Editor's Note

JAVIER ANDREU / AITOR BLANCO-PÉREZ
(University of Navarra)

From Chaeroneia it is twenty stades to Panopeus, a city of the Phocians, if one can give the name of city to those who possess no government offices, no gymnasium, no theatre, no market-place, no water descending to a fountain, but live in bare shelters just like mountain cabins, right on a ravine.

(Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10, 4, 1)

Ipse in largitionibus pecuniae publicae parcissimus fuit, quod laudi potius datur quam reprehensioni, sed tamen et bonis viris pecunias dedit et oppidis labentibus auxilium tulit et tributa vel vectigalia, ubi necessitas cogebat, remisit.

(HA, *Marcus Aurelius* 23, 2)

Cities in the Roman world, in general, and in Roman Spain, in particular, are historical realities whose particularities pose challenges of interpretation and study. Despite the many – and largely illustrative – legal and epigraphic sources available to us, our understanding of a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon such as civic life under Rome's rule is far from complete. The diversity of formulas, both demographic and material as well as institutional and juridical, constituted the urban reality of the Roman West, as shown by the institutionalisation of the concept of *municipium* and the spread of this model of urbanisation in the provinces. A *municipium* was, essentially, a juridical formula which, through the incorporation of pre-existing Latin institutions and the regulation of a framework of rights and duties, recognised lawful ways of life founded on the traditions of conquered territories. In the case of *Hispania*, these consuetudinary forms were adapted to a model of municipal regulations particularly defined by the Flavian municipal law. This adaptation required a high degree of generosity and engagement by the elite, civic pride, a desire of emulation; in sum, the acceptance that the Roman way of life was, first, attractive and, then, profitable and adequate for communities that constituted the administrative backbone of Rome in western provinces of the empire such as those on the Iberian peninsula.

Once this model of civic life was institutionalised in Roman Spain, the subsequent archaeological materials show generous efforts of monumentalisation that can be quantified and contribute to better understanding the magnitude of the process. Like-wise, the same evidence would indicate that, at the beginning of the High imperial period, the material reality of the city (*urbs*) did not always match the civic maturity (*civitas*) of the urban settlement. From the end of the 2nd century AD, the decline of this monumentality seems to signal the transformation or re-dimension of urban life from an institutional perspective. Phenomena such as the local political decadence known from later legal compilations could have originated in the progressive appraisal of civic duties as something burdensome, nonessential and only apt for those times of economic bonanza and imperial strength. Between the end of the Antonine and Severan dynasties (c. 180–230), a series of negative circumstances – e.g. court and ideological tensions, plagues, climate change – could have undermined the structural problems of a developed municipal model that required the maintenance of infrastruc-tures, magistracies and other obligations which put local finances under stress as evi-denced in many documents of this period.

Even if this process of deterioration cannot be considered universal – either in the provinces of *Hispania* or, even, in the *Tarraconensis* – archaeological evidence together with some epigraphic and legal notices after the mid-2nd century show a general trans-formation of the urban layout of many municipal communities, particularly those of modest size, suffering from shrinkage, if not crisis and complete abandonment. Many public buildings seem to have lost their *decus* – for example, the *fora* celebrating the grandeur of Rome– there was a progressive privatization of public spaces, programmes of monumentalisation declined sharply, the *custodia viarum* inside the urban centres was largely given up and there was an overall phenomenon of spoliation caused by the challenge to maintain facilities quintessential to Roman urbanism such as sewage and hydraulic systems. Likewise, the ruin or reuse of official sculptural and architectural elements and the regression – sometimes halt – of the epigraphic habit are signs inherent to the phenomenon of 'cities in crisis' or *oppida labentia* that is recorded in diverse an-cient testimonies (see supra), naturally subject to the rhetorical particularities of each genre.

From the fact that this phenomenon cannot be regarded as universal and, even, general, it becomes necessary to avoid simple explanations and single causes. Instead, everything indicates that such issues originated from the combination of the afore-mentioned structural problems of the Roman municipal system in *Hispania* and a se-ries of intervening factors which, since 2011, have been studied by our research group. As a result of these investigations, it is possible to state that there was not just one type of communities that resulted more fragile and subject to deeper transformations of their urban layout. In principle, it would appear that those cities with a lower degree of interconnectivity could be more exposed to such changes. However, there are com-munities whose civic territories were still fundamental for the Roman administration

throughout the 3rd and 4th centuries as shown by the many milestones surviving on the roads. Conversely, the urban splendour of many of these communities could be in ruins with the local elite preferring a more autarchic (although still luxurious) way of life in *villae* and *fundi*. Cities that were financially dependent on a single resource appear to have reacted more acutely to the global transformation of economic trends as recently demonstrated by commercial and *annona* transactions, mining exploitation registers and numismatic studies. Probably, the elite of some communities – already promoted during the Augustan and, particularly, the Flavian periods – began to depart from their smaller *patriae* at a later stage and enrolled in more prestigious imperial careers which could potentially affect local munificence. Finally, some urban centres could not survive the concurrence of other communities that were more able to maintain the public works and level of urbanism reached at the beginning of the imperial period and, in this way, overcome the *infirmitas* and *tenuitas* decried by the epigraphic sources.

This volume is conceived as a continuation of the Spanish book *Oppida labentia: transformaciones, cambios y alteración en las ciudades hispanas entre el siglo II y la tardoantigüedad* (Uncastillo, 2017). It focuses on the signs of urban transformation appearing in the archaeological record of Roman Spain and, particularly, the eastern *Tarraconensis* province with paradigmatic cases such as *Iulia Lybica*, *Sisapo*, *Lucentum* or Los Bañales de Uncastillo that are analysed in the following pages. Other case studies such as those from *Lusitania* and *Baetica* – where the urban crisis appears to be less marked – seek to improve the interpretation of this complex and heterogeneous phenomenon, as previously emphasised. The volume also presents papers on Roman Law, Epigraphy and Ancient History by scholars participating in the research project "De *municipia Latina* a *oppida labentia*: sobre la sostenibilidad económica e institucional del expediente municipal latino en Hispania (siglos I–III d. C.)" funded by the Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad / Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades. Obviously, our work does not aim to bring this discussion to an end but, rather, to enhance indicators of crisis, continuity and change that had largely been overlooked in recent bibliography. As a result of this work and with the assistance of other members of the international scholarly community – as exemplified in the present volume – we intend to explore in the future not only urban deterioration and the amortization of public spaces, but also to improve our understanding of the circumstances that made small and medium-size communities in Roman Spain to engage in such programmes of monumentalisation in the first place.

General issues / Cuestiones generales

Unstable cities:
some questions about Roman urbanism

NICHOLAS PURCELL
(University of Oxford)

'Roman towns': what are we looking at and what do we see? My aim in these pages is to try to ask some questions which go deeper than the familiar, orthodox questions and answers about Roman urban history, and which perhaps might undercut them, or at least prompt new and productive thought.[1] The Roman city is central to how we conceive of the Roman world, and that familiarity inevitably raises problems. Here are three groups into which we might divide some searching questions.

1) What do we see when we see a city?
The features of the city are so well known that they are easy to take for granted: the fabric – streets, houses, temples, public-buildings, shops, city-walls; social categories – memory, identity, hierarchy, continuity, division of labour, social order; institutions – magistrates, laws, assemblies, cults, spectacles. All of these need to be interrogated again, looked at with a new surprise at their distinctive aspects.

2) No city is an island
The city has such a distinctive physical form, and such characteristic social and cultural features within its walls or built-up area, that it is tempting to take it in isolation. A moment's reflection proposes the ensemble of town plus territory as a necessary corrective. But towns are not isolated from each other either, and we need to think about the whole set of towns of which each is a constituent part, whether a set of peers or a hierarchy. What unites the numerous members of the complete set of 'Roman cities' in a region, province, or across the empire?

3) What are cities for?

The functions of cities are likewise easy to take for granted. In whose interests are cities which have the characteristics explored in my first two sections founded and maintained? Above all, what purposes are served by the theories and ideologies of a world composed of cities? How is this reflected in the statuses – and even the names – of Roman cities?

4) You cannot step twice into the same city

Finally, if we aspire to the pursuit of history, we need to ponder how all of this changes over time. The argument of these few pages aims to emphasize the likelihood that permanence, stability and continuity are ideas which we especially associate with cities, and to such an extent that they can have unintended – and uninterrogated – consequences for our agendas and our results as historians. My aim is to suggest some ways in which we might rather look for instabilities in the ancient city in particular – not to advocate abandoning all notions of the enduring qualities of Roman urbanism, but to counterpoint these claims to help us present the orthodox view in a more nuanced and persuasive manner.[2]

What do we mean by 'continuity' in the history of towns? Here again there is a major danger that we are convinced without real questioning by the claims of those who are interested in establishing the antiquity of their own entitlements. I should like to reinstate narratives of change, drawing inspiration from the fluidities we see in the cities of our own times.

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1) What do we see when we see a city?

1.1 The physical, material, tangible urban matrix itself is perhaps stranger and less familiar than we might suppose. All its major categories, the domestic, the monumental, the economic, communications, open space and built environment, need investigation. The balance between them varies over time.

Take, for instance, the significance of the House. Even its constituent materials should not be taken for granted. Roof-tiles had a place of origin – the city of Corinth in the archaic period – and came to stand for the house, as in the charter of the Spanish *colonia* Urso. Bricks and houses had inventors – Euryalus and Hyperbius at Athens, who thus brought to an end the habit of cave-dwelling (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 7.194). Then

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2   I have developed some of these arguments at greater length in N. Purcell, Statics and dynamics: ancient Mediterranean urbanism, in: B. Cunliffe / Osborne, R. (eds.), Mediterranean Urbanization 800–600 B. C., London 2005: 249–272.

we should reflect on the theory by which the house with its hearth was seen as component and microcosm of the city, which also had its hearth. What weight should we give this deeply entrenched mode of thinking at different moments in Antiquity? And roughly equipollent citizen-houses of course speak of ideas of rough parity between the entitled cadre of city-dwellers, a large or small proportion of the population according to the context. All these things are hardly features of all human urban form. They need an explanation, and their changes need to be charted and analysed too.

The main elements of the monumental architecture which also served as a symbol or metonymy for the Roman city were equally peculiar to this culture and worthy of scrutiny. Why temples? Why the monuments of the public life of the political community, or the buildings which accommodated its rewards, the bath-houses, porticoes, or spectacle architecture? How should we explain the genesis and history of the dichotomy between public and private domains?[3]

The buildings of the economy, for craft-production, storage, or retail, all equally betokened very specific social relations and distributions of wealth, as well as reflecting practices of labour and consumption which were historically distinctive too. Even the streets of Roman cities are not obvious in their design and functioning, as has been shown by a surge in scholarly interest over the last few years.[4]

1.2 The inhabited city.

An ancient commonplace insisted that instead of the physical materiality of the city, it was the people who made it. The maxim manifested itself in various forms, from the end of the 7th century BC to late Antiquity, when Isidore of Seville (15.2.1) wrote *civitas autem non saxa sed habitatores vocantur … hominum multitudo societatis vinculo adunata*. Formulations variously emphasized the fortifications or the monumental public domain, contrasting them with various formulations for the 'people' – 'adult (citizen) men' in the early Greek cases, 'human beings' later, as in Isidore. To begin with, and paradoxically, the idea matters precisely because it displays the appeal, in Antiquity as to us today, of seeing the city as first and foremost its architecture and built environment.[5]

The social relations of the ancient city, the 'chains of community', should indeed be recognised as a real alternative to the architectural carapace, when we seek the reality

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3   cf. A. Zaccaria Ruggiu, Spazio privato e spazio pubblico nella città romana, Rome 1995.
4   See J. Hartnett, The Roman Street: urban life and society in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Rome, New York 2017; P. Ballet / Dieudonné-Glad, N. / Saliou, C., La rue dans l'antiquité: définition, aménagement et devenir de l'orient méditerranéen à la Gaule, Rennes 2008; B. Gruet, La rue à Rome, miroir de la ville, Paris 2006.
5   The most famous example is Thuc. 7.77.7, but the idea first appears at Alcaeus F 22.

of the city. Towns are processes, patterns of social and economic interaction, which may be located in, but are not co-extensive with, the densely built-up physical place which often forms their core. A necessary question which we ask too rarely, about ancient as about modern urban fabrics, is 'Who owns it?' Who is entitled in what way to make what kinds of decision about urban space and what happens there? What mobilisations does such entitlement make possible? This means mobilisation in the sense both of making mobile, causing to move, of people, but also the movements of all the other things and goods which make urban systems viable.

The structures of permanence are not only different from the human realities of cities, but may even be at odds with them, since they are, like all human transactions, essentially vulnerable and ephemeral. In particular, movement and communications exacerbate all the mutabilities of life-cycle and family formation.[6] The social city is a snapshot, a movie still, of the whirling universe of human displacement and journeying. This can be illustrated with two eloquent passages from the early Roman imperial period.

1.3 Strabo and Seneca

The Augustan geographer Strabo writes (*Geography* 4.1.12):

> Now the metropolis of the Arecomisci is Nemausus [Nîmes]. Although it falls well short of Narbo [the *colonia* of Narbonne] in its crowded population of outsiders and of merchants, Nemausus surpasses Narbo in the number of citizens. It has attributed to it twenty-four villages, which are exceptional in their abundance of men who form part of the citizen body of Nemausus, and assessed with it for purposes of taxation.

Here we see two complementary vignettes of Roman provincial cities. In the case of Nemausus, the city is indeed people, not walls, a people which goes far beyond a single city and its own territory, because it has been founded as the centre for mobilising the resources of a large number of dependent settlements, whose free-born inhabitants are citizens of the capital of the whole, Nemausus. Strabo clearly sees how different this stable but populous case is from the port-city Narbo, where the density of the population of the urban core is to be attributed to visitors pursuing economic or political purposes in a city which is a regional centre, as the capital of the Roman province of Narbonensis.

Two generations later, Nero's advisor, the philosopher Seneca, picks up the theme of the outsider population of cities in the empire of his time (*Consolatio ad Helviam* 6.2–5):

> Consider the abundance of population which the buildings of this gigantic City can scarcely contain – the greater part of this crowd has no fatherland … Some have come to put their beauty on sale, some their eloquence. There is no people that does not rush to

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6   See R. Laurence / Newsome, D. J., Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: movement and space, Oxford 2011.

Rome, which pays high prices for virtues and vices alike. Get all these folk to a roll-call, and at each name ask 'where's your home?' You'll find that the majority have abandoned their home and come to a city which, though very large and very lovely, is not theirs. Now leave this community which can, after all, be seen as common to all, go round all the cities – there is not one in which a great part of the population is not foreign. Move on from those whose convenient location or advantageous hinterland attracts large scale immigration, to remote places and the roughest islands … what could be found as barren as this rock, what so precipitous all round, what more meagre in subsistence, what less hospitable to human life, what more appalling to look at, what less equable in climate? And yet here too the community is composed more of outsiders than native citizens. So slight a problem is the changing of places that even this spot has enticed some people away from their fatherland.

For Seneca, Rome the imperial cosmopolis is the ultimate example of the processes which Strabo saw at work at Narbo. But he could maintain – without risking incredulity in his readers – that a significant level of mobility lay behind the populations of every city, however inaccessible and undistinguished. The Roman city, then, is a paroxysm in a geography and sociology of movement. Looking at the city entails seeing not just a population which belongs there, but assessing the origins and destinations of all those who are on the move through it. That means in turn that we should never seek to examine cities in isolation, which brings me to section 2.

2) No city is an island

2.1 The first respect in which the urban nucleus demands a wider setting is, of course, its territory.[7] It is not so much that the populace of the city controls or rules a separable countryside, as that the people of the city belong as much in the wider landscape as in the built environment, and the country is as much the stage of their activities as the urban core. The separation is in a sense arbitrary, schematic and provisional.[8] Ancient observers took nucleation of an urban core for granted, but were capable of recognising that a dispersed settlement pattern was not essentially different in kind. Thus Tacitus distinguishes Roman and German settlement patterns (*Germ.* 16.2): 'they do not establish settlements in our manner, with buildings joined together and continuous

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7   See J. Dubouloz, Territoire et patrimoine urbains des cités romaines d'Occident (Ier siècle avant J.-C. – IIIe siècle après J.-C.). Essai de configuration juridique, MEFRA 115 (2003), 921–957.

8   This was argued forcefully long ago by P. Abrams 'Introduction', in: P. Abrams / Wrigley, E. A. (eds.), Towns in Societies: Essays in Economic History and Historical Sociology, Cambridge 1978: 2–3; casting doubt on the historical usefulness of the 'autonomous urban reality'. Peregrine Horden and I adopted this viewpoint in The corrupting sea: a study of Mediterranean history, Oxford 2000: 96–105, 115–122.