

CITY AND COUNTRY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD



Edited by John Rich
and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill

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**CITY AND COUNTRY IN THE
ANCIENT WORLD**

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Edited by

JOHN RICH
and
ANDREW WALLACE-HADRILL



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PREFACE

This volume, like its predecessor *Patronage in Ancient Society*, is the result of a series of seminars jointly organised by the Classics Departments of Leicester and Nottingham Universities. 'The Ancient City' was chosen as the theme of the seminar series, which ran over two academic years, between 1986 and 1988. In addition to the seminars, which meet in both centres, two conferences were held at Nottingham, on 'City and Country in the Ancient World' (1987) and 'The City in Late Antiquity' (1988). These conferences promoted a lively exchange, particularly between archaeologists and ancient historians, and it was felt that each of them would make a good core for a volume of papers.

The present volume contains substantially revised versions of a selection of papers from the 1987 conference, together with others from the seminars that cohered with the theme. The first five papers are concerned with archaic and classical Greece, the last six with the Roman world. There is no attempt at complete chronological or geographical coverage. Approaches differ considerably, some more archaeological, some more text-based, some more concerned with problems of methodology and some with model-building. But all represent attempts to come to a better understanding of the town-country nexus that characterises 'the ancient city' and that lies at the heart of Greco-Roman civilisation.

The editors are grateful to many who have assisted in the production of this book, and in particular the following: the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies which gave a generous grant towards the costs of the seminar series; to Jan Hamilton of the Classics Department at Nottingham for help with sub-editing; to Jo Wallace-Hadrill for translating Mireille

Corbier's chapter from French; to Adrienne Edwards of the Classics Department at Nottingham for assistance with the administration of the conferences and seminars and to Sybil Lowery and Pella Beaven of the Classics Department at Reading for skill and patience in rising to the challenges of computer-typesetting.

JWR
AW-H

INTRODUCTION

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill

The towns are so many electric transformers. They increase tension, accelerate the rhythm of exchange, and ceaselessly stir up men's lives.

Braudel (1973)

If towns have a quickening effect on human life, they have no less power to stir up academic discourse. Urban history is a fashionable and flourishing subject; and when a Centre for Urban History was established at Leicester University in 1985, with the express purpose of focusing the common interests of specialists in different disciplines, it seemed to the ancient historians of Leicester and Nottingham a good opportunity to take 'the ancient city' as the theme for their research seminar. Not that the theme, stretching back to classics like Fustel de Coulanges (1866), Weber (1921) and Glotz (1928), could be seen as a new one. But though old, it has become the centre of lively current debate, and not only among ancient historians, notably as the subject of one of Finley's most provocative and polemical papers, but among archaeologists, who in dialogue with historians have in the last decade made fundamental contributions to the debate.

At once, a problem of definition obtrudes. What does it mean, in the context of Greco-Roman antiquity, to call your theme 'the city'? The urban historian of any period, whether or not they accept Marx's claim that the whole economic history of society is summed up in the movement of the antithesis of town and country, must have difficulty in discussing the urban without simultaneously discussing the rural; and as Abrams stressed in introducing the Past and Present Society volume

on *Towns in Societies*, approaches that insist that 'the town is a town' run into major conceptual difficulties; the current tendency is to undo the separation of town and country and reunite the town with its non-urban environment (Abrams and Wrigley 1978, 1ff.). For the ancient historian, the separation is even more difficult: even on a linguistic level, the same Greek word, *polis*, means both urban centre and the type of state characterised by the domination of an urban centre, leading, as Aristotle appreciated, to considerable confusion in discussion (see Morris below). It is persistently unclear, in authors from Aristotle to Finley, whether at any one moment talk of 'the city' is intended to contrast with or to embrace the countryside; use of 'the town' or in Greek *astu* is only a partial solution, since the object of discussion is not so often the physical urban environment as the system of power and social relations that focuses on but is not the same as the urban centre.

Town and country were antithetical for the ancients too. An image of the separation is the Avezzano relief, found near the Latin town of Alba Fucens (depicted on the cover of this volume), which juxtaposes the close-packed houses of the town, insulated within their wall, and the open countryside and its scatter of villas. Yet even the juxtaposition implies a relationship, represented by the roads which via town gate link town and country. The relationship is more visible if we picture the tentacles spread out by the Roman town into its hinterland in the form of aqueducts: symbolically siphoning off, as Corbier puts it (below), the resources of the land into the urban centre, to feed the public baths where the imported water acts as a focus of sociability, and as a symbol of the 'washed' and civilised way of life that rejects the stench of the countryman. Implicit in the aqueduct is a dynamic of power, flowing between country and town; and if we wish to represent that dynamic as exploitative, we may extend our picture to the sewers to which the water eventually flows, used memorably by Victor Hugo as an image of the wasteful consumption of the city:

When the Roman countryside was ruined by the Roman sewer, Rome exhausted Italy, and when she had poured Italy through her drains she disposed of Sicily, then

Sardinia, then Africa. The Roman sewer engulfed the world, sapping town and country alike. *Urbi et orbi* or the Eternal City, the bottomless drain.

Hugo, *Les Misérables*, part V, i.

Not all the contributors to this volume would accept Hugo's bleak vision of the negative effects of the city; but all, in various ways, are concerned with city and country as a relationship, and one which was problematical yet of crucial importance in shaping the societies of antiquity. Interest in this relationship has blossomed recently: and this owes as much to developments in archaeological method as to debate on a theoretical level.

Archaeology's most important contribution to the study of the city has been the paradoxical one of shifting its attention away from the city and its monumental structures and towards the countryside. The rise of the new method of 'field survey' (discussed below by Snodgrass and Millett, but drawn on by most others) has many strands: the excitement of a new approach, the desire to assemble data systematically and 'scientifically' rather than haphazardly and anecdotally, and to give equal weight to the traces of the inconspicuous and unprestigious as to the monumental and grand; intellectual disillusionment with the descriptive and non-analytical character of much traditional excavation; but also (factors particularly potent in Mediterranean archaeology) the new possibilities and threats to the survival of evidence posed by new agricultural trends like deepploughing, the expense of excavation and the increasing difficulty in extracting permission to dig from local authorities, and the ease and attractions of taking groups of students to walk the Mediterranean terrain in lines abreast. From the pioneering days of the 1960s, of Ward-Perkins' British School survey in South Etruria and the Minnesota survey in Messenia, intensive field survey has grown to become the commonest Anglo-Saxon archaeological activity in the Mediterranean, with all the glamour of a 'new archaeology' (Snodgrass 1987, 99ff.). Contributors to this volume draw on surveys in Euboea and Boeotia (Snodgrass), Sparta and Megalopolis (Cavanagh), Samnium and Balboura in Lycia (Patterson), South Etruria

(Potter), Tarragona (Millett) and make reference to many more.

The new archaeological approach has made possible a new level of dialogue with historians (not that the two disciplines have ever operated in complete isolation from each other). For the historian concerned with the city, town plans and monumental layouts have had a limited interest (though Perring's study of spatial organisation suggests that new approaches in this direction too are needed), whereas social, economic, political and cultural relationships between town and country go to the heart of their subject. Snodgrass shows how new archaeological evidence touches on almost every aspect of the questions previously posed about the Greek city by a non-archaeological historian. But in the younger generation of scholars, archaeologist and historian are hard to disentangle, as is suggested by the papers of his own pupils Morris and Osborne, or on the Roman side by Patterson.

Many common themes, shared concerns and related methods and approaches run through the papers in this volume, on both the Greek and Roman sides. In picking out only a couple of the major overarching themes, I want to illustrate both the extent to which the volume marks progress in moving towards new understanding and towards some measure of consensus at least about the questions worth posing about the ancient city, and also the extent to which it throws up difficulties of method, disagreement, and implicitly the need for further research.

One conspicuous theme is the rise of the polis, and the impact of city-formation on the territory as a whole. Here we may observe that the new archaeological approach has produced a swing-around in interpretation. The Greeks accounted for city-formation as the result of the bringing together of previously dispersed households and small clusters of households, *synoikismos*. Not unreasonably, archaeologists used to look for traces of this unification in the urban centres: the walled settlement of Old Smyrna was the prime example of the rise of the polis. The Aegean has now produced a handful of such early fortified sites: yet these did not give rise to poleis in the Archaic and Classical periods, and Snodgrass argues that it is not their fortification but their abandonment that marks the advent of the polis. Both Snodgrass and Morris see

the crucial element of polis-formation not in an urban nucleus, but in changed social relationships, particularly the development of citizenship, reflected in the extension of access to burial rites, and the growth of common cults that unified the polis, not just at its centre, but also as markers at the edge of its territory. Morris in particular distinguishes urbanisation from state-formation, and arguing for the slowness of the process of urbanisation, sets the dividing line between 'city' and 'non-city' as late as the end of the sixth century.

If the archaeologist is less insistent on discovering an urban nucleus to the polis, he is more insistent on exposing the hierarchy of settlements that surround the centre. Cavanagh points to the difficulties arising from the use of the term *synoikismos*: if we look for a physical relocation rather than an act of political unification, the polis disappoints us, for what is found is an extension and elaboration of rural settlements, not the converse. Just as Cavanagh posits a hierarchy of settlements in the territory of Sparta, a city with a notoriously underdeveloped urban centre, so Osborne has argued that the strength of the polis of Athens, despite its relatively high degree of urbanisation, lay in its success in incorporating its rural demes (villages and even towns in our terms) into its political structures.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the thesis that a strong network of rural settlements should be seen as supporting, not antithetical to, the polis, is in the innovative experiment of Rihll and Wilson (the latter a geographer concerned with contemporary problems of urban and regional planning) in using geographical theory to elaborate a mathematical model of exchanges between settlements. By plotting the known distribution of sites (of whatever size or importance) in Central Greece in the protogeometric period, despite making the counterfactual assumption that all started as sites of equal importance, and that the terrain was isomorphic (i.e. ignoring mountain barriers), the computer simulation of the patterns of exchange between the sites predicts that certain sites will emerge as 'terminals', i.e. as centres of hierarchical clusters; moreover, given the right conditions in the variables of ease of communication and benefit of centralisation, the model is remarkably successful in predicting the 'correct' terminals, i.e. those where urban

centres did in fact evolve. Whether or not this gives us an insight into *why* the polis evolved (i.e. was the growth of the unified state determined by the geographical distribution of sites in the preceding period?), it illustrates very clearly how the corollary of a strong urban centre is not an empty countryside, but one with a dense network of intercommunicating settlements for which it provides the common focus.

Similar patterns are detected in the Roman world, though not uniformly. Millett shows how both in Britain and Spain a relatively powerful urban centre generates a penumbra of villas and settlements, becoming denser with proximity to the town; and he comments on the density of the settlement pattern of the Roman landscape in general, rising in Spain at some periods as high as one site per square kilometre. Potter too finds dense settlement in South Etruria in the late republican and early imperial period; but stresses that the pattern varies widely across Italy. Patterson offers an example of what may be seen as a contrary pattern in Samnium: the impact of Roman control on a non-urbanised mountainous area was concentration of resources, with central encouragement, in urban sites, leading to the evolution of a local elite that competed for power by the expenditure of resources in the urban centre, and to its own eventual assimilation into the Roman elite. The centralisation of resources was founded on the creation of fewer, larger landholdings; hence the growth of urbanisation seems here to be linked to a drop in number of rural sites. He provisionally posits a similar pattern in the interior of Asia Minor.

The pattern of contraction of the number of rural sites under the impact of Roman rule seems to emerge from a number of surveys in the eastern Mediterranean, and as the studies of Sue Alcock (1989 a and b) indicate, has important implications for our understanding of the impact of Roman imperialism. But whether the penumbra of settlements around the city grew denser or rarer, it is agreed that the city must be seen in the context of that penumbra. Corbier's analysis of the taxation system of the Roman empire illustrates why this must be so. The empire is seen as a chequerboard of cities, each with its own set of dependent communities; just as the power and wealth of the individual

landlord depended on his ability to extract rents and profits from his tenants and workforce, so the power and wealth of each city depended on the extraction of taxes, rents and dues from its own network of villages and settlements, while Rome herself depended on the extraction of taxes from the provinces and their component cities. Epigraphy, through the wide range of local inscriptions that cast light on the relations between cities and their territories, here reinforces the sort of picture emerging from survey archaeology.

Intensive field survey has thus made enormous strides towards filling out the blanks in our mental maps of Greek and Roman cities, and towards repopulating the countryside. It is important to add, by way of caution, that the new approach is not without methodological difficulties, and cannot be expected to give us a complete and infallible picture of the settlement patterns of antiquity. Such problems are not always fully exposed in the presentation of the results of surveys, which, particularly when represented as a series of dots on maps, have a seductively cut and dried appearance. Hence the importance of Martin Millett's analysis of the problems of survey data. Survey depends heavily on the discovery of surface finds of 'diagnostic' pottery, i.e. pottery that is susceptible of dating. Not all pottery is equally datable; not all pottery survives in the ploughed ground equally well; not all pottery implies habitation. Identification of inhabited settlements at any given period depends on the supply and survival of pottery diagnostic for that period; yet it emerges that the volume of supply of such pottery fluctuates considerably from period to period. In the Tarragona survey the richest sites produce over 63 sherds per hectare for the Iberic period; but the comparable figure for the Republican period is 26 sherds or more, for the early Empire 6 or more, for the late Empire 1 or more. The gradient of decline is very steep, and at the very least figures need to be scaled to allow for fluctuation in supply. One might add that parallel excavation of the associated urban sites would be a valuable control. Field survey is a supplement, not an alternative, to traditional stratigraphic excavation. We may expect to see further development of sophistication and caution in the interpretation of the results of field survey over the next decade.

The most significant area of disagreement, however, lies at a different level. All agree that the ancient city needs to be seen in the context of its relations with the countryside; but over the nature of those relations there is deep disagreement, which emerges explicitly in several chapters, but implicitly underlies virtually all. In its most direct form, the question can be posed as one of economic balance: did the ancient city make significant return for the resources of the land it consumed? Was it more than Victor Hugo's Roman sewer, a bottomless drain? But as formulated by Max Weber, and reformulated, stridently yet powerfully, by Moses Finley, the question cuts to the heart of the study of ancient society. How did the economic relationship of town and country in the ancient city differ from that of other periods, notably the late medieval, and, assuming that, whatever the variations from city to city, from period to period, a historically distinctive relationship can be isolated, how did that contribute to the distinctive character of ancient society as a whole?

The Weber/Finley answer to these questions is partly summed up in the concept of the 'consumer city'. Yet it points to much more than the economic imbalance of a city draining and exploiting its territory, a criticism which can be made of capital cities at many historical periods (Hugo, after all, was comparing the Roman sewer to that of nineteenth-century Paris). Starting from the ambiguity of polis as city and as state, as town-not-country and yet town-and-country, it underlines the importance of the participation of the rural, from the large landowner to the peasant, in the operation of both state and town, and the consequences of that in preventing the emergence of a distinctively urban economy and society.

These are complex issues, and a range of positions on them is possible, as here emerges in various chapters. Finley's insistence that the question of the relationship of town and country matters was in itself a seminal contribution, and a stimulus to archaeological work, acknowledged for instance by Snodgrass and Morris. Some form of the model of the 'consumer city' may be implied by Corbier's account of the social imbalances generated by the flow of taxation from country to city; though that still leaves room for Hopkins' argument that the net effect of taxation was to stimulate the

economy (1980; Hopkins' view of the consumer city in his important paper of 1978 is carefully nuanced). A strong version of the consumer-city model emerges in Perring's argument that the Roman city, at least in Britain, became increasingly exclusive, to the point that trade was ultimately driven out of the towns by the influx of the landowning class, leading to their eventual collapse.

Two papers in this volume directly question the Finley model. For both Osborne and myself, the model creates real difficulties in interpreting the relationship of the landowning elite to the town. That the relationship of town and country had fundamental implications for the structure of power in ancient societies and for the definition of the elite is an assumption shared by many of the contributors, for instance by Patterson in his account of urban construction and estate-extension by the Samnite and Lycian elites, by Corbier in her suggestions of the exploitation of the taxation system by the powerful, by Perring in his picture of a move from inclusivity to exclusivity in the spatial organisation of the Roman town. To this extent we all accept some version of the Finley model, or at least the importance of the problems it raises. But it is another matter to accept that for the elites of the Greek and Roman city the countryside was the only significant place of production, and the town essentially a place of consumption. Osborne suggests that the needs of the town for consumption are balanced as a driving force by the needs of the landowner to raise cash to meet political and social demands; hence by implication the countryside needs the cash-generating capacity of the urban economy as much as the town needs the food-generating capacity of the country. I suggest that the political and social imperatives that brought the Roman elite to reside in towns brought an intimate and positive contact between the big landowner and the world of trade. But both arguments seek to qualify, not to discard, Finley's position.

In the end, we are left with the ambiguities about the definition of 'the city' with which we started. Defending Weber's model of the 'consumer city' (i.e. city in the sense of urban centre), Finley states, 'It still remains true, and needing an explanation, that the peasant was an integral element in the ancient city, but not in the medieval' (1981, 17). Was the peasant an integral element in the city as state, or in the city

as urban centre? The answer is probably both. Citizenship gave him access to the citizen-state; but the concentration of political and cultural, and surely also economic, activity in the urban centre regularly drew him there. If the town was where the surplus of the countryside was consumed, the peasantry could join with the big landowners in consuming it there, in the festivals, rituals, games and entertainments that offered communion to the community of the ancient city.

We have still a considerable way to come in grappling with this paradox. Field survey and other new archaeological approaches should cast further light on town/country relations; though it might be hoped that a greater integration between new and traditional approaches could be achieved, and that survey of the landscape could be coordinated with excavation of the urban centres. Historians too have major problems to resolve. What does 'the ancient city' mean? Is 'it' a phenomenon about which useful generalisations can be made? Was it indeed different in essence from 'the medieval city', and if so, was it different in the sort of way which Weber suggested? How helpful is Weber's characterisation of the medieval city as the 'producer city'? Or should we allow greater significance to variations, from period to period, from region to region, and construct a more differentiated typology, if we are to construct typologies at all? These remain open questions; and before any satisfactory answers can be given to them, it will be necessary for ancient historians to enter into the same level of dialogue with their medievalist and early modernist colleagues as they have already achieved with archaeologists.

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1

Archaeology and the study of the Greek city

A.M.Snodgrass

For well over a hundred years, people studied the Greek city as an entity without making more than negligible use of archaeological evidence. As late as 1969, in the translated second edition of Victor Ehrenberg's *Der griechische Staat*,¹ the reader has to search very hard indeed to find even a veiled recourse to archaeology. The historians of the polis saw themselves as dealing essentially with an abstraction; they avoided tawdry physical detail, much as they tended to eschew the whole diachronic approach; and both exclusions rendered archaeology superfluous. The archaeologists showed little sign of minding this: they carried on studying their temples, statues and pots, innocent not of *all* historical considerations—from the 1930s to the 1950s was, after all, the golden age of the 'political' interpretation of pottery-distributions—but certainly innocent of any concern with historical *entities* like the city-state.

Today, all that appears to have changed. Some books on aspects of the polis are being written by historians who make constant reference to archaeological findings; others are even written by archaeologists. What factors have brought about such a change? An important contributory factor has been the minor wave of new archaeological discoveries, relating especially to the era of the rise of the polis. But what generated this wave? The answer lies partially in an initiative on the part of historians: which brings us to a second and more fundamental factor. There has been a change of attitude, on the part of historians and archaeologists alike. The former

¹ Ehrenberg (1969).

are now no longer content to give, like Aristotle in the *Politics*, a more or less theoretical reconstruction of the advent of the polis, set in some indefinite early period: they feel an obligation to offer some kind of account of the date, causation and means whereby the entity that they are concerned with came into being. To do so, they must venture back into periods where the written sources on their own are manifestly inadequate. So they have called in the archaeologists, who in turn have been surprised to find that they are already sitting on a substantial body of existing evidence that is relevant to the problem, as well as responding to the call for new excavation to fill in the blank areas on the map of early Greece. The fact that so much of the evidence was long since available, however, must mean that it is this change of attitude that has been the decisive factor. In a nutshell, explanation has taken over from analysis and description as the prime aim, in both disciplines. I hope that, to most readers, these will be welcome developments.

These considerations all relate to one large area of the study of the polis, that of its origins and rise: this is indeed a topic where archaeology plays a major role, which is why it will feature prominently in this paper. But there is a second such topic in polis studies, which has likewise benefited from new archaeological work, and from a parallel change of attitude. It is the whole question of the physical basis on which the Greek city rested: the territorial sector and the rural economy. Here, the seeds of the change of attitude may be detected very much longer ago; but they were sown outside the boundaries of Classical scholarship (I have the name of Max Weber especially in mind) and, perhaps for that reason, they took an extraordinarily long time to germinate; indeed, but for the stubborn advocacy of Moses Finley, I rather doubt whether even now they would have burgeoned into the flourishing growth which they present today in ancient historical studies. In the archaeological field, they fell on even stonier ground, and I believe that the change of direction in archaeological studies has other causes. In passing, both sides alike should pay tribute to a third group, the epigraphists: with many of the relevant topics, from topography in general to the constitutional arrangements as they affected territories, to

territorial boundaries, to agricultural slavery, it was they who were often first in the field.

The opening up of this second field of enquiry (or so I am suggesting) has come about through a fortunate coincidence of interests between recent historical and archaeological research. The historians, as soon as they became conscious of the need to examine the agricultural basis of the city, found that the evidence from the ancient written sources was seriously defective, and began to look round for alternative kinds of documentation. The archaeologists, having for so long followed the historians in their concentration on the urban sector of polis life, were in no position to assist. But help was at hand, and from an unexpected source. Archaeological colleagues in northern America were beginning to supplement, or even replace, excavation as the traditional medium of fieldwork with the new technique of area survey. Here was a technique which, unlike excavation, was designed to generate information on a regional scale, and with a rural bias. Methods which had been applied to the indigenous cultures of North America, by people who often had little interest in urbanised cultures and none at all in the Classical city, were found to be eminently applicable, first to pre-Roman or Etruscan Italy, then to the period of Roman rule in Italy and beyond, and finally to the world of the Greek city. A survey could provide a picture of the pattern of settlement over the whole territory of a medium-sized polis, or over parts of those of several poleis, and would also have an application in the more extended landscape of the average *ethnos*—exactly what the historians needed.

As a result of all these developments the study of the polis, at least when conducted at the generalised level, has become more and more deeply involved with the use of archaeological evidence. If we return to our first topic, that of the origins and growth of the city, we may begin our search for applications, actual or potential, of such evidence. In his opening chapter, Ehrenberg (1969) divided his treatment of this subject into five sub-headings: 'Land and Sea', 'Tribe and Town', 'The Gods', 'Nobles and non-nobles', and 'Forms of State'. Except for the last category, where the enquiry is essentially historical in nature and is conducted through backward projections from later documentation, I believe that archaeology can contribute

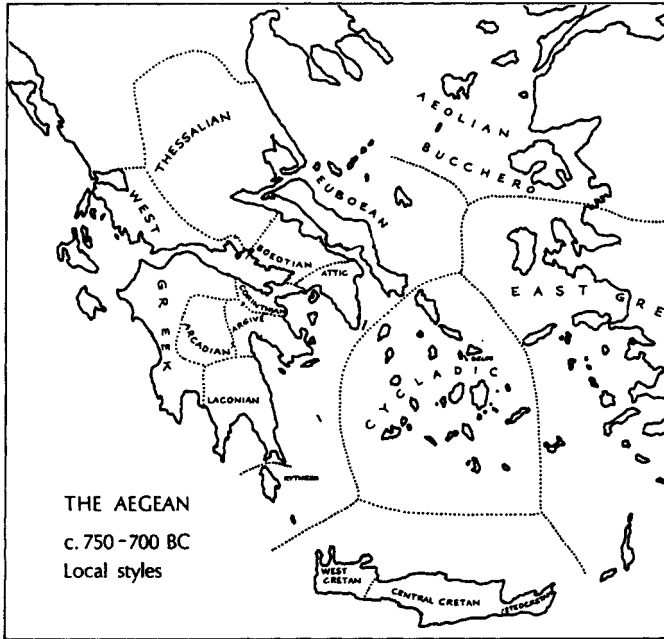


Figure 1a: Extent of the regional Late Geometric pottery styles

in each of these spheres. It can offer not only the classes of evidence, referred to above, which are specific to the case of the Greek city, but also a body of recent work that is directed towards a general theory of state formation, based on anthropological research but later given an archaeological application.¹ Although such work has been mainly applied to non-historical cultures, some of its findings are relevant to the case of ancient Greece: notably, the idea of an 'Early State Module' that is essentially small in scale,² though hardly as small as the typical Greek polis. Indeed, a case could be made for treating even the polis, at its stage of formation, as a non-historical instance, since it is almost entirely lacking in contemporary documentation. This is generally true of early states: the discovery of writing seldom precedes state-

¹ See, e.g., Cohen and Service (eds.) (1978); Claessen and Skalnik (eds.) (1978); Cherry (1978 and 1984); Renfrew and Cherry (eds.) (1985).

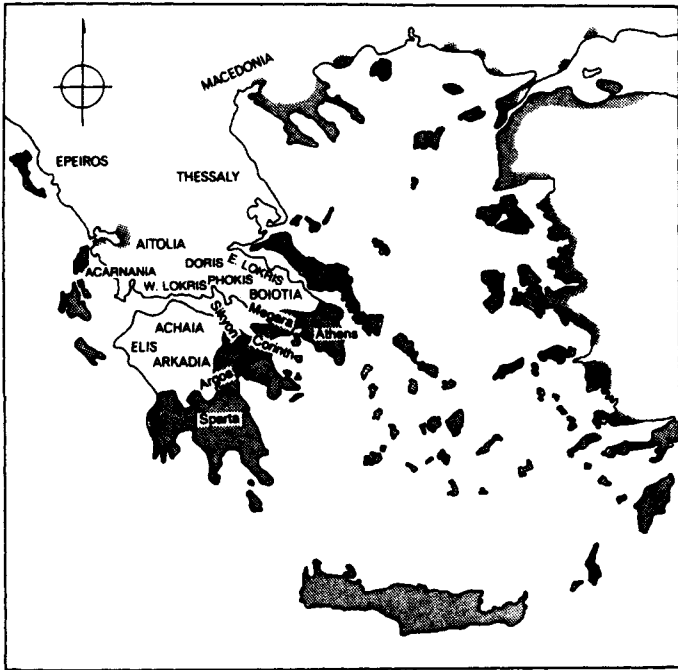


Figure 1b: Extent of the polis system (shaded)

formation by a long enough interval to generate coherent documents by the time of the political change.

A good starting-point for the discussion is the primary importance that Aristotle attached to ‘community of place’—perhaps the earliest clear acknowledgment that the abstraction of the polis had an inseparable physical embodiment. Community of place incorporates both the *astu*, the central place, whose function was transformed when the state came into being, and the territory, which henceforth consisted of the sum of the landholdings of all members of the

² See Renfrew (1975), who finds c. 1,500 sq.km to be a frequent modular size, and c. 40 km a mean distance between the central places of neighbouring modules. Both figures are far too high for the average Greek polis, notwithstanding the calculation of C.Doxiadis, cited by Renfrew at 14–16.

community. These are changes which can be expected to have manifestations in the archaeological record. What we must guard against is any expectation that these manifestations will be *uniform* in every case. The physical impact of polis-formation would vary according to the different prior conditions in the region where the particular polis arose. We know little enough about these prior conditions in any part of the Greek world, but what we do know can at least be expressed in archaeological terms. Thus there is the interesting fact, whose significance was spotted by Ehrenberg and has recently been enlarged upon by Nicolas Coldstream,¹ that the area of the Greek world where the Geometric style in pottery had reached its most advanced development (fig. 1a), and the area where the polis was to prevail (fig. 1b), roughly coincide. The priority of the archaeological phenomenon will stand unless we push back the rise of the polis to an improbably early date, nearer 900 than 800 BC. How much weight we attach to this coincidence will depend on our assessment of the importance of Geometric pottery: but we may at least recall the arguments advanced by Martin Robertson for thinking that, at this early period, painted pottery in general held a primacy among the visual arts which it never recovered later.² It may be that artistic sophistication was a foretaste of political progressiveness.

How then, precisely, might political transformation be reflected in the physical aspect of city or territory? We may begin with the *astu* itself, and assume that the circumstances were not those relatively simple ones where a physical *synoikismos* took place, with part of the population moving to a newly established urban nucleus, nor those even simpler ones of the colonisation of a new locality. In other words, we assume that there *was* a pre-existing settlement, whose status was now transformed through its becoming the centre of a polis. How will this show? It is possible that some kind of concentration will have occurred at the site, with new functions and perhaps new inhabitants being transferred to it, and that this will show itself in a nucleation of buildings—possible, but by no means to be counted on. That a ‘nucleus’ could continue to take the form of a cluster of separate villages, long after the transition to polis status, is proved not only by Thucydides’ well-known reference to fifth-century

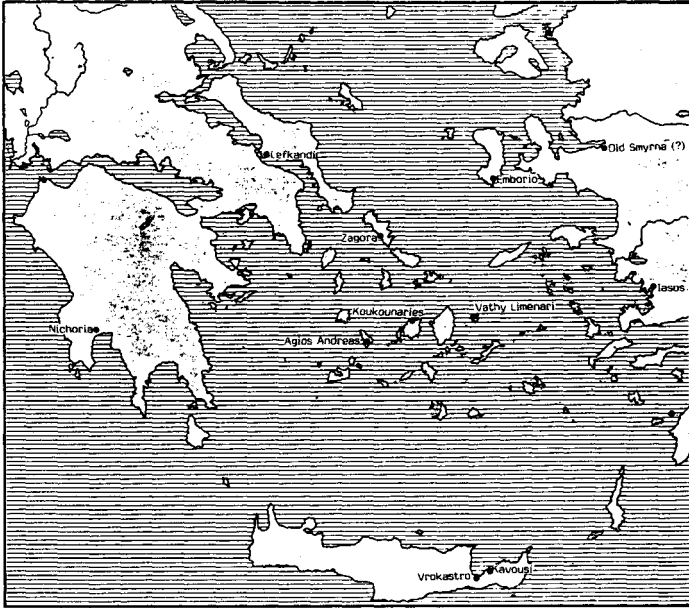


Figure 2: Fortified settlements of the ninth and eighth centuries BC in the Aegean

Sparta (1.10.1), but by the findings of survey archaeology elsewhere in the Greek homeland. That an *agora* would now be a necessary feature is no guarantee of its archaeological traceability. An acropolis would in many cases have been in existence long since, and archaeology has contributed here by showing how often it was the very same that had once served as a Mycenaean citadel. Administrative buildings, as is shown by the example of several cities, could at first be dispensed with. Sanctuaries are another matter, but they will be treated presently under the heading of religion. What we are looking for above all are the physical traces of *communal* activity, in the service of the polity as a whole.

Such traces have often been sought in the form of *fortification*. Here we must be more specific: the fortification

¹ Ehrenberg (1969), 19; Coldstream (1983).

² Robertson (1951), especially 152–4.

must have clearly been designed to surround the whole inhabited nucleus, and not just a citadel; and that nucleus must be of an adequate size to represent a plausible *astu* for the territory and population in question, rather than being merely an isolated local stronghold. The second criterion is the one that invites most debate. We have, for example, a whole series of excavated sites in the Cyclades and other Aegean islands, where a fortification wall surrounds a nucleated settlement: the earliest of these begin in the ninth century BC, if not the tenth (fig. 2). Perhaps the largest and most impressive of them is Zagora on Andros,¹ which may serve as an exemplar. It has a protecting wall (among the earliest dated structures on the site), areas of housing that show clear signs of planning, a probable contemporary temple, and plenty of open space for the siting of a hypothetical *agora*. Was Zagora then the centre of an early polis embracing the island of Andros? Given the low population figures estimated for Greece as a whole, and the islands in particular, in the earlier Iron Age, it is not impossible that the size of Zagora, at any rate, was commensurate with that function. But if this was an early experiment, it was a short-lived one for Zagora, like so many of this group of fortified island sites, was suddenly and permanently abandoned around 700 BC. Many of the other sites in this group fail to match up to Zagora in one or more respects, principally those of size and of the location of the fortification. Thus, Emborio on Chios² was a sizeable village, but its fortified area was confined to a narrow hilltop with only one structure of recognisable domestic function within, plausibly identified as the chieftain's hall; much the same could be said of Koukounaries on Paros,³ where the fortified area is also a small hilltop citadel, while other nucleated sites in its vicinity are relatively small; Agios Andreas on Siphnos,⁴ and Kavousi⁵ and Vrokastro⁶ in eastern Crete, look more like tactically sited hilltop refuge sites than the centres of populated territories; Vathy Limenari is an almost inaccessible fortified headland on a small islet (Donoussa), and would be much more reasonably interpreted as a pirate stronghold than as an abortive polis-venture;⁷ and so on. The mere fact that these fortifications are mainly confined to island sites, at a time when mainland and offshore-island settlements (even those concentrated in the same epoch, like

Lefkandi in Euboea⁸ and Nichoria in Messenia¹⁾ were unfortified, suggests that some special geographical factor, rather than a ubiquitous political change, is responsible for the walls. The long delay in building city-walls round even the most famous mainland poleis, or even, as at Sparta, their permanent absence, is a matter of record.

Instead, I think that we should concentrate our gaze on the other almost invariable feature of these fortified island sites: their lasting abandonment, usually in the years around 700 BC. It is, I think, this negative feature which gives the strongest hint of political change. What concerted process, if not state-formation, would lead to the roughly simultaneous desertion of a range of sites which for the previous century or two had been not merely occupied, but in some instances places of real local prominence (Zagora, Emborio and on the off-shore island of Euboea, Lefkandi)? Was it not that their siting, and the original purposes that had prompted it, became suddenly obsolete with the advent of a new system? That their inward-looking, security-conscious orientation formed no part of a wider community which itself promised security through communal action? If such proves to be the case, then archaeology, virtually unaided, has provided the first secure indication of the date and nature of the earliest historical state-formation in the islands of the Aegean.

By that date, the colonising process had already begun to testify to the advent of the polis in rather different circumstances; and earlier still, there had been the 'pre-colonial' phenomenon of the Ionian Migration. It has been suggested that Zagora itself may represent a relatively late

¹ Cambitoglou *et al.* (1971); Cambitoglou (1981).

² Boardman (1967).

³ See especially Schilardi (1983), with mention of other Parian sites at 180–82 and nn.39–42.

⁴ Philippaki (1970).

⁵ See most recently Gesell *et al.* (1983) and (1985).

⁶ Hall (1914).

⁷ Zaphiropoulou (1967–71).

⁸ Popham *et al.* (1979–80).

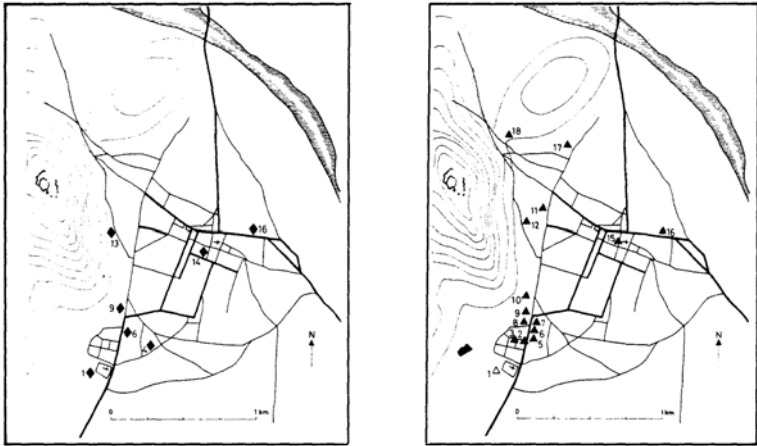


Figure 3: Early settlement traces from the city of Argos: Protogeometric Period (left) and Geometric Period (right)

and half-hearted contribution to this latter process; while today we have, in the evidence of the large Protogeometric cemetery at Torone in the Chalkidike,² a considerably earlier and entirely unexpected manifestation of the same migratory spirit. Several of the sites, both of the Migration and of the later colonies, also show fortification as an early feature. I refrain from introducing yet again the site of Old Smyrna into this analysis, pending the radical reinvestigation by Turkish archaeologists of the dates of its first two fortification circuits; but there is another early wall reported at Iasos in Karia,³ and in due course the early colonies often demanded walls. We have seen enough to appreciate, however, that local conditions often determined the construction of a fortification. City walls, as the mainland shows, were not at first a necessary condition of polis-formation; and our other instances are enough to cast grave doubt on any belief that they were a sufficient condition either.

¹ McDonald *et al.* (1983).

² For preliminary reports, see Catling (1983), 42–4 and (1986), 59–61.

³ Levi (1961–2).

Now that the colonial sites have been introduced to the discussion, we may note that they are the first to manifest another sign of that communal action that we have been looking for: the planned layout of an urban centre, with an *agora*, blocks of housing, and even individual plots provided for; Megara Hyblaia in eastern Sicily¹ has become a classic instance. From an historical point of view, however, such a discovery has limited significance, since it had never been doubted that the early colonies embodied the polis principle. Historically, much the most interesting question is whether this feature of the first colonies in itself presupposes the prevalence of the same principle in the homeland communities that sent the colonies out. I note in passing that the recent work of Irad Malkin² makes some use of archaeological evidence to answer this question firmly in the negative, and instead pursues the idea of the colonising experience as a 'trigger' for the relevant political developments at home.

Comparable physical evidence is, predictably, much harder to detect in the urban centres of Greece proper. Here the exercise of town planning was frustrated by the pre-existing structures, and the best that we can usually hope for is that the general layout of the settlement will bear some trace of reorganisation and re-location. The most fruitful investigation of this has been conducted in respect of the town of Argos,¹ but under severe handicaps of modern building and heavy dependence on burial evidence (fig. 3). Otherwise, as with the abandonment of the fortified island sites, the clearest sign may be a negative one. Where, as at Athens, the site of the subsequent *agora* had previously been given over to indiscriminate activities including burial, then the cessation of these activities may herald the new political order. In the case of Athens, this is detectable from shortly after 700 BC, when graves are progressively eliminated from an increasing area of the Agora site.²

But it is time to turn away from the urban centres, and look instead at territories. The territorial aspect is at once the most basic and the most neglected element of polis organisation.

¹ Vallet *et al.* (1976).

² Malkin (1971).

The frankest illustration of this neglect is to be found in the pages of almost any Classical atlas. Here you will look in vain for many features that one might expect to find in a map of a well-documented historical civilisation. The traditional atlas is constrained by its format to mark only the known and firmly located ancient toponyms, and such other data as the written sources convey. This excludes, most obviously, the unnamed sites excavated or otherwise investigated through archaeological means; but it excludes much else as well. There is unlikely to be a map showing the boundaries of the individual poleis of the Archaic and Classical periods. Then there are the second-order settlements, which must in reality have far outnumbered the *astea* themselves, but which in most atlases appear if anything less numerous; internal, district boundaries are correspondingly absent. Here the findings of epigraphy have proved invaluable, at least in the case of Attica,¹ but these too are generally not taken into account in an atlas. All of this explains why most Classical maps, unless they are drawn on a small scale, wear such a sparse look. You do not need a map of an abstraction and that, as we have seen, is exactly how the polis was seen by most of its earlier students.

It should be a primary aim of archaeology to fill in these blank spaces on the map and, as we have seen, the development of the technique of intensive area survey has given it the instrument that the task requires. The survey has to be intensive if it is to achieve two joint objectives: first, to discover the full range of settlement, in at least a sample area, from the *astu* itself down to the smallest isolated habitation; and secondly to estimate the frequency of settlements, of each level of importance, as it varies from period to period. A large-scale or 'extensive' survey will of course cover a much wider stretch of terrain, but at the cost of picking up only the most

¹ Hägg (1982).

² Thompson and Wycherley (1972), 10, 12, 19; Camp (1985), 28, fig. 11, and 34; neither account, however, brings out clearly the fact that from the end of the eighth century BC burials are excluded from the central area of the Agora and banished to locations on the periphery, where in turn they die out (apart from a couple of late burials in a family plot) at the end of the seventh.

conspicuous—that is normally the larger—settlements, with the consequence that the settlement range is truncated, and the settlement distribution possibly also distorted, through neglect or unpromising (e.g. infertile or overgrown) terrain. By its total or near-total coverage of a given piece of territory, the intensive survey should be capturing a very large part of the history of occupation there; yet even the most intensive survey is not a precision instrument. For example, the level of chronological definition can never be sufficiently high to establish that a group of sites was in exactly simultaneous, rather than broadly contemporary, occupation; one needs further supporting indications, such as are provided in the case of the colonial land-allotments at Metapontum,² where the sites are not only contemporary but also very regularly spaced and located with respect to field-boundaries.

But at a less specific level, the broad trends of settlement between one period and the next can emerge very clearly from survey. Consider, for example, the maps and tables published by Dr John Bintliff and myself from the limited area covered by our first four seasons of survey in Boeotia (fig. 4).¹ These show, in a space of 21 square kilometres, a maximum total of only 7 sites with occupation in the Geometric period, rising to a maximum of 23 in the Archaic, and a maximum of 76 in the Classical and earlier Hellenistic periods. Once one learns that the great majority of these are small, isolated rural sites, it becomes an inescapable conclusion that dispersed rural settlement took place over the first few centuries of the historical period and accelerated in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Results like these can be first checked against those obtained by other surveys in Greece (which in several cases show similar patterns), and then monitored by the continuation of survey in the same area. In our case, three further field seasons (1984–86) have reinforced the overall proportions, but added more specific nuances. Thus, the seventy-odd additional sites investigated since the publication of the preliminary report include the two actual *astea* of

¹ See for example Eliot (1962) and Traill (1975), with their associated maps.

² See especially Adamesteanu (1967).

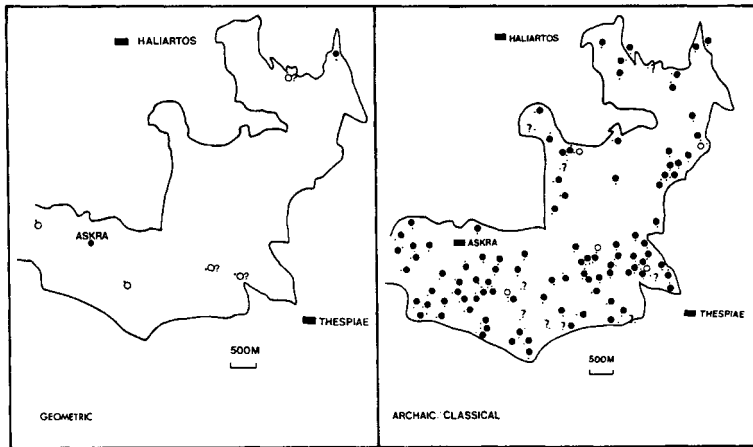


Figure 4: Boeotia survey:

Distribution of Geometric sites (left) and Classical sites (right)

(Slightly updated from Bintliff and Snodgrass, 1985)

Haliartos and Thespiæ, in whose territory we have mainly been operating. These can now be added to the small group occupied from Geometric times onwards, showing that the population then existing was relatively nucleated. Thereafter, Thespiæ provides the fuller sample, since at least two-thirds of our sites can be confidently allocated to its territory. This sample makes it virtually certain that there was no major dispersal of rural settlement from the city in the eighth, the seventh, or the greater part of the sixth centuries BC; nor was the *astu* of Thespiæ itself a major nucleated settlement in these years, but rather a cluster of small village-sized settlements. It was only in the fifth and fourth centuries that Thespiæ grew into a sizeable city, and (perhaps in concert with its second-order settlement of Askra) generated a dense scatter of rural settlement within its territorial boundaries.

This pattern is the more interesting because of the contrast that it presents with certain other cases, notably that of Athens. Whatever its precise explanation, an undoubted

¹ For a preliminary report, see Bintliff and Snodgrass (1985).

feature of the early growth of Athens is the proliferation of new sites in the Attic countryside during the eighth century BC, and an accompanying concentration of occupation in Athens itself.¹ Since we have already seen one reason for associating with this general period the rise of Athens to statehood, and shall shortly consider another, it does seem likely that this process in Athens was accompanied by a sharp increase in the size of the city, and the number of rural settlements. Where, though, does this leave Thespiai? Is it simply an illustration of the fact that the physical processes attendant on state-formation could be utterly different in different places? Are there grounds for the surmise that, in terms of power rather than of political form, Thespiai and perhaps other Boeotian cities developed late, and for that reason may have espoused the loose form of ethnic confederation that appears in later history as the Boeotian League? Politically, there can have been no significant time-lag, since we are fortunate enough to have the first-hand testimony of Hesiod as to the function of his own polis.

Our reconstruction will partly depend on the view taken of the dispersed rural sites. In eighth-century Attica, they look like a successful attempt to consolidate, by internal colonisation, an unusually large territory for which a single city now took responsibility. In Thespiai, with a territory of perhaps one-twentieth of the size, this move may have appeared neither necessary nor perhaps feasible with the available resources of population. This brings us directly to the obvious demographic question: had Athens experienced a dramatic rise in population, which aided and even partly caused the rise of the Athenian state? Ten years ago, I favoured a positive answer to these questions;¹ but there is little doubt that the interpretation then given was too simplistic. By calculating the numbers of extant burials, within and outside Athens, apportioned between successive generations (fig. 5), I sought to show that the Attic population had risen exceptionally steeply, precipitating in at least this one case a political change. But one of the hypothetical or potential factors involved, which was explicitly left out of

¹ Snodgrass (1977), 16–17, fig. 3, and 29, fig. 5.