

Urbanization Before Cities: Lessons for Social Theory from the Evolution of Cities

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the world-system in the structure of cities. Data from the evolution of cities in the Fertile Crescent shows that a number of traits of modern cities were also present in the earliest cities. Specifically, mass production, social differentiation and inequality, cultural mechanisms utilized for social control, and a tendency – even a need – for territorial expansion were all characteristic of ancient cities. Such characteristics of cities are rooted in the process of urbanization, understood here as the creation and maintenance of networks of economic and cultural exchange amongst communities in disparate regions. Cities are understood as “nodes” in this system of exchange. It is argued that urbanization predates cities by thousands of years, and that the social dynamics arising from urbanization must be teased out of the data in order to understand cities better.

Outside the tradition of world-systems research (e.g., Braudel 1977; Kohl 1992; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997), studies of modern cities often present a historical context that stretches back perhaps one-to-two hundred years (e.g., Taylor 2002; Davis 1990; Zukin 1991; Thomas 2003) or present barely any at all (e.g., Wilson 1987). This state of affairs is often appropriate to the aims of urban studies, particularly in its emphasis on modern societies and on current social policy. The cumulative effect, however, is a tendency to de-historicize the city in its deep context as a social form evolved over thousands of years. The result is that the scientific study of urbanization is impeded by a modern bias.

A world-systems approach to the study of urban evolution would analyze ancient cities in a manner similar to modern cities: as located within a broad network of economic and cultural exchange. As discussed below, the city is an outgrowth, rather than a cause, of such an emergent world-system. This observation explains some of the features of modern cities that are also found in ancient cities of the Fertile Crescent, such as the existence of the network itself, mass production, social stratification, hegemonic means of social control, and the expansion, indeed the emergence, of the state. This paper examines the lessons for modern urban theory that can be gleaned from a study of ancient cities and world-systems.

Defining the City

As a feature that is so central to modern life as the city might be expected to have a precise scientific definition, the treatment of the city is disappointing. In terms of practicality, governments across the world have attempted to define cities in terms of population. In the United States, for example, an urban place is defined as a settlement with at least 2,500 residents (Federal Register 2010). This rather generous definition results in thousands of “cities,” a state of affairs that most social scientists find unconvincing. As size alone does not appear to explain the features of the city, social scientists have utilized a variety of approaches in defining the city and urbanization.

An early approach to defining the city and urbanization was that of cultural opposition. Tonnies (1963 [1887]) viewed the rise of the city in Europe as being accompanied by a major shift in social life. According to Tonnies, rural society (*gemeinschaft*) was characterized by close-knit social relations with high social control, in contrast to a form of anonymity and the lack of social ties found in the emerging cities (*gesellschaft*). For Georg Simmel (1964 [1905]), the effects of city life were so deleterious that serious mental disorder was considered a real possibility without the comforts of village life and society. Simmel did see in this shift, however, an emancipatory potential as primarily rural residents were freed from age-old patterns of status hierarchies and loyalties. These former forms of domination were replaced by impersonal characteristics. Instead of social relations built up over time, first impressions became more a prominent feature of social life, influencing, for instance, fashion. The pinnacle of such impersonalism in public life was the use of money. Indeed, Simmel portrayed such themes – similar to Durkheim’s concept of anomie (1997 [1933]) and Weber’s (1978) Iron Cage of Rationalism – as outgrowths of urbanization and city life itself.

The city was thus defined in relation to the country, and this was functional but also problematic. Perhaps one of the best attempts to define the city was by Louis Wirth (1938), who defined the city, “as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals” (8). Few social scientists today would argue that the size, density, and heterogeneity

of a settlement define the city. The definition remains problematic, however, as the precise measure remains unmentioned: how dense, or large, must a settlement be? Indeed, how should we define “dense” and “large?” This issue has been avoided through reference to an urban-rural continuum, although research at the time failed to show as compelling a contrast as the early scholars believed (see Dewey 1960; Pahl 1966).

Another approach to defining the city is in relation to other types of communities while avoiding the distinction of cultural measures that may be summarized as “triggers.” In this approach the diversity of places is acknowledged, and the city is differentiated from other types of settlements (towns, villages, etc.) through a system of triggers that establish the place as a city. Max Weber (1921), for example, established the following criteria for a city:

- 1) the presence of fortifications;
- 2) the presence of markets;
- 3) a court system and laws;
- 4) a sense of citizenship; and
- 5) some level of political autonomy.

Weber meant the model to be an ideal type and thus some variation was expected. Nonetheless, his contrast between the “occidental” and the “oriental” city was based on the supposed failure of the oriental city to develop a sense of citizenship in the city separate from that of the state; in other words, not sufficiently triggering all the criteria. The model has not held up to more recent research: ancient Near Eastern (oriental) cities were more democratic than realized by Weber (see van de Mieroop 1999).

Another trigger system was proposed by V. Gordon Childe (1950) in regard to ancient cities. The criteria included (see also Kleniewski and Thomas 2011):

- 1) Early cities were, in relation to neighboring communities, geographically and demographically larger;
- 2) Early cities exhibited a division of labor that includes individuals who do not work the fields for their own sustenance, such as priests and administrators;
- 3) Each producer granted the agricultural surplus to a ruling elite through tax or tithe;
- 4) Early cities contained monumental buildings;
- 5) Cities were characterized by social stratification, including a ruling class;
- 6) The culture included writing and numbers;
- 7) Cities were home to predictive sciences;
- 8) There was a developed artisan class;
- 9) Cities were part of a long-distance trade network; and
- 10) Citizens were interdependent upon each other economically.

A reading of the two sets of criteria reveals that Weber and Childe had different ideas of how and when a settlement achieved the status of “city.” For Weber, the medieval European city was the model, whereas for Childe the Near Eastern city was acceptable. For our purposes, the differing triggers point to differing definitions of the city and, as such, point to the problem of defining the city.

It is useful to understand the city in relation to the hinterland: the city is larger physically and demographically than rural towns and villages, and in most cases is densely populated as

well, although it should be noted that density has decreased in many American metropolitan areas due to the rise of the suburbs based on the automobile. Cities are also heterogeneous, including a variety of social classes, ethnic and racial groups, and other populations. By stressing the relative nature of the definition and avoiding specific criteria (e.g., a population limit), it is possible to compare differing urban societies. In other words, even though Uruk in the third millennium BCE had only fifty thousand residents, it is possible to acknowledge the similar role the city played to that of first millennium CE Rome with a million residents. For this reason the trigger approach is also useful because it stresses the functions performed by the city for the wider society. Both approaches to defining the city are, however, limited by their inability to account for the full variation of places in between: as dichotomies between “city” and “country,” “urban” and “rural,” and even “occidental” and “oriental” are central to these definitions, the interested researcher is drawn, even if unintentionally, to the ideal types themselves.

Economic approaches to explaining the city have allowed for more variation in size and function. Karl Marx (1990 [1867]) viewed ancient cities as having been supported by slave labor, itself constituting a “stage” in the progressive development of humanity, but also recognized the dislocations found throughout the European countryside during the nineteenth century as having been caused by the shift to capitalist accumulation. Capitalist development was dependent upon and a cause of mass production as the bourgeoisie sought to accumulate increasingly high profits. This dynamic led to and was based upon the influx of new workers who, in effect, flooded the labor market, driving wages down and increasing profit margins for the factory owners. His compatriot and benefactor Friedrich Engels (1958) noted that cities were arranged in such a way that the working classes lived near their sources of employment but also hidden from the upper classes, relegated to the smallest streets away from the wider public. The class conflict and exploitation of workers relegated them to low-income districts of the city, and most modern sociologists see this process of class segregation as related to racial and ethnic segregation as well. The role of capitalism is central to Wallerstein’s (1974) understanding of the development of the modern world-system.

In a similar manner, Pirenne (1925) argued that medieval European cities developed because of, and in turn influenced more, trade. While limiting himself to medieval Europe, the influence of this work has been to see cities performing economic functions, even before the rise of industrial capitalism.

Sjoberg (1955; 1960) emphasized the role of technology in the ability of a city to industrialize, ultimately influencing (and influenced by) other social structures such as family, social class, and politics. Sjoberg avoided the pitfalls of previous comparative work by not suggesting triggers: the work is primarily descriptive and assumes the legitimacy of defining such cities as cities. The work primarily suffered from a tendency to over-generalize. The preindustrial city was compared to the industrial city, and as such diverse city forms including modern cities in the developing world and cities in the ancient world were lumped together, although he did distinguish from region to region (Sjoberg 1960).

A similar approach to classification, although dealing with American cities, was that of David Gordon (1978). Gordon classified cities into those characterized by economic function and time period. Cities from the time of European settlement to the Industrial Revolution were characterized as commercial cities (1620-1850). Industrial cities were marked by manufacturing from about 1850 through 1920, after which corporate cities became the norm.

Each of these approaches to defining cities and urbanization shares the same limitations. While emphasizing the city in relation to other settlements is important, sacrificed is an

empirically verifiable approach to defining the city. The city is assumed to exist because the largest settlements are called “cities.” In the middle of the urban-rural continuum, however, are numerous settlements that satisfy some but not all of the criteria for “city” status in a given society but not all – this makes comparative and historical research extremely difficult. In order for comparative work to be meaningful, a definition of the city that incorporates lessons from world-systems theory is preferable.

A World-Systems Approach to Urbanization

Given helpful but ultimately unsatisfactory definitions of the city, world-systems theory can further illuminate the nature of the city and urbanization. In practice, most urban sociologists have been able to work with the existing definitions of the city because the presence of cities has been taken for granted, and issues of origins have been relegated to other disciplines such as history and archaeology. Although history has long been an important component of urban studies (see Harris and Smith 2011), a recent article in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* suggested that urban studies as a field was rooted in concerns of the present (Bowen et al. 2010). Like world-systems analysis, urban studies is heavily interdisciplinary in nature, and like world-systems analysis would benefit from a sense of the *longue durée* (see Braudel 1982). This includes lessons from archaeology and the origins of cities (Peregrine 2000). Nevertheless, urban sociology, particularly that of the political economy school, has adopted perspectives complimentary of world-systems theory.

Contemporary urban sociology has been increasingly moving toward a view of cities as part of a “hierarchical global system” based upon competitive capitalism (Smith 1995). This view had been central to that of the political economy paradigm as it developed during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and is a central assumption of the “Los Angeles school” as well (see, for instance, Zukin 1991; Dear and Flusty 1998; Soja 2000). Weber (1966), too, saw cities as part of a larger network as he defined the city as those communities having a prominent place in such networks. Recent scholarship has discussed the importance of major cities to the creation and maintenance of such systems (see Smith 1995; Sassen 2001, 2002; Abrahamson 2004). The nature of such global systems has even spread into prominent debate within Mesopotamian studies as such scholars as Algaze (1989, 1993) and others have argued for a fourth millennium BCE global system based in southern Mesopotamia (specifically on Uruk), with a periphery extending into western Iran and as far north as southern Turkey. Others have questioned the appropriateness of this analogy (Joffe 1994; see also the readings in Rothman 2001 for a discussion). Frank and Gills (1996) have argued for a single global system dating to this period.

The influence of world-systems theory on the understanding of modern cities has been considerable. The view that cities are part of a network of cities was not necessarily new (see Smith 1996), but the idea gained momentum during the 1980s and 1990s. As summarized by Beaverstock et al. (2000):

Historically, cities have always existed in environments of linkages, both material flows and information transfers. They have acted as centers from where their hinterlands are serviced and connected to wider realms. This is reflected in how economic geographers have treated economic sectors: primary and secondary activities are typically mapped as formal agricultural or industrial regions, tertiary activities as functional regions, epitomized by central-place theory. Why is our concern for contemporary cities in a

world of flows any different from this previous tertiary activity and its study? First, the twentieth century has witnessed a remarkable sectoral turnabout in advanced economies: originally defined by their manufacturing industry, economic growth has become increasingly dependent on service industries. Second, this trend has been massively augmented by more recent developments in information technology that has enabled service and control to operate not only more rapidly and effectively, but crucially on a global scale. (123)

In other words, the existence of a global network of cities became more significant with advances in communications and transportation technologies that created a global division of labor (Henderson and Castells 1987; Smith and Feagin 1987). The idea was that corporations organize production from their headquarters in world cities, the three most important of which are New York, London, and Tokyo (Friedman 1986; Sassen 1991). By the 1990s the approach in urban sociology was to analyze those relations using variants of social network analysis. Smith and Timberlake (1995) proposed that a network analysis framework could illuminate the working of the world-system through economic, cultural, political, and spatial linkages (see also Smith 1996). World-systems analysis has added to this literature three major insights: 1) the influence of place on economic development; 2) the utility of a wider ecological approach; and 3) the importance of historical development and context.

The importance of a nation's position in the global political economy has strongly influenced its potential for future economic growth. In his seminal works, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989) showed the evolution of the capitalist world economy as one of vertical integration of nations within the core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Snyder and Kick (1979) empirically demonstrated this three-tiered system, and subsequent work has largely drawn similar conclusions (Kick and Davis 2001; Clark and Beckfield 2009). As the fate of individual cities is tied to those of nations, this line of world-systems research is directly applicable to cities (Walton 1976).

A world-systems approach also ties the functioning of the global city system to ecological destruction. Urbanization itself, and its correlates with the position of the city within the world system, has been shown to predict the level of biodiversity loss and its accompanying effects of worsening health and food security (McKinney et al. 2010). Boone and Modarres (2006) show how the morphology of the city – the increases in population and resultant stress on farmland and natural resources – results in the degradation of the environment (see also Hornborg 2006). Chew (2000) showed how this demand for resources and the resulting long-range trade spreads this degradation over a wide region. The environmental degradation associated with urbanization and the increasing demand for resources forced social changes and increased pressure in a dialectical fashion. For instance, increasing agricultural yields in Europe created pressure for colonization which then in turn created more pressure for social change and increased uneven development (Jorgenson 2006).

Development has been concentrated in cities, whereas the hinterlands have been sites of resource extraction (Chase-Dunn et al. 2005). Near the city the trade network for bulk-goods is considerable, but as one leaves the core other networks become prevalent: information travels the farthest and is thus the most far-reaching network emanating from the core, and the network for trade in luxury goods is also relatively large. In a given city information and luxury goods often come from great distance, whereas bulk goods have historically been more likely to be produced locally (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). At the frontier of the city's influence the periphery is

contested. The drive for resources has not only ecological consequences but social as well: as discussed below, it is responsible for the earliest evidence for war in Mesoamerica (Flannery and Marcus 2003), Syria (Ur 2002), and southern Mesopotamia (Dalley 2000).

The location of cities within the larger ecological framework provides a link between world-systems theory and a more broadly “evolutionary” sociology. For instance, Lenski (1966, 2005) places human society squarely within the larger framework of “nature,” and in so doing presents such macrosociological phenomena as power, technology, and change. Like other species, human populations must interact with the environment and in turn influence it themselves – when population increases beyond carrying capacity it must come down somehow (Jorgenson 2006). The growth of cities can thus be understood as a technological innovation meant to increase production necessary to survival and defend against rivals (Chew 2000; Boone and Modarres 2006). Massey (2005) noted that life in cities is not “natural” given the previous course of human evolution in small groups.

Perhaps the greater gift of world-systems analysis to an understanding of cities is the deep historical perspective. Although early works (e.g., Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989; Braudel 1977, 1982) concentrated on the making of the capitalist world-system, the perspective has increasingly pursued a radically historical-comparative lens. Indeed, related work in world-systems allows for pre-capitalist world-systems that were based on the urban economy and political structures (Braudel 1977; Kohl 1992; Algaze 1993; Kardulias 1996; van de Mierop 1999). Chase-Dunn and Hall (1997) examined thousands of years and multiple societies, for instance, even allowing for world-systems of hunter-gatherers. Both Chew (2000) and Boone and Modarres (2006) start their analyses with the rise of cities in Mesopotamia. Chase-Dunn et al. (2005) examine the relationship between empires and cities between 1200 BCE and the present. Algaze (1993) has demonstrated the existence of a world-system in the fourth to third millennium BCE in Mesopotamia, and Frank and Gills (1996) have argued that the current world-system is ultimately rooted in this early system. Abu-Lughod (1989) and Mielants (2005) have examined the European system during the pre-capitalist Middle Ages. On the basis of a deep historical approach, Thomas (2010) argued that the state arose because of the city, in stark contrast to earlier sociologists such as Weber (1921) and Pirenne (1925).

As was suggested by Childe (1950), it can be inferred from the world-systems literature that a world-system is necessary for the functioning of the city. Indeed, a world-system is a necessary pre-requisite of cities as it allows for a diversity of products to be brought to one place (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Thomas 2010). As the system is necessary for the functioning of the city, it follows that the system must pre-date the formation of cities (see below; also Blessy et al. 2005; McCorrison 1992). Although it has been common among social scientists to state that urbanization is a consequence of cities, given the empirical difficulties of defining “city” it is more accurate to see all cities as the result of urbanization, or the rise of the “urban” world system prior to the formation of what most social scientists would call cities.

This definition obviously accounts for the current alignment of the global economy, but also considers the Uruk world-system of the fourth millennium BCE and many other ancient systems (see Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). To account for such “non-global” systems, we might consider the term “urban system.” In contrast, a city is a particular locale where economies of scale and agglomeration based upon a differentially large population for a region exists. Such locales function as “attractor points” within the system, bringing resources and talent to a place that grows dynamically as a result (Thomas 2010). From this perspective, cities are nodes in a wider social network, and often differentiated from one another by the particular role each plays

in the network (Sassen 2001). Another benefit of this approach – that the development of the world-system that lead to cities be understood as urbanization, with cities resulting from the functioning of this system – is to provide a way of distinguishing between world-systems as they existed prior to sedentary communities and those that came into existence after sedentism (see Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997).

If we understand urbanization and the city in this way, then there are several features of modern cities discussed by scholars that have analogs in ancient cities. Evidence for such features of cities found in non-capitalistic settings is evidence that these features are not specific to capitalist or modern economies, but are more likely the result of the process of urbanization itself. Such phenomena include networks of cities we may call urban systems, mass production, social stratification, ideologies of cultural hegemony, and the impetus for expansion of the system. In other words, from this perspective urbanization does in fact pre-date cities.

Modern Phenomena?

Many of the phenomena found in modern urban systems have been found in the past as well. This paper examines such phenomena primarily through the archaeological record of the Fertile Crescent, the first place in the world where urban systems arose, with some contrasting material from other regions as well.

Networked Communities

In a sense, one of the great “discoveries” of the past generation in urban studies has been the great social network we call the “global system” (see Abu-Lughod 2000; Soja 2000; Sassen 2001, 2002; Abrahamson 2004; Harvey 2006). Contemporary scholars have described a phenomenon in which relations of trade, cultural influence, and power are distributed throughout a complex network of social relations with cities acting as nodes in the system (Sassen 2002). At the “top” of the system, global cities function as administrative centers and magnets of global capital (Abu-Lughod 2000; Sassen 2001). In the United States, such cities as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago come immediately to mind, but it should be noted that there are similar cities throughout the world, such as Shanghai, Mumbai, and Rio de Janeiro.

Although much of the research literature has stressed the role of global cities (e.g., Abu-Lughod 2000; Sassen 2001), a number of studies have examined those places lower in the hierarchy. For instance, Zukin (1991) examined not only large cities but smaller industrial cities such as Youngstown, Ohio and Weirton, West Virginia in her study of the postmodern urban landscape, finding that such cities experience the post-industrial world differently than larger cities (Zukin 1991). In her study of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Nash (1989) found that the major impact of globalization was deindustrialization as local multinational firms found it practical to close local facilities and move them to distant locales, both national and international. Similarly, Thomas (2003) found that the fortunes of Utica, New York, were heavily influenced by the ability of global capital to 1) move much of the local textile industry to the American south during the 1950s, and 2) move much of the high technology sector to other countries during the 1980s and 1990s. Rabrenovic (1996) similarly found that the position of a city in the global political economy influenced its ability to revitalize. She found that neighborhoods in Albany, a

healthy service sector city, had advantages over similar neighborhoods (adjusted for race and social class) in Schenectady, a manufacturing city.

In parts of the global economy some social distance from the centers of power, the fate of communities is still intrinsically tied to global elites even if the dominant ideologies bespeak a desire for independence. Within core countries this effect is found in rural communities. Fitchen (1991) distinguished between “truly rural” communities and those slightly more integrated with the global system, betraying a distinction between those communities that are considered unimportant to the system and those ignored altogether. In her study of a newly founded mining community, Tauxe (1993) found that administrative elites moving to the community were attracted to newly-built suburban-like subdivisions that “local” residents could not afford. Davidson (1996) found that many rural communities have suffered so much through deindustrialization and the restructuring of agriculture that they are becoming “rural ghettos” (see also Duncan 2000).

In the developing world, a city’s ultimate economic fate rests on the position of its country in the global political economy (Walton 1976; Snyder and Kick 1979). Cities in the developing world are nodes of intersection for the global political economy and the countryside, often attracting global corporations intent on taking advantage of “emerging markets” (Smith 1996). The result is a dramatic rural-to-urban migration as formerly agrarian villagers move to the cities in search of employment, often landing in urban slums in rapidly growing cities (Neuwirth 2006; Davis 2007). Nevertheless, such patterns of urbanization are subject to the specific historical context unique to each city and country; in other words, the experience of urbanization in a city in Nigeria is not the same as that of a city in South Korea, regardless of similarities in the country’s position in the global political economy (Smith 1996).

Much analysis of the modern world-system has, not surprisingly, concentrated on the capitalist world-system (see Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989; Harvey 2006). Research on other time periods has also found evidence for world-systems prior to the advent of capitalism, even in relatively egalitarian settings (Braudel 1977; Kohl 1992; Algaze 1993; Frank and Gills 1996; Kardulias 1996; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). In the Fertile Crescent, networks of communities based on trade and cultural exchange are attested as early as the sixth millennium BCE, two thousand years before the rise of the Uruk system in southern Mesopotamia (Oates 1993; Blessy et al. 2005). The cultural tradition known as the Halaf was spread from areas in northern Iraq and Syria (northern Mesopotamia) as far west as the Mediterranean Sea (McCorriston 1992; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003). Identified primarily by Halaf pottery, Halafian communities also shared a common stone tool kit and agricultural regimes, as well as interdependence with semi-nomadic herders of goats and sheep (Schwartz 1994; see also Kradin 2002). At about the same time, the Samarra “culture” overlapped with the Halaf in its eastern regions and spread to the east of Halaf territory (Maisels 1990). The Samarra culture was similarly marked by a reliance of its towns on a settled agriculture and trade with semi-nomadic herders. In both regions, the larger towns could reach perhaps five to ten thousand in population, and these towns typically had a small network of local hamlets with which they traded and perhaps served central place functions (Maisels 1990; Pollock 1999). In this context, central place functions would likely have been limited to trade activities with distant places via semi-nomadic populations and religious functions. Indeed, these larger towns typically featured religious sanctuaries that were the forerunners to the ancient Near Eastern temple system.

It was this network of trade that allowed for an expansion of the Samarra culture into the southern half of Mesopotamia during the sixth millennium BCE (McCorriston 1992; Zeder

1994). Unlike northern Mesopotamia, where rainfall was plentiful enough to support dry farming and sheep and goat herding in the mountains, southern Mesopotamia is characterized by large expanses of desert interspersed by fertile swaths surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A lowland alluvial plain, southern Mesopotamia had quite fertile soil, and the introduction of irrigation techniques made agriculture possible. Simple irrigation began during the sixth millennium BCE, became more complex during the Ubaid culture of the fifth millennium BCE, and achieved its full flourishing during the Uruk period when the first “true” cities developed (Nissan 1988; Pollock 1999). Nonetheless, even with the increasingly sophisticated agricultural regimes, southern Mesopotamia remained dependent upon trade for the importation of certain resources such as wood and some foods (McCorrison 1992). As with agriculture, this trade system grew more complex from the Samarra culture, through the Ubaid culture, and into the Uruk period when the system resembled in many respects a modern global system (Algaze 1993). Population grew with these changes, and the largest towns contained perhaps ten thousand residents during the Ubaid period (fifth millennium BCE) and up to fifty thousand in Uruk at the end of the fourth millennium BCE. However, the vast majority of settlements contained perhaps a few hundred to a thousand residents (Pollock 1999).

A similar state of affairs existed in the American southwest between 900 and 1200 CE (Dickson 1975; Lekson 2009). The Chaco Canyon civilization was, like the Samarra and Halaf cultures, based on agriculture. In Chaco Canyon, a cultural area spread over 120 miles of New Mexico and adjoining states, ancestors of modern Puebloan Indians built a series of large towns in the forms of pueblos, or great houses, that were home for up to five thousand residents (Stuart 2000; Fagan 2005). As in Mesopotamia, however, the majority of settlements contained only a few hundred residents of farmers. The inhabitants built a complex road system and a system of communications centers utilizing smoke (daytime) and fires (at night), and these aided both trade and defense (Stuart 2000). Unlike in Mesopotamia, however, the society of Chaco Canyon did not become an urban society in the sense of the Uruk civilization. It suffered an environmental catastrophe as the regional climate dried, and the survivors became the modern Puebloan cultures (Stuart 2000; see also Boone and Modarres 2006). Nevertheless, we can suggest that Chaco Canyon exhibits urbanization without the rise of cities, a condition similar to the Ubaid period in Mesopotamia during the fifth millennium BCE.

There were in both cases advantages to the growth of a system of communities interacting in trade and other forms of exchange. First and foremost, the development of the urban system spread the risk of agriculture across a wider area. In contrast to hunting and gathering societies, agricultural societies cannot leave their region in hope of finding more abundant resources elsewhere; in case of environmental desiccation, agricultural societies need trade to bring resources from places where conditions are not so bad. In the cases of southern Mesopotamia prior to the Uruk period (fourth millennium BCE) and at Chaco Canyon, political power for the emerging elite was based on the control of food production in the name of serving the community. At Chaco Canyon, for instance, food and other resources were brought to the great houses and redistributed in public ceremonies, with the emphasis being on the integration of the community (Earle 1987; see also Durkheim 1965). In Mesopotamia during the Ubaid Period, the increasing power of the temple as a mechanism for social integration and economic redistribution were central to the social structure and increasing social inequality (Maisels 1990). Along with new possibilities, the rise of the urban system in agricultural societies also increased the possibility of war. For instance, during the Samarra period in Mesopotamia the first evidence of defensive walls, most likely used against animals, is followed by increasingly sophisticated

walls throughout the Ubaid and Uruk periods. The sequence comes to full flourish during the Uruk period when in about 3500 BCE a complex wall at Hamoukar in northern Mesopotamia was breached, its pottery assemblage ominously changing from the local to the foreign Uruk assemblage immediately afterward – the first good evidence of a war of conquest in the region (Ur 2002). Urbanization is tied to the rise of war in Mesoamerica as well (Flannery and Marcus 2003).

Mass Production

Mass production is widely seen as an economic advance, but within an evolutionary context it must be understood as a cognitive and conceptual advance as well. In this sense, the roots of mass production are not found in the manufacturing sector, but rather earlier. As early as the ninth millennium BCE at Mureybet in Syria, small seals were designed to be impressed in wet clay and thus mark an object as belonging to the owner (Schmandt-Besserat 1996; Cauvin 2000). The advantage of such a system is a uniformity of seal impression over multiple uses, a technology updated by the fourth millennium BCE at Uruk sites with the cylinder seal capable of complex and repetitive designs. Such seals were used as forms of communication, and served as the forerunner to the cuneiform writing system of Mesopotamia – the first such system in the world (Schmandt-Besserat 1996). The significance of this cognitive innovation was to “mass produce” the insignia of the owner, and we can be assured that although mass production in terms of manufacturing was not yet found the concept was understood.

We see this concept of mass production in use during the formative period of the fifth millennium BCE known as the Ubaid period. The Ubaid culture evolved from the Samarra culture as it worked its way into the southern alluvial plains of Mesopotamia and adapted to this new, harsher environment. We see the concept of mass production put to use primarily when there was a reason for doing so, and in the case of the Ubaid period this was the complex needs involved with food production. The Samarra culture had been using small scale irrigation techniques as it worked its way south, and one aspect of the emerging Ubaid culture was an intensification of those techniques and the development of social organization such intensification required (Pollock 1999; Liverani 2006). During the Ubaid period and into the following Uruk period, the temple became increasingly important to the organization of agriculture. The temple would have been involved in organizing the labor required for digging and maintaining canals, for such tasks as plowing, planting, and harvesting crops, and for the eventual redistribution of food (Sterba 1976). With an eye toward efficiency, we see a shift from short furrows in fields, more advantageous for smaller planters, to long furrows that were better suited to larger operations and the efficient use of available water (Liverani 2006).

In terms of manufacturing, we again see a shift to mass production in response to a need. Although Sjoberg (1960) stated that “manufacturing in the preindustrial city is a small-scale undertaking...,” more recent archaeological evidence has since shown a level of mass production previously unknown (van de Mierop 1999; see also Ward-Perkins 2006). This can be seen in examining the role of mass production in its broader economic context. In the case of agriculture, by the beginning of the Uruk period (during which cities developed) there arose a need for increasing quantification of food rations. As Weber (1978) noted, such a move toward rationalization occurs as organizations (in this case, a society) become more complex and bureaucratized. In the case of food rations, this involved a standardized unit as manifest in the “beveled rim bowl.” In later years, the pictograph for the beveled rim bowl would become the

cuneiform inscription for “ration,” but beyond its role in the distribution of resources and the general bureaucratization of Mesopotamian society, the beveled rim bowl is also notable for its sheer ubiquity. It was mass produced with an eye toward disposability, and as such has been found throughout the region in a variety of contexts: in temples, households, and even scattered throughout agricultural fields (Pollock 1999). Unlike the elaborate pottery of the Ubaid period, the Uruk pottery in general seems to have been mass produced at a generally lower level of quality with rougher features and a lack of decorative detail.

Mesopotamian cities after the Uruk period were also characterized by entire neighborhoods devoted to particular manufacturing activities (van de Mieroop 1999). While not all such activities necessarily involved mass production in a modern sense, the clustering of such activities suggests knowledge of city planning; for instance, certain activities, such as leather tanning, were relegated to outside of the city wall and downwind of the city itself (van de Mieroop 1999). Specific neighborhoods involved in such activities as tanning, pottery production, and metallurgy may also have been home to specific ethnic groups involved in their manufacture (Sjoberg 1955, 1960). Even lacking Fordist modes of production, such manufacturing neighborhoods would have benefitted from the economies of scale and agglomeration that characterize similar neighborhoods in modern contexts.

In the comparatively less urbanized western flank of the Fertile Crescent known as Canaan, middle and late Bronze Age cities were often little more than administrative centers in city-states with specialized production facilities for wine, olive oil, and or metallurgy (Tubb 1998). We nonetheless see production of such items for trade on a massive scale. For instance, at Tell es-Sadaiyah and other sites, large presses used in the production of olive oil have been found in an industrial context capable of producing a significant surplus of trade goods (Tubb 1998).

Social Stratification and Differentiation

In his seminal work on cities, V. Gordon Childe (1950) specified that cities had a broad division of labor and hardened social classes, explicitly stating that the city could not exist without social class. In ancient Mesopotamia social class was not merely a function of economic fortune. The basic organizing principle of these early cities was the *oikos*, an economic and social unit that used the metaphor of the family and kinship as a way to organize a disparate array of people into a cohesive unit (Maisels 1990; Gelb et al. 1991; van de Mieroop 1999). One is tempted to suggest the corporation as a modern equivalent, but the lack of reciprocal social responsibility and the division between corporate (work) and domestic (home) activities disqualifies such a comparison. A more apt modern analogue may be the syndicate, with its lack of kinship but higher standard of social responsibility. To understand social stratification in the ancient city, an understanding of its development within the context of the *oikos* is essential.

The *oikos* was descended from the household of earlier, that is, Samarra and early Ubaid, times. It appears to have been the primary mechanism for organizing production and other social functions, a rudimentary gender-based division of labor translating into differing but not necessarily differentially empowered social roles. Judging from the presence of “goddess” figurines in domestic contexts, particularly in middens (ancient household waste dumps), it has been suggested that women held prominence in the household during the Neolithic period prior to the growth of large towns and cities (Zegarell 1986; Hodder 2006; see also Dever 2005). Similarly, the burial of primarily women beneath the homes of many Neolithic villages of the

ninth through sixth millennia BCE in such varied sites as Jericho, Mureybet, and Catalhoyuk further implies a centrality of a “matriarchal” woman at the center of family life. The central role of women is further suggested by the fact that the earliest evidence of a shaman, a burial from Israel dating to the Natufian period thousands of years before cities (ca. 11000 BCE), is also of a woman (Grosman et al. 2008). In contrast, the role of men seems to have been relegated to relations outside the home, to hunting and trade, and to the contacts with men from other villages (Hodder 2006). Given such a social structure – one that implies not a hardened social inequality but a relatively benign division of labor – the rise of urbanization as a system of trade and social relations also occurred in concert with associated changes in the organization of the *oikos*. Increasing trade over a period of at least two thousand years resulted in a higher prestige for men as this required contact outside the village (Zegarell 1986). Nevertheless, there is little reason to assume that such relations resulted in major differentials of power when rural villages were still organized around kinship where a matriarchal figure could have been most important. The shift to such differentials of power is more likely to have arisen during the Ubaid and Uruk periods, the period from 5,000 BCE to 3,000 BCE, when large towns and the first cities formed and groups of different families were organized in large towns.

The rise of social classes in the earliest cities of the late fourth millennium BCE has been tied to matters of production. McCorrison (1997) discussed the relationship between the rise of social class and the extensification of textile production during this period. For much of Mesopotamian history, most textile production was in the form of linen, a product of flax. During the late fourth millennium BCE, just as cities were developing throughout Mesopotamia, an increased dependence on wool (from sheep) transformed the nature of textile production. Sheep were primarily herded by semi-nomadic populations, some loosely tied to cities through kinship, which were found primarily in the steppe regions of the mountains. Whereas flax production had occurred locally where the plant was grown, the increased reliance on wool meant that cities were more reliant on such herders. It seems difficult to believe that residents of the alluvial plain, whether living in cities or their agricultural satellites, would have voluntarily submitted to such an arrangement of dependency, and as such it seems more likely that growth of population in those regions resulted in food crops such as wheat being more necessary to survival than flax, especially with wool as a viable alternative. One aspect of this change would have involved a change in the status of women: women were less likely to have left home for extended periods to herd sheep than were men (McCorrison 1997: 528). In exchange, women were more likely involved in household or even workshop textile production for a larger political-economic entity, whether the temple, the palace, or an independent *oikos*. A similar argument for the role of beer in control of the agricultural workforce has been advanced by Joffe (1998): simply, changes in the mode of production were accompanied by an increasingly unequal system of class and gender relations.

It should be stressed that the changes that resulted in increased social stratification evolved from approximately 5000 BCE when relations were relatively egalitarian to 1000 BCE and beyond. There is evidence that diverse arrangements of social structure were evident. For instance, a basic form of social stratification – stratification of place – seems to have been accompanied by different mechanisms for *oikos* organization. In rural villages, kinship networks were at the heart of social organization, and even though the population seems to have become more or less organized based on security considerations (villagers moved to cities in times of war, and back to villages in peace), kinship (and fictive kinship) seems to have been dominant throughout the entire period. In the cities, however, *oikoi* were more likely to have been

organized on the basis of profession and/or neighborhood – often strongly correlated units – using the metaphor of kinship as an organizing principle based on fictive ties. Each *oikos* was run by an elite group of elders, the chief among them being the “father” or, in later Greco-Roman terminology, the *paterfamilias*. Women were responsible for household maintenance, including over time an increasing responsibility for household production of trade items such as cloth (Sjoberg 1960). Men and women appear to have worked the fields, particularly during periods of high labor consumption such as planting and harvesting, with administrative overlords responsible for organizational decisions (van de Mieroop, 1999).

This basic social structure was the foundation for the social organization of the city itself, conceived as an *oikos* writ large, although again we are faced with a diversity of structures from differing times and places. For instance, early in Mesopotamian history the temple appears to have been a dominant presence in southern Mesopotamia, with the secular authorities becoming dominant as “kings” in the north before 2400 BCE. By the early second millennium BCE, however, the palace is certainly the stronger institution throughout the land, though still highly reliant on the temple elite for legitimacy (van de Mieroop, 2006). It is likely that kings, as military leaders, gained power when under threat or through wars of aggression against their neighbors. For instance, the earliest written account of war dates to the twenty-fifth century – it was over competing claims to agricultural fields between the cities of Umma and Lagash (Dalley 2000). By the mid-second century, a large number of the elders appear to have participated in the temple economy, often holding a specific office for a short period of time of the year, in order to gain some share of temple revenues. It seems likely that the main economy at question here was not so much for income, as some officials were priests for as little as one day, but a system of prestige and legitimacy.

In contrast to outmoded concepts of “oriental despotism” (e.g., Wittfogel 1957), the Mesopotamian city appears to have had at least some element of democratic institutions. Although the strength of any particular ruler vis-a-vis his subjects likely varied across time and space as it does today, at all times the role of the assembly seems to have been important. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for instance, Gilgamesh must appeal to the assembly for permission to fight an invader. When the “council of elders” votes to sue for peace rather than go to war, Gilgamesh appeals to the “assembly” to overturn that decision, which it does. At various stages of Mesopotamian history reference is made to the great and small assemblies. It appears that a “council of elders” composed of the heads of each *oikos* was influential in decisions of state and city, whereas a larger assembly of all free men could also be called upon (van de Mieroop 1999; Jacobsen 1943).

In the cities, the temple and palace elite was supported in their activities by a class of retainers, the closest analogy to the middle class. Like the modern middle class, they were detached from the land and lived off surplus agriculture (van de Mieroop 1999). This also translated into them being dependent upon the tutelage of the upper class, and as such they tended to adopt the perspectives of their social superiors. This class included cooks, scribes and educators. Hierarchically below them were craftsmen who produced a variety of wares, often mass produced in large workshops akin to modern factories, such as pottery and metalwork. Below them were the mass of the Mesopotamian population, working for urban-based *oikoi* on nearby lands, for the palace or temple *oikoi* directly, or for rural-based kinship *oikoi* further in the countryside (van de Mieroop 1999; see also Sjoberg 1960).

Ethnicity is not easily discerned in the archaeological record, and as such segregation along ethnic lines is also not easily discerned. Nevertheless, it can be identified in some cases,

and those cases do show at least some circumstantial evidence of segregation. Certain neighborhoods of ancient Mesopotamian cities are dominated by particular industries, for instance, and if the common pattern of members of certain ethnic groups working in particular occupations held in those cities, this would indicate some level of segregation (Sjoberg 1960; van de Mieroop 1999). The best evidence of segregation by ethnicity, however, occurs in early Iron Age (Iron I) cities in Philistia (southern coast) and the central highlands of modern Israel and Palestine. In those regions, “Israelite” ethnicity is found in both rural contexts and in certain quarters of Philistine cities (Faust 2007).

Cultural and Ideological Hegemony

Hegemonic power has as an advantage over the use of coercion the fact that it is more efficient in its implementation: whereas coercive power requires a credible threat of force at minimum, hegemonic power is constituted of the ability of the ruler to convince the ruled of shared interests (Mann 1986). As urban elites organized production and distribution primarily through the temple establishment and the *oikos* – the temple itself was ultimately organized as a large *oikos* with the god as the patriarch – it is not surprising that the ideological basis for many ancient societies was based on the religious views of the temple establishment.

Spiritual or religious beliefs were not so clear cut in earlier times as they are today, and from deep in the Neolithic through the building of the earliest cities we see a religious belief system that functioned as knowledge *in toto*. Cauvin (2000), for instance, has argued that the birth of agriculture itself at the beginning of the Neolithic (ca. 9500 BCE) was the result of a conceptual change in how “the gods” were perceived. Specifically, he argues that agriculture was possible because humans could see themselves as capable of altering and controlling nature, and not merely as part of nature. Throughout the Neolithic, people living in agricultural villages appear to have sought help from ancestors, creating “goddess” figurines that likely symbolized a maternal ancestor thought to exert influence in a spiritual realm, for example. The earliest cities, as well as those later cities of the third millennium BCE from which the first good written accounts come, reflect such a tradition in that they nearly all had a divine couple as city patrons (Bottero 2001). Urban spiritual entities experienced an upgrade, however, as they became identified as gods rather than mere spirits or ancestors (Oates 1993; Bottero 2001). In a sense, the gods were socially significant spirits, exhibiting normal human frailties in contradistinction to the later “all powerful” gods. They served as the macro-level counterparts of household or family gods, such as Biblical *teraphim*.

Besides the mythologies that explained key questions such as the creation of the world and the exaltation of certain leaders such as Uruk’s Gilgamesh, urban elites would often utilize the structure of the city itself to suggest both urban greatness, thereby instilling pride in the city by suggesting a sense of common ownership, and to convey specific messages. In terms of temple architecture, for instance, in southern Mesopotamia temples were built on “sacred” sites and then rebuilt over thousands of years – the site of the temple at Ur, for instance, dates to the Ubaid period and has over twenty distinct temple buildings, each rising over the remains of the other. Temples and later forms of monumental architecture, particularly the palace and city walls, were expressions of the power of the state and a source of communal pride. The larger the project, particularly but not exclusively in terms of height, the better. At the end of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for instance, Gilgamesh contemplates his own mortality in the shadows of the walls of Uruk which he recognizes as his *raison d’être* for life: management of his city.

The use of architecture and art in building a hegemonic means of control through cultural representations was widespread in the ancient world. In Mesopotamia, the building of the Ziggurat, a pyramid-like temple complex similar to Mesoamerican “pyramids,” was often the symbolic center of the city in a manner similar to the Empire State Building in New York and the Prudential Center in Boston. In Egypt, differing time periods witnessed similar structures: pyramids during the Old Kingdom signified the pharaoh’s power, as did various temples during the Middle and New Kingdoms. Lively artistic renditions of military campaigns and other magnificent works of the king were both carved and painted into such structures. Throughout the region, the placement of steles – sizeable stones erected to commemorate a significant event – typically involved the carving of boastful claims of the event’s significance. A typical such stele is the Mesha stele, a ninth century BCE basalt slab erected by the king of Moab to boast of his defeat of the Israelites, an important find because we have his opponent’s perspective in the Biblical account (2 Kings 3:4-27). In the stele, Mesha recounts the history of the oppression of his people by the “House of Omri,” an allusion to the ancient kingdom of Israel, and his subsequent revolt with the aid of the Moabite god Chemosh. He then goes on to list the improvements made upon the sites after taking them from Israel, including presenting the artifacts of YHWH to Chemosh in thanks for his help; constructing new city walls, towers, and other fortifications; a new palace; a reservoir; and a decree ordering the inhabitants to each build a cistern for their own dwelling. Such a stele was meant to:

- 1) Justify the taking of the territory by suggesting it had been illicitly taken by the Israelites in the first place. One is struck by the reference to the leadership (House of Omri) rather than to the Israelites themselves: the territory would have included a number of ethnic Israelites.
- 2) Justify taking the territory as a religious function. The stele explains that the god Chemosh allowed the Israelites to rule the territory because of the Moabites’ sin and his subsequent anger, but that Mesha found favor with the god. Mesha’s actions are thus attributed to the god in exchange for the king being able to claim a divine rule and, one might add, the superiority of the Moabite god over the Israelite god.
- 3) Justify taking the territory by suggesting Mesha was a better steward of the region’s urban centers. Mesha spends about half of the stele recounting the urban improvements, including the new walls, palace, and water systems.

A similar ideological framework is found from Persia to Greece by the turn of the Common Era (Mikalson 2004).

By the fifth century BCE every society had a pantheon ruled by a patriarchal god, and that god ruled always from the capital city. Babylon was home to Marduk, and the Assyrian capitals (the capital moved several times) were home to Assur, each move “inspired” by Assur. A god could be patron to more than city, as the god Ba’al was patron to several such cities, including Ugarit in the Middle Bronze Age and Sidon during the Iron Age, among others. It seems likely that the phenomenon called syncretism, in which the identity of two or more gods would become fused into one, was the result of rulers and traders attempting to build bridges to various other societies and ethnic groups within their own societies by equating a “native” god with a “foreign” god. For instance, although the goddesses Astarte, Asherah, and Anat are quite distinct in the Middle Bronze Age at Ugarit (ca. 1800 BCE), by the late Iron Age (ca. 600 BCE) they appear to be fused into one deity and even equated with the Egyptian goddess Hathor

(Dever 2005). Similarly, the Israelite god YHWH appears to have been equated by at least some with the former Canaanite high god El, now the Hebrew word for “god” (Cross 1997; Smith 2002). This indicates two trends common to modern societies as well: the delicate balance between nationalism (in the form of exalting the national deity) and the attempt to keep the peace and maintain good relations through acknowledging diversity (in the form of syncretism).

Expansion

The maintenance of good relations across ethnic groups in the ancient city was necessary because 1) the city then as now attracted immigrants from a variety of locales, and 2) the process of urbanization itself forced the state to expand its influence. In his discussion of the building of the New York City water supply, Thomas (2005) suggested that the need for a city to expand into its adjoining hinterland was necessitated by urbanization itself. As a city grows, the enlarged population consumes a greater land area through building, ultimately forcing such activities as farming and resource extraction (such as water) to the periphery. This expansion also forces the city to seek control of land and resources at a distance from the city itself. In New York, the water supply extends over an area over a hundred miles away, and in order to protect its interests the city needs to have some mechanism of control. For New York City, this is a combination of its own agency to watch over the water supply as well as the power of the state itself. If the city of New York were to exert direct control over the region, it could be seen as act of colonization, and as such appeal to the higher authority of the state, obscuring the relationship between the city and its hinterland. In essence, the city exchanges some level of direct control in exchange for the state government legitimating its *de facto* power in the region. In ancient societies, the development of the state was similarly an act of control: cities needed to control the water supply, agricultural fields, and trade routes, and this meant placing a claim over people living in rural villages and even smaller cities at a distance from the main city.

The structure of the Mesopotamian city-state, as well as its later descendant the Greek city-state, was based on the idea that a city included not only its urbanized area, but also the satellite villages immediately connected to the city and agricultural villages at a greater distance (Morley 1996; van de Mierop 1999, 2006; Hall 2001). Expansion of influence often brought in not only new resources but new people, but even without the new populations the city population would be allowed to grow by the presence of additional resources. This in turn set up a dynamic wherein additional growth was eventually necessary, with the result of frequent wars (Yoffee 2005; Thomas 2010). This dynamic of growth and expansion was found not only in Mesopotamia, but in other regions of new urbanization such as China (Maisels 1999) and Mesoamerica (Flannery and Marcus 2003). In time, successful expansion and continued favorable environmental conditions led to the rise of territorial states in some regions wherein the political, economic and ideological functions were integrated into one dominant system (Yoffee 2005). Of course, territorial states continued to face the same issues and as a result continued to seek greater and greater social entities, leading to even larger states, empire building, and colonization.

The drive for expansion at the center of the urbanization process led to the continual redefinition of core-periphery relations. Early city-states shared “contested peripheries” where their spheres of influence overlapped (Allen 1997; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). Early in Mesopotamian history the first recorded war between Umma and Lagash was over the contested fields of Ningirsu (see Dalley 2000). The fields were the contested periphery between cities 18

miles distant from one another, but the territory would soon be consolidated under Sargon of Akkad. The Akkadian Empire, i.e. a territorial state, soon dissolved, but other states such as the Third Dynasty of Ur and the Babylonian Empire would envelop the contested territory as well. Similarly, the Jezreel Valley functioned as a contested periphery through the Iron Age and the Hellenistic Period only to be consolidated under Rome (Cline 2000). The drive of urban systems – and world-systems – to expand is related to urbanization as a process.

Conclusion

A world-systems approach to the growth of cities would see the evolution of the world-system as a prerequisite for the growth of cities, and we can term this process “urbanization.” Viewed as a network of social and cultural exchange, with cities as major nodes in that network, such an approach explains the coevolution of cities with their associated phenomena such as social stratification, and more importantly explains the rise of certain “urban” phenomena before the growth of cities themselves. Even if one does not wish to equate the growth of the world-system with the process of urbanization – a question of semantics – the point is clear: in the Fertile Crescent, the world-system evolved prior to the growth of cities. There are ramifications of this observation for social scientists studying modern cities. Specifically, urbanization is shown to be the root cause of many of the phenomena sometimes associated with modern industrial capitalism, and as such it should not be surprising that these same phenomena in the ancient world brought about some very modern looking conditions.

Mass production is today associated with ubiquitous products that are sometimes, and perhaps unfairly, characterized as “cheap.” In Uruk in the late fourth millennium BCE the ubiquity of the Beveled Rim bowl used for rations is evidenced by their being found strewn across the desert in former agricultural fields and in various environments in the cities themselves (Maisels 1990). They are often considered to be “cheap” in comparison to the pottery of previous periods. Similarly, in Iron Age Israel Asherah figurines, small clay figures of the goddess with a tree like base were found in a variety of contexts throughout the countryside as well as the capital cities of Jerusalem and Samaria, much to the consternation of the Biblical authors (Mazar 1992; Dever 2005). Many of the mass-produced items found in ancient times were in the same industries as those in early capitalism: textiles and jewelry, for example.

It is tempting at times to think that it is our modern society that has become so diverse, but social stratification and differentiation dates to deep into prehistory. A typical city dweller in ancient Babylon (ca. 600 BCE) would have heard the voices of a variety of ethnic groups, including the ruling Chaldeans, traders and new residents from Assyria, Phoenicia, Israel, Egypt, Afghanistan, and many other societies. Besides cultural diversity, the spectacle of the palace and the ziggurat would have been faced by the slaves doing much of the work, by “middle class” artisans with fine skills producing for the palace, temple, and other *oikoi* and dependent upon those institutions for access to the agricultural surplus, and the serfs and peasants working the fields. Members of these groups would have been found in their own distinct “neighborhoods.”

Cultural mechanisms of political control are prevalent today, and no less so in the ancient city. Today we speak of the impact of such media as television and the internet, but the primary mechanism of such propaganda in ancient times was carved in stone. Through monumental architecture and memorial steles, ancient rulers could convey their perspective to the populace in ways that resemble modern conditions: the cost of such construction was high and as a result the

ability to produce such work limited to the elite. Even in ancient times, however, there were lower cost alternatives: clay ostraca, the remnants of broken pottery, were used to convey messages of a more basic nature. The dominant cultural institutions were related to religion, and as such most rulers legitimated their authority on religious grounds. Indeed, the rise of Babylon as a political power was accompanied by the rise of Marduk as a god of importance as Babylonian scribes adapted the Sumerian creation myths for the new political realities in the form of the *Enuma Elish*. Similarly, the centralization of political and economic authority in ancient Judah under Kings Hezekiah and Josiah was justified by the call to centralize all worship and animal sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple.

In terms of the expansion of the urban system, one can see in this dynamic the roots of later colonialism and the modern world-system. Sociologists are accustomed to see this dynamic as the result of the state, but what preceded the state? As cities in ancient times became the dominant political realities, their enlarged populations presented an objective need for more resources, and as a consequence early cities of necessity “annexed” adjacent lands and, over time, smaller cities and their lands. It was this process that generated the state, and it is of course the state that continued to expand its influence through direct and indirect means. The modern world-system, founded on modern colonialism but today characterized by “core” states dominating the periphery through indirect hegemonic means, is a modern continuation of these basic urban dynamics. It is also a basis for dating the beginning of world-systems. Although it has been suggested that world-systems existed among hunting and gathering societies (see Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997), it can instead be argued that world-systems evolved in lockstep with cities, ultimately predating cities and giving rise to them.

The task for sociology is to tease out the traits of the contemporary world that are the result of urbanization as distinct from modern economic systems. Although the rise of the megacities known today may be understood as relating to capitalist accumulation, the city is not the creation of a capitalist economy, and many of the problems associated with capitalism are not specific to capitalist economies. This does not mean that capitalism does not bring about its own problems: it is likely, for instance, that capitalism (and not urbanization) encourages considerable waste and environmental degradation, for instance. Similarly, the cultural effects of a consumer driven economy seem the result of capitalist accumulation, not the city. The ramification of the acknowledgement that some problems with capitalism are in fact rooted in urbanization itself, however, is obvious: if we are to create a more fair society that is sustainable over the long term, it is not enough to restructure the means of production. As social scientists, it is essential that we study not only the city, but urbanization as a whole. Paradoxically, this means decentering the global city as the unit of analysis, and examining the functioning of the system from the centers of economic and political power to their most outlying provinces. It means placing such key components of ancient urbanization – agriculture, power, and the maintenance of community – at the center of urban sociology.

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