exceptions that point to the rule. Later, Italy as a whole is seen to break the pattern:

> The cutting of status connections with the rural nobility was carried out in relatively pure form only in the civic corporations of Northern Europe. In the South, chiefly Italy, the reverse occurs when, with the mounting power

> of the cities, rural nobles took up urban residence. This latter phenomenon also appears in augmented form in Antiquity where the city originated precisely as the seat of nobility. Thus the ancient and to a lesser extent, the southern medieval European city form a transitional stage between the Asiatic and the North-European cities. (p. 95)

By now it is becoming clear that the ideal type of the medieval city is essentially a northern European, and not so much a Mediterranean, phenomenon. It raises the question of whether in antiquity itself northern European cities conformed to the Mediterranean model, but while Weber makes great efforts to differentiate medieval cities, he generalises about ancient cities without looking for variants. As he comes to discuss the 'patrician city', he concedes that in both antiquity and the Middle Ages, patricians may be found resident within cities:

> It cannot be too often re-iterated that the urban residence of the nobility had its economic cause in urban economic opportunities. The exploitations of these opportunities in every case produced the power of the patriciate. Neither the ancient Eupatrid patrician nor the medieval patrician was a merchant. (p. 153)

Again, the contrast between antiquity and the Middle Ages is dissolving, and the thesis that the urban residence of landowners was an impediment to the emergence of commerce is modified. The nobility might indeed live in the city, and might indeed profit from the opportunities of trade it generated, only with the exception that they did not overtly take part in trade as merchants.

As he turns to outline the bigger picture in his final chapter, awareness of the contrast between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean again surfaces:

> It is in these respects [i.e., the location of the city within the total political and social organisation] that the typical medieval city was most sharply distinguished from the ancient city. The medieval city, in turn, may be divided into two sub-forms with continuous transitions between them but which in their purest forms approximate ancient city forms. The Southern European city, particularly of Italy and South France, despite all the differences, was closer to the ancient polis than the Northern European city, that is of North France, Germany and England. (p. 197)

Recent research supports Weber's caution in drawing distinctions between the ancient and the medieval city in the Mediterranean.[32] The more nuanced the distinctions become between the periods, the harder it is to

[32] That the Italian city remained the residence of the elite throughout the Middle Ages is stressed by Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy*, pp. 80ff.; cf. p. 86: 'We do not have to identify a historical

set up the 'consumer city' with its resident landowning elite as a phenomenon limited to antiquity, as does Finley.

Weber's typological distinction, albeit qualified at a significant point, coincided with that of Henri Pirenne, a historian for whom he had little time. Pirenne's *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* of 1928, as its title indicates, was not primarily concerned with the ancient city. In looking for the origin of the medieval city, he needed to account for the demise of the classical city. Famously, as in his *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, he saw the Arab conquest of the eastern and southern Mediterranean as the great historical turning point. He regarded, not without reason, Merovingian Gaul as an extension of Gallo-Roman practice: the city did not yet change in its nature. The collapse comes, somewhat surprisingly, under Charlemagne, with a collapse of Mediterranean trade as a result of Islamic dominance over the sea. Paradoxically, he sees this collapse as the chance for the city to invent itself in a new form, with a focus on commerce and the rise of a new merchant class that would pave the way to later capitalism. He thus coincided with Weber in seeing the medieval city as a new beginning, almost cut off from the city of antiquity. While a historian of the medieval Low Countries, such as Adriaan Verhulst, would agree that, in this area at least, there was minimal continuity with the Roman past,[33] it is among archaeologists that the sharpest doubts about Pirenne's thesis have been raised.[34] The idea that Mediterranean trade was cut off and that Charlemagne's reign marks a deep break with the past has lost its traction, even if the case for a transformation of the European economy and patterns of trade is strong.[35]

Politics and the Ancient City

In different ways, Fustel de Coulanges and Max Weber sought to identify the 'essence' of the ancient city, whether in city-based religious practices or in the economic relationship of town and country. In both, Aristotle's *Politics* hover somewhere in the background. Yet neither addresses what

break in the economic base of our cities, now landownership, now commerce (let alone industry); now aristocratic, now bourgeois', going on to refer to Weber.

[33] Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities*.

[34] Hodges and Whitehead, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and The Origins of Europe*. The European project on *The Transformation of the Roman World* explored many related issues. For a more recent survey, Bonnie Effros, 'The enduring attraction of the Pirenne thesis'.

[35] For a radical reassessment of the Pirenne thesis, see McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*.

Aristotle himself clearly regarded as the essence of the *polis*: its political systems.[36] Aristotle's *polis* is a community of *politai*; and he defines the *politēs* by his participation in politics:

> A citizen without further qualifications is defined by nothing more than sharing actively (*metechein*) in judicial office (*krisis*) and political office (*archê*). (*Politics* 1275a22–24)

That was, of course, a very Athenian perspective, for no city carried the ideals of participation quite so far as Athens. It is also a distinctly masculine point of view. As has been vigorously pointed out by Josine Blok, women were *politai* just as much as men, and the definition of citizenship offered in the court cases where it is disputed is the right to participate in the religious life of the city: the *hiera kai hosia*.[37] Fustel of course was well aware of this definition, and his emphasis on family cults, and his insistence that the non-citizen was excluded from the religion of the *polis*, reflects this reality. But whether you focus on the all-too-masculine public life of 'politics' or on the religious rituals that embrace all members of the family, it is participation in the life of the *polis* that is the essence.

We might indeed object that a definition like this refers not to the city as urban phenomenon but to the city-state, and that this is a separate issue. But the integration of town and country into a single community means that this distinction can never quite hold. On the Aristotelian model, the countryman, whether peasant or landlord, must make constant use of the urban centre, whether as a market or as a political centre in which to exercise rights of voting and, indeed, to hold magistracies, or for access to justice, or for access to the religious festivals of the city. The Parthenon is not just an urban monument, but the centre of the greatest festival of the community as a whole, rural as well as urban, the Panathenaia. It follows that the essence of Athens as an urban centre is the product of Athens as the centre of a city-state.

The historian who took this point most seriously was A. H. M. (Hugo) Jones, the predecessor of Moses Finley in the chair of ancient history at Cambridge.[38] His ideas of the city were worked out over the span of an exceptionally productive career, which started with two linked volumes,

[36] See Zuiderhoek, *The Ancient City* (esp. pp. 78–93) for a sophisticated recent discussion giving emphasis to politics.

[37] Blok, 'A covenant between Gods and men'; Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens*, pp. 1–24. See also my paper, '*Civitas Romana*'.

[38] Remarkably, Finley does not cite Jones' works on the Greek city in his essay, though their views on the agrarian dominance of the ancient economy were close.

The Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire (1937) and *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (1940), later followed by his massive history of the *Later Roman Empire 284–602* published in 1964.[39] What these impressive works have in common is a determination to expand Roman history beyond what was then the traditional scope of the Oxford ancient history syllabus on which he was trained, ignoring the Hellenistic period and terminating with the death of Trajan. His initial focus on the Greek East made it easier for him to ignore the potential terminus of 476 as the end of the Roman Empire in the West. He saw the real break as coming with Justinian (or his successor Maurice). That enabled him to take the story up to the eve of the birth of Islam and the Arab conquests of the seventh century, which, not unlike Pirenne, he implicitly took as ushering in an entirely new world. In starting his *Greek City* with Alexander, he was pushing out into the relatively little-studied Hellenistic world; his *Later Roman Empire*, in starting with Diocletian, rightly identified the then nascent period of 'Late Antiquity' as the most neglected field.

It is perhaps the paradox of Jones' work that in trying to expand the study of ancient history beyond the confines of the 'classical' world, one which might be seen to end in the East with Alexander and in the West with Diocletian, he nevertheless retained many of the values of the classical world. His *polis* is that of Aristotle, written before his pupil Alexander changed that world by his eastern conquests. Jones's studies of the Greek city start from the observation that 'the Greek city' as a phenomenon saw an unprecedented period of expansion as a result of Alexander's conquests. The creation of hundreds of new Greek cities, in areas previously not urbanised or not Greek, and the continuous process of city foundation that was taken up by Alexander's successors, and then by the Romans, especially the Roman emperors, who were every bit as keen as the Hellenistic monarchs to have their names immortalised in new city foundations, continues to the very end of his period: Justinian was the most prolific founder of new cities of them all.

Even as the number of cities multiplies (*Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire* catalogues some 899 cities in the eastern provinces of the empire, though it leaves out the more eastern foundations in central Asia that fell outside Roman rule), so their adhesion to an Aristotelian model fades. The chapters on 'Internal Politics' (part III) spell out the long decline from an Aristotelian ideal. At first, the semblance at least of democracy and autonomy is preserved by Alexander. His successors follow his lead and,

[39] See Lavan. 'A. H. M. Jones and "the cities"'.

whatever their tactics of maintaining control, 'there was one which they could not use, the formal limitation of political power to a small class' (p. 157). All citizens were assumed to have equal rights, even if their numbers were limited (p. 160). An essential principle of democracy, of limiting the power of magistrates, was preserved by limiting tenure of office to a year (p. 12). Nevertheless, in practice decision-making tended to be with the council (*boulē*) not the *ekklēsia* of all citizens, representing 'a distinctly oligarchic trend' since 'persons of standing and substance' tended always to be elected (p. 166). So democracy survives, but in a compromised form, 'tempered by a convention that the rich should have a virtual monopoly of office, provided they paid for it very liberally' (p. 168).

Roman conquest pushes this oligarchic tendency further. By the time the Romans arrive, democracy has lost its substance, 'but it remained a popular ideal' (p. 170). The Romans do what Alexander's successors could not: 'place power in the hands of the well-to-do' (p. 170). In Rome the senate and the magistrates dominated in a way incompatible with Greek democracy, and this became the new model. Membership of councils was limited to those of a certain property qualification, and the councils acquired the right of veto over assemblies. Councils became ever more dominant, and membership of the 'curial class' – those who served on the council (*boulē* = *curia*) – became hereditary (p. 176). The assent of the citizen body became more and more of a formality, and eventually the assembly ceased to meet, its voice replaced by chanted acclamations that were recorded (p. 177). The privileges of the curial class were enshrined in the laws which protected them (the *honestiores*) from the physical punishments to which the humble citizens (the *humiliores*) were subject (pp. 179–180). Not even the election of magistrates was a matter of free choice by the citizens, who, even if they got to vote, were presented by the council with a closed list (p. 181).

Despite the erosion of the rights of citizens, the ruling class still felt obliged to use their wealth for the benefit of their cities:

> The tradition of local patriotism indeed maintained itself for a surprisingly long period, all things considered. Men still in the third century AD took pride in their cities, and the great families still in many cases felt the traditional obligation to pay for their position by lavish expenditure. (p. 182)

Gradually, the financial burdens of holding office and council membership come to outweigh the advantages of prestige, and competition for office fades. Thus, membership of the *boulê* and the expenses it implies become compulsory. Jones here makes clear his increasing distaste at a process of

decline by his choice of language ('degeneration'). His picture culminates with Libanius in fourth-century Antioch, who offers an idealised vision of how things used to be, and still ought to be:

> Libanius paints a picture of the council of Antioch as it was in the recent past which is very different. The councillors are all of ancient family: their ancestors have all held magistracies and liturgies for generations and have trained up their descendants to a proper sense of civic spirit. (p. 191)

By the end of this chapter on 'the Roman age', the process of decline is advanced: any semblance of democracy has gone, the ordinary citizen is separated from the class of 'curials' and has no vote, and it is only by a sort of hereditary inertia that the ruling class still bother to evince civic spirit and spend their wealth lavishly for the public benefit. The final collapse comes with Late Antiquity, here called 'the Byzantine age'. At this point Jones can turn not only to the complaints of Libanius, but to the rich sequence of imperial edicts preserved in the *Theodosian Code* (book 15). Spanning the years 312 to 438 (Theodosius' excerptors were only interested in the pronouncements of Christian emperors, and Catholic Trinitarians at that),[40] emperors issue a series of 192 increasingly indignant rulings about city councils, attempting to block attempts to evade their local financial obligations by those who sought exemption through imperial service, membership of the senate, and even the privilege of clergy.

This stream of imperial constitutions is taken to demonstrate the widespread and growing unpopularity of service on city councils, and, at the same time, the utter impotence of imperial pronouncements in the face of local evasion. The wonder is not so much that council service had become undesirable, but that the system managed to survive at all:

> These tasks were, now that the service of one's native city had no emotional appeal, felt to be exacting and tedious, and it is natural that many decurions aspired either to more interesting work in the higher grades of the public services. (p. 206)

Jones has charted the steady process, over the 800 years and more that separate Alexander from Justinian, first of a decline of the institutions that characterised the Aristotelian *polis*, from democracy and autonomy to the willing domination of the rich, to the conversion of the rich into a hereditary caste that was compelled to undertake local burdens; at the same time, he has traced a decline in morale, from the sort of competitive

[40] See Humphries, 'The rhetorical construction of a Christian Empire'.

euergetism that made the rich willing to support their cities, seen as a spirit of 'patriotism', to the surprising continuance of that patriotic spirit after the need to compete for local recognition had gone, to the final evaporation of that spirit.

We meet the same picture of ineluctable decline in the chapter on 'the Cities' in *The Later Roman Empire* (pp. 712–766), written twenty-five years later, except that now the story starts with the late empire, so that decline is already advanced when the story begins, with Libanius and the Theodosian Code. Jones now broadens his view to include the western empire, bringing into the picture the Germanic kingdoms which from the late fifth century replaced imperial administration (p. 748). He notes with interest that when Alaric II, Visigothic king of Spain, issues his law code based on that of Theodosius, the provisions affecting cities and their administration remain virtually unchanged, while the pen of Cassiodorus shows for the sixth century how meticulously the Ostrogothic regime enforced old rules intended to support cities and encourage curials. Italian archives, particularly from Ravenna, show the councils, *curiae*, and the local magistrates in action from 489 to 625 (p. 761). And though the general tone is one of ineluctable decline, he observes that this is far from the end of the story for cities in the East:

> The cities apparently continued to prosper economically, and the guilds maintained their membership without any need of governmental action. The archaeological evidence supports this conclusion and even suggests a revival of the towns in the fifth and sixth centuries. To take one instance, Gerasa, a largish city in Arabia, which had flourished greatly in the second century AD evidently fell on evil days in the third and shows little or no sign of revival in the fourth or early fifth. But from the latter part of the fifth century a dozen churches, many of them of some architectural pretensions, were erected and several public buildings repaired or re-erected: this activity went on uninterrupted down to the Arab conquest, the last church being dedicated under Phocas. (p. 763)

This passage is the more remarkable because of the rarity of references to archaeological evidence in a text almost entirely dependent on written sources. This might be taken as a sign of the new significance being awarded to archaeological data in the 1960s, did we not know that Jones' archaeological interests were more longstanding. In his obituary, Russell Meiggs recounts that the young Jones travelled widely, making repeated

visits to Constantinople and Jerash (Gerasa), and was known to his friends as 'Jerash Jones'.[41]

As we have seen, it is Jones' thesis of progressive political decline and the loss of patriotic spirit by the landowning elite that forms the basis of Liebeschuetz's more detailed account of the same 'decline and fall'. While Jones' thesis incorporates an economic side, subscribing to the Weberian thesis of the 'consumer city' and assuming that the prosperity of classical cities was founded on the willingness of landowners to invest 'patriotically' in urban monuments and benefactions (what Paul Veyne called 'euergetism'), for Liebeschuetz, who rejects the 'consumer city', the matter is almost purely political and constitutional.

> This book's principal theme is political change. The discussion focuses on the end of city-government by the *curia*, and its replacement by another looser, and much less transparent form of oligarchic control. (p. 4)

He sees government passing to the hands of a group of 'notables': rich and influential figures who were free of the disagreeable burden of being members of the *curia*, as the end of any trace of constitutional government that would be recognised by Aristotle.

We will return the issue of the demise of the *curia* in due course (see Chapter 7). The relevant point here is to observe how 'constitutional' government forms the thread that gives supposed unity to the idea of 'the ancient city'. The *curia* is the last vestige of a political essence that marks the ancient city apart. There is nothing inherently wrong in following an Aristotelian line and giving primacy to politics over religion or the economy in our analysis of ancient cities. The problem lies in using it to set up an unbridgeable gulf between 'the ancient city' and later cities. Another way of looking at it – and one developed here – is to say that how cities were governed evolved continuously under the impact of imperial control, and that the elimination of the *curia*, or at least its reduction to a mere formality, was simply the next step in a process of continuous evolution. If we focus on the perspective of contemporaries, the gulf may seem more like a channel of communication.

Urban Fabric and the Ancient City

While Fustel de Coulanges, Max Weber, Moses Finley, and A. H. M. Jones put different emphasis on the importance of religious, economic, and political

[41] Meiggs, 'Arnold Hugh Martin Jones', p. 186.

factors, they agree that 'the ancient city' was a distinctive phenomenon which terminated at the end of 'antiquity'. They also (despite Jones' interest in Jerash) paid little attention to the physical form of the city; not until Liebeschuetz does archaeological evidence start to form part of the picture. But, for all that, the physical city is there in the background. Moses Finley opened his essay on 'The Ancient City' with a discussion of definitions, and turned at once to the much-quoted comment of Pausanias, in his second-century AD guide to Greece, questioning the city status of Panopeus in Phocis:

> no government buildings, no theatre, no town square, no water conducted to a fountain, and . . . the people live in hovels like mountain cabins on the edge of a ravine. (10.4.1)

That suggested a definition of sorts:

> a city must be more than a conglomeration of people; there are necessary conditions of architecture and amenity, which in turn express certain social, cultural and political conditions.[42]

Yet one might use Pausanias to make exactly the opposite point. Bearing in mind the proverbial 'men not walls make a city', Panopeus shows that possession of the sort of public buildings which typify ancient cities was *not* after all a necessary part of the definition of a *polis*, whereas the independence and self-government to which Aristotle points were so. An archaeologist might conclude on the basis of physical remains that Panopeus was no city, whereas the inhabitants might claim that they were indeed a *polis*. In the end, Finley brushes off archaeological study of the fabric of cities impatiently:

> There is considerable publication about what is sometimes rather grandiloquently called 'ancient town-planning', and no one will dispute this is part of urban history, as are demography, drains and sanitation. But a town is more than the mere arithmetical total of layout and drains and inhabitants, and it is remarkable that the ancient city *qua* city has aroused so little interest. (pp. 7–8)

His list of those responsible for this 'grandiloquent' conception omits the ancient historian who might rate as the pioneer of the study of ancient town planning, Francis Haverfield.[43] The use of the expression 'town planning',

[42] Finley, 'The ancient city', p. 3.

[43] Finley, 'The ancient city', p. 8 note 11 cites Martin, *L'urbanisme dans la Grèce antique*; Wycherley, *How the Greeks built Cities*; and Homo, *Rome impériale et l'urbanisme dans l'antiquité*. Along with Haverfield, Ward-Perkins, *Cities of Ancient Greece and Italy* is a striking omission. For the discussion of town planning from Haverfield on, see Greaves and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Introduction', pp. 11–13.

by Haverfield at least, was largely due to the Town Planning Conference organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London in October 1910.[44] Intended to be a major international event, it deliberately looked at town planning past, present, and future. In the opening session, dedicated to antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, there were three papers on antiquity, by scholars of unquestionable authority: Professor Percy Gardner of Cambridge talked about Hellenistic Greek town planning; Francis Haverfield talked about the Romans; and Thomas Ashby, a pupil of Haverfield's and by then director of the British School at Rome, talked about Rome itself. A central theme of the work of Haverfield, an ancient historian by training and profession, was his commitment to the use of archaeological evidence. Indeed, he had played a crucial role (along with Percy Gardner and Thomas Ashby) in the foundation in 1901 of the British School at Rome, one aim of which was to put Classicists in touch with the physical remains of Roman antiquity,[45] and a decade later he was one of the founders of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, which, like its Hellenic predecessor, sought to promote interest in physical remains as well as text. 'Town planning', a theme scarcely touched on by previous scholarship, suited his agenda well, for it allowed him to argue that the fundamental character of Roman civilisation was encapsulated in, and could be studied through, the remains of cities, and particularly their street plans. To promote this idea, he developed a line that seems to have gone down well with his audience.

> The great gift of the Roman Empire to Western Europe was town life, and during the Roman Empire the creation of new towns went on apace . . . One central fact is plain: that all these towns assumed a definite form . . . It was an old form – the familiar rectangular street plan . . . The square and straight lines are indeed the simplest marks which divide man civilised from the barbarian.[46]

Haverfield stopped well short of claiming that Rome invented rectilinear planning (and he immediately offered an older Chinese example); his argument is rather that regular 'chess-board' city layouts, which he illustrated by Florence, Timgad, Silchester, and Caerwent, were both a symbol of Roman civilisation and a major legacy to the future. At the same time, he

[44] *Town Planning Conference London*. Discussed in greater detail by Greaves and myself in the introduction to *Rome and the Colonial City*, pp. 1–24. I am grateful to Sofia Greaves for underlining to me the significance of this conference.

[45] See Wiseman, *A Short History of the British School at Rome*, p. 3.

[46] Haverfield, 'Town planning in the Roman world', p. 124.

identified the loss of such planning with the fall of empire. He notes how rare it was for regular plans to survive into the Middle Ages, and takes Belgrade (Roman Singidunum) as the exception that proves the rule:

> Here on the high promontory which looks out over the lowlands of the Danube and the Save, is the 'old town' of the Servian capital, and this old town, grouped around the market-square, shows the regular streetage which I think we may safely connect with its Roman days. For once, the wave of barbarism, even the last and longest wave of Mahometanism, has failed wholly to efface it. (p. 129)

Haverfield could count on his audience to share his Orientalist take on Islam, and the assumption that it was represented in the sort of tangle of narrow streets that for them represented barbarism.

Interestingly, his prejudices were not shared by all contemporaries. His old pupil, Thomas Ashby, beneficiary and inspiring leader of the School which Haverfield did so much to create, spoke about Rome itself. In his quiet, non-conformist way,[47] he did not openly question Haverfield's celebration of regular streets so much as seek to show, through the topographical and historical factors that governed the development of Rome as a city, that there was no principle of planning at work here at least, in the greatest of Roman cities. In case his message was lost, Ashby concluded with a more explicit statement:

> There has been too much of a cult of the straight line and the right angle, not only in Rome since 1870, but in most other parts of the world, and I take it that one of the objects of the present Conference is to spread a different gospel among the nations. (p. 145)

His remark must have caused an uproar. His overt target was the post-Risorgimento expansion of Rome (as he was later to criticise Mussolini), but the message was clear. In the discussion, Professor Reginald Blomfield, secretary of the RIBA and one of Ashby's supporters in developing the British School as a base for architects, used his opening of the discussion as Chair to put him in his place:

> There is one remark in his [Haverfield's] Paper which struck me as admirable, and that was his reference to the straight line and the square as the distinguishing mark of civilised man as opposed to the barbarian. I think we may all take that as a motto for this Town Planning Conference. I notice that Dr Ashby disagrees with him, and I understand him to say

[47] See Hodges, *Visions of Rome.*

> that meandering lines are preferable; but I think he will find the principles of great architecture against him. (p. 177)

For all Blomfield's lordly put-down, Ashby, who knew his Italy a great deal better than Blomfield, could have pointed him to architects from Alberti on who celebrated the sinuous streets of an Italian hill town and their potential for opening up unexpected and striking vistas.[48]

As far as Haverfield was concerned, the battle was won in favour of the straight line and the rectangle, and he proceeded to elaborate his ideas in the slim volume that stands at the base of modern studies of ancient urbanism: *Ancient Town-Planning* (1913). He made good use of the conference, helping himself to Blomfield's discussion of Priene and Brinkmann's discussions of both the Renaissance and particularly the grid-like new towns of the thirteenth century. In the full version of the book, he is able to deploy many more examples, and to emphasise the gains of archaeology. But he also formulated the theme that so pleased Blomfield in even more explicit fashion:

> In almost all cases, the frequent establishment of towns has been accompanied by the adoption of a definite principle of town-planning, and throughout the principle has been essentially the same. It has been based on the straight line and the right angle. These, indeed, are the marks which sunder even the simplest civilization from barbarism. The savage, inconsistent in his moral life, is equally inconsistent, equally unable to 'keep straight', in his house-building and his road-making. (p. 14)

He was also able to spell out more explicitly the theme that grid planning ended with the end of the Roman Empire, even if some centuries later it was picked up as an enduring legacy. The end of antiquity is a catastrophic collapse:

> the Roman planning helped the towns of the empire to take definite form, but when the empire fell, it too met its end. (p. 140)

If the grid plan was the symbol and instantiation of civilisation, it could scarcely survive barbarian invasions.

> When, after 250 years of conflict, the barbarians triumphed, its work was done. In the next age of ceaseless orderless warfare it was less fit, with its straight broad streets, for defence and for fighting than the chaos of narrow tortuous lanes out of which it had grown and to which it now returned. (p. 140)

[48] See my 'Ancient ideals and modern interpretations', p. 51, on Alberti.

Haverfield's prejudices are very much of his time: there is a confident and unembarrassed Edwardian belief in the moral superiority of empire. He was not shy in drawing parallels between the Roman and the British Empires, and, as his inaugural lecture to the newly founded Roman society showed, he felt that the parallel showed the value of the study of the ancient world.[49] His views on the value of 'Romanisation' have been sharply criticised.[50] His views were what we now see as 'colonialist'. That was not only a British failing: the French in North Africa and Syria looked at the tangled streets of what they called the 'Islamic city' with equal distaste. Not only did their colonial authorities build new orthogonal towns alongside the old 'madinas', but their archaeologists sought to demonstrate how Islamic rule led to the breakup of the planned cities they had inherited.[51]

In Haverfield's picture, ancient rectilinear planning came to an end, later to be revived in the thirteenth century in the Terra Nova of Federico II and the *bastides* of France: his image of the ancient city is finite, with a beginning, middle, and end. Just as much as Fustel or Weber, he sees the 'ancient city' as a circumscribed entity with a specific character. He does not suggest that rectilinear planning is a Greco-Roman invention, as his Chinese example shows. Rather, such planning is a universal value, a hallmark of civilisation wherever it may be found. But the ancient world for him takes this universal value to a special level. Ancient civilisation is embodied in the city, and the values of the city are embodied in the orthogonal plan. So, the 'ancient city' as abstract idea achieves a concrete form, one which can be easily recognised on the ground by the archaeologist.

Haverfield's book thus locked into the scholarship an assumption that the ancient city was a distinct phenomenon with recognisable physical features. Subsequent books on ancient town planning modified some details and added new examples but did not challenge the underlying scheme. Ferdinando Castagnoli built up further the figure of Hippodamus as father of town planning;[52] John Ward-Perkins, director of Haverfield and Ashby's British School at Rome, took up the theme sixty years later, and in his slim volume on *Cities of Ancient Greece and Italy: Planning in Classical Antiquity* (1974) showed vividly how modern techniques of aerial photography could bring out the grid plans still visible on the ground. We may note that though Ward-Perkins mentions other urban

[49] Haverfield, 'An Inaugural Address'.

[50] Hingley, *Roman Officers and Gentlemen*; Freeman, *The Best Training Ground for Archaeologists*; Greaves and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Introduction', p. 10.

[51] See Ennahid, 'Searching for Rome'.

[52] Castagnoli, *Ippodamo di Mileto*.

features, from monuments to drainage, the focus of the book is still on planning.

Ward-Perkins, like Haverfield, had an agenda in demonstrating the importance of archaeology in understanding the ancient city. He takes some pride in pointing out that we would not grasp the importance of orthogonal planning from the ancient texts: you need the archaeology to see it; hence, too, the dominance of image over text. He is explicit in his Introduction:

> Although this study of classical town planning concerns itself very largely with the formal layouts which are its most tangible surviving expression, it is as well to remember that this was not by any means the aspect of urban planning that bulked largest in the eyes of contemporaries. Questions of formal layout seem in fact to have been largely ignored or taken for granted by most Greek writers, or considered if at all for their relevance to the political and social problems which were their main interest . . . For town planning as such we are driven very largely to the study of surviving remains. (p. 8)

If, as he has just claimed, 'the history of the classical town is in a very real sense the history of classical civilisation itself', should we not be more perturbed that the ancient writers, who undoubtedly valued the city, showed so little interest in what is being offered as the ultimate expression of classical civilisation? The suspicion must surely lurk that the whole interest in street layouts – what Ashby called 'a cult of the straight line and the right angle' – is actually a modern obsession, retrojected onto antiquity, which is then recruited to give authority to one side of a modern debate.[53]

Haverfield and his Edwardian attitudes may be long gone. But the idea that the classical city was characterised by well-planned and orderly streets, and that these give way in the post-antique period to winding streets and urban clutter, persists. So, Averil Cameron puts it in her discussion of Procopius, who paints a strikingly classical picture of the streets of Justinian's new cities (see Chapter 6):

> All over the empire, archaeology shows that a transformation was occurring during the sixth century. The open spaces of the classical city – the baths, fora and public buildings which Procopius records, for instance at Justiniana Prima or Ras Kapoudia in North Africa, were giving way to the crowded and winding streets of the medieval souks; the houses were soon

[53] I develop this idea in 'Ancient ideals and modern interpretations'.

> rather to be found huddling round the fortified citadel enclosing the bishop's palace and the main church.[54]

If we follow this vision, we may be persuaded that the classical city of antiquity is divided from the medieval city, whether Christian or Islamic, by an uncrossable gulf.

What Might 'The End of the Ancient City' Mean?

The four approaches to the 'ancient city' sketched here have in common the assumption that there was such a thing as 'the ancient city', the characteristics of which can be defined, and which had considerable duration over the best part of a millennium, from archaic Greece to the Antioch of Libanius, and which by a process of decline, irrespective of external pressures and changed conditions, came to an end at some unclear point in Late Antiquity, maybe with Constantine, maybe as late as the seventh-century Arab invasions of Syria.

Does it matter that these approaches have different perspectives and emphases – religious, economic, political, and physical – given that all four come to the same conclusion: that 'the ancient city' was distinctive and unique and came to an end in Late Antiquity? The danger is this: seen from the perspective of later history, it offers a simplified image of the city in antiquity, one that is fixed. Everything makes the city of antiquity different and unchanging: its religious pluralism, its economic model of town and country, its political constitution, and its physical structure. Yet when we look at each of these aspects in detail, the picture is more complex. If polytheism defines the ancient city, the Christianised city after Constantine no longer counts as 'ancient'. If we insist on the town/country relationship of the Weber/Finley model, we must not only ignore the abundant archaeological evidence for ancient urban commerce but must exaggerate and distort the contrast between antiquity and the Middle Ages. If politics defines the city, we must ignore the evidence of profound political differences between cities so carefully analysed by Aristotle and set up one particular variant propagated by imperial authorities as definitive. If straight streets and grid plans define the ancient city, we must not only explain their absence or limited importance in Athens, Rome, and Constantinople, but also account for the fact that some of the most orthogonal layouts, like that of ʿAnjar, are post-antique and Islamic. The

[54] Averil Cameron, *Procopius*, p. 112–3.

simplified typology of 'the ancient city' understates its variety, its changes over time, and its ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

The flaw of these approaches is that they depend on a narrative of a lost ideal, except, indeed, with Weber/Finley, for whom the 'consumer city' is a model doomed to failure. That was built into Fustel's invention of the ancient city from the outset. His ideal – of a community built up in stages from a family unit which used shared cult to mark its property – never quite exists: almost from the outset, in archaic Greece and Rome, the ideal is compromised by an endless sequence of social changes and revolutions, which redefine social relations and undermine the religion which binds the community together. What the historical city offers us is a series of remnants of this lost ideal, from which we can reconstruct it, without ever having it simultaneously before our eyes. A. H. M. Jones's political city displays the same 'lost ideal' narrative. Somehow, the ideal stands just outside the narrative, in the Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries (he wrote separately on Athenian democracy). When the narrative opens, with Alexander, the democratic ideal only survives by lip service, and is rapidly eroded; its fate is sealed by Roman conquest (interestingly, Fustel too saw Roman conquest as a critical factor in the demise of his city); and as the Roman state tightens the rules, turning council membership into a hereditary obligation, so the city loses its soul, which is the principal of citizen participation. Yet 900 years stretch between the beginning and the end of this story of decline, and the wonder is that the city manages to retain the patriotic loyalty of its citizens for so long (Jones, like Fustel, saw the role of patriotic spirit as crucial).

Yet all these doubts, and all these difficulties, can be set aside if we cease to talk of 'the ancient city' and talk instead of the city in antiquity – that is, of antiquity as a chapter, or series of chapters, in a longer ongoing story of the city, not as a separate phenomenon. It is possible to think about the city in Classical Antiquity in the context of the phenomenon of urbanisation in a broader chronological and geographical context. As Greg Woolf argues in his account of ancient cities, seen in the context of the cities of Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and the Near East, Mediterranean cities are part of a longstanding and widespread phenomenon that is a recurrent feature of human societies, appearing in diverse guises. Mediterranean cities seem both relatively small and late in appearance. They may indeed have distinctive features, but that is no reason to cut them off from a longer history of city-making.[55] The city of antiquity is not a tale of a lost ideal, but

[55] Woolf, *The Life and Death of Ancient Cities*. I am grateful to the author for an advanced view of his text.

of a fundamental social, economic, political, and religious phenomenon that changes and develops constantly though time. There is no need to mark off uncompromising periods. The city of Late Antiquity is closer to the city of the early Middle Ages than it is to the city of archaic Greece. The very idea that a human structure should have a coherent duration for more than a millennium strains belief.

The deconstruction of the idea of 'the ancient city' proposed here is necessary in order to address the basic question of this book: how the idea of the city in antiquity affected the idea of the city in the subsequent period. Instead of seeing a collapse or abandonment of ideals, I am interested in continuities and adaptations. Rather than identifying the classical idea of the city with a particular phenomenon, city-governance by a council, city-cased polytheistic cult, or straight streets, we might allow for an evolving complexity; and rather than identifying the adaptations of the subsequent period as collapses of the old ideal, we might see them as adaptations driven by survival in changing circumstances. It is here that an approach focused on resilience may help.

Transformation and Resilience

Peter Brown, with his characteristic talent to evoke a world from an anecdote, used the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus to encapsulate the transformation of the urban world of Late Antiquity.[56] As told by Gregory of Tours at the end of the sixth century on the basis of a Syrian original, the seven young men of Ephesus, persecuted as Christians by the emperor Decius, take refuge in a cave, where they fall asleep. The cave is blocked up and only unblocked by a local shepherd centuries later when Theodosius II is emperor. One of their number, Malchus, deputed to go to town to do their shopping, finds to his astonishment, being convinced that their sleep was simply overnight, that Ephesus is transformed, with a cross over the city gate, men praising Christ in the streets, and churches. At most two centuries separated the persecutions of Decius (who died in AD 251) from the reign of Theodosius II (408–450), but the world had changed profoundly: 'Don't you think you have entered a different city?', Gregory has Malchus exclaim.[57] The tale emphasises the difference brought by

[56] Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, p. 1; tellingly cited by Humphries, *Cities and the Meanings of Late Antiquity*, pp. 2–6.

[57] Gregory, *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Septem Dormientium* ed. Krusch (*MGM SRM 1.2)* p. 401: Putasne, quia in aliam urbem ingressus es?

Christianisation. Yet this does not mean that the Ephesus of Decius in 250 was just the same as it had been since its foundation in the tenth century BC. Had our sleepers disappeared into their cave in the period of Persian control and woken up two centuries later, they might have been equally astonished to find the temple of Artemis ranking as one of the seven wonders of the world. They might have been equally astonished to wake up in Hadrianic Ephesus and find the city full of monuments of Roman taste, like the library of Celsus which tourists today so admire in reconstructed form. Eventually, the sleepers would wake again to find their city under Islamic control.[58] Cities never stand still; change is continuous, and the changes of Late Antiquity were simply the latest in a series.

One way of thinking about the longer-term history of the city is in terms of resilience. Resilience has become a fashionable idea: international movements encourage city authorities to adopt policies which will enhance their chances of bouncing back from natural and man-made catastrophes.[59] In its more sophisticated form, resilience theory is not just about the capacity of cities to recover from disaster and return to the *status quo ante*. It is about adaptation. Rather than a model of flourishing followed by decline and collapse, it sees in the natural world of ecology a cycle, in the form of a continuous loop, between growth and consolidation on the one hand, and adaptation in the face of crisis followed by new growth on the other. Critically, it sees the phase of adaptation as drawing on the past, using memory as a creative tool to build new structures. (The theory is explored in more detail in the final chapter.)

Cities are, or at least can be, resilient. They may be created in specific historical circumstances, but they gain a life of their own that transcends their origins. They respond continuously to changes in the environment. Sometimes those changes are deep shocks – what greater shock to a city than to be sacked? Sometimes they never recover. But the remarkable thing is how often they bounce back, changing themselves to respond to new circumstances, but simultaneously drawing on memories of the past as a resource. If cities are resilient, so is the idea of the city. We can identify long adaptive cycles whereby human societies move between phases of change and adaptation to consolidation to response to change and further adaptation, crucially drawing on memories of the past not from nostalgia but as a means of reformulation.[60] That theory has been fruitfully applied

[58] Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*.

[59] See the Rockefeller foundation-sponsored 100 Resilient Cities programme: Resilient Cities, Resilient Lives. The relevance of resilience theory is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

[60] Redman, 'Resilience theory in archaeology'.

to antiquity, whether by Alan Walmsley looking at Roman and post-Roman Syria, by Greg Woolf looking at the success of the surprisingly small but adaptive city of antiquity, or by Michele Salzman looking at the capacity of Rome and its ruling class to recover from successive shocks.[61]

My aim in the pages that follow is to explore some of the authors of Late Antiquity for whom the city provides an important focus and ask how they drew on past memories. My purpose is not to look at the city as a typology, but as part of a trajectory: a never-ending story in which earlier chapters influence later chapters, in such a way that they may indeed be new but make little sense without the chapters that precede. The question is not whether 'the ancient city' ended or was transformed, but which memories of the cities of antiquity continued to affect the cities which frequently continued in the same footprint. I shall explore a series of writers, chosen because they each have a good deal to say about the city.

My focus is on what contemporaries thought and wrote, their expectations, assumptions, and ideals, rather than on the urban fabric itself; exceptionally, I look at some of the striking number of new cities constructed between the fourth and eighth centuries because of the potential of a new layout, as opposed to a modified and adapted one, to illuminate an urban ideal. One rich source for ideals is the rhetorical tradition of 'praises of cities', *Laudes urbium*, that stretches from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages: they may be poor guides to the realities of city life, but they are eloquent of a tradition of expectations (Chapter 2). Augustine and other Christian writers have too often been cast as the enemies of the city; a more careful reading of Orosius, Augustine, and Salvian suggests that the City of God, rather than displacing the earthly *civitas*, presupposes and builds on it (Chapter 3). I then explore four authors in whose writings cities are a recurrent theme: Cassiodorus, whose service of the Ostrogothic kings of sixth-century Italy put him on a hinge between the Roman imperial world and the new western world of successor kingdoms (Chapter 4); Procopius, whose histories, panegyric, and criticism of Justinian expose a sixth-century Mediterranean world to which the city remains central (Chapter 5); Gregory of Tours, whose accounts of a sixth- and seventh-century Gaul tormented by the squabbles of Merovingian kings still keeps the city centre stage (Chapter 7); and Isidore of Seville, whose works show a seventh-century bishop deeply involved in the politics of Visigothic Spain trying to show the enduring truth of the classical language of the city

[61] Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*; Woolf, 'Locating resilience in ancient urban networks'; Salzman, *Falls of Rome*, pp. 17–21 and passim.

(Chapter 8). Chapter 6 explores the potential of documentary papyri from Italy and Francia to illuminate the workings of city life. Resilience, and the process of drawing on memories of the past to adapt to the present, is a theme that runs throughout these chapters, and the final chapter draws together those threads.