

Settlement, Landscape and Narrative: What Really Happened in History

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And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

Genesis 4: 15-17

Some seventy years ago, in his *What Happened in History*, the archaeologist Gordon Childe proposed a model for the development of complex societies originating in the Fertile Crescent (Map 6).¹ Four millennia ago, in the Tigris-Euphrates delta, an area ‘no larger than Denmark’, temple priests began systematically to organize farmers to produce a surplus of food. The land was so fertile ‘it could be made a garden of Eden.’ Thus liberated from agricultural production, these priestly castes and their elite peers gathered to live in cities; the rest of the population (80-90%) remained at work on the land. We know all this thanks to the survival of the clay tablets on which the priests recorded the grain renders of the labouring

¹ Thanks to colleagues in the GMA network, and to audiences in Oxford and Manchester for their comments and questions; and to Lesley Abrams, Gwen Bennett, R. I. Moore, Andrew Wareham, and to our anonymous readers for help and wise counsel, ignored at peril.

peasantry. What Childe called ‘the urban revolution’ is thus co-terminous with the beginning of recorded history.²

This origin story for the development of civilization is supported by narrative sources. In its opening chapters, the Book of Genesis, committed to writing in the sixth century BCE, tells a ‘just so’ story: how humans moved from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence — foraging at will in the garden of Eden — to one based on agriculture and the sweat of the brow. Abel is ‘a keeper of sheep’, Cain ‘a tiller of the ground’ (Gen. 4: 2). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same concerns are present in the still more ancient Mesopotamian narrative (whose earliest written traces date to c. 1800 BCE), the Epic of Gilgamesh. For Cain and Abel, read here Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, a city on the Euphrates, and the wild man Enkidu who grazes with cattle. They are not brothers, and their relationship is not a simple story of competition — but it ends the same way, with the death of the pastoralist. Pastoralists and hunter-gatherers are elided here as mobile, uncivilized peoples, opposed to the sedentary lifestyle epitomised by early agriculturalists. The future belongs to the city and the social order it represents.³

² V. Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (Harmondsworth, 1942), Ch. 5, ‘The Urban Revolution’, with the quotations at 49.

³ See further D. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco, 1987); A. Porter, *Mobile Pastoralism and the Formation of Near Eastern Civilization: Weaving Together Stories* (Cambridge, 2012); and cf. Standen and White in this volume.

This Mesopotamian model of the development of what Marshall Hodgson called, tautologically, ‘cited civilization’ has been interpretatively ‘rolled out’ across Eurasia.⁴ It is ‘the standard narrative’ that James Scott’s recent reimagining of Mesopotamian state formation attempts to disrupt.⁵ Scott is not the first to point to the long heritage of the civilizational narrative in western European thought. Drawing on a shared, biblical plotline, scholars have posited a transformative move to urban life in very different chronological periods and geographical areas: our concern here is with the medieval iteration.⁶ It has been argued powerfully that, at the end of the first millennium CE, we can see the playing out of Childe’s ‘urban revolution’ in three theatres: southern China, Mesopotamia, and north west Europe. The scenario here is that the collapse of ancient empires across Eurasia – beginning, perhaps, with the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century, and continuing with the fall of the western Roman Empire in the fifth – inaugurated a half millennium of abatement in terms of agrarian production and exploitation. A period of intensification followed, with spectacular results: tenth-century Abbasid Baghdad was the size of nineteenth-century Paris; eighth-

⁴ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1974); and see now B. Cunliffe, *By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean: The Birth of Eurasia* (Oxford, 2015).

⁵ J. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, (New Haven, 2017), 7 and *passim*. In that his focus is on the processes of state formation, Scott’s critique of Childe runs in parallel to ours here. He mentions but does not focus on the urban narrative: states required towns, but not all towns were states.

⁶ D. Smail, ‘In the Grip of Sacred History’, *American Historical Review*, cx (2005), 1337–61.

century Chang'an 長安 and eleventh-century Kaifeng 開封 both grew to twice this size, with populations of over a million each (Map 5).⁷ Thus, even where Childe has ceased to be referenced directly,⁸ the teleological premise of his argument – with history as a journey towards complex, urban civilization – continues to influence the ways we reconstruct the global past. Whether used consciously or not, Childe's model functions as an ideal type, enabling a comparative history of the city—but also constraining its terms, by establishing a particular notion of what a city is.⁹

There are, certainly, empirical grounds on which to accept Childe's model. The forest clearances of medieval north western Europe (marked in Germany, for example, by the *-rode* suffix to place names) are witness to an exit from Eden, as tillers of the soil sought to put more land under cultivation.¹⁰ Although the pace of this agricultural intensification has been

⁷ Heng Chye Kiang, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats: The Development of Medieval Chinese Cityscapes* (Honolulu, 1999), 7, 136–7.

⁸ Although Childe remains popular as a framework and straw man in archaeological explanation; see for example M. E. Smith, 'Empirical Urban Theory for Archaeologists', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, xviii, 3 (2011), 167–92.

⁹ See in particular, R. I. Moore, 'The Eleventh Century in Eurasian History: A Comparative Approach to the Convergence and Divergence of Medieval Civilizations', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* xxxiii (2003), 3–21; and 'A Global Middle Ages?' in J. Belich, *et al.* (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford, 2016), 80–92.

¹⁰ G. Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (London, 1968) is a classic account; C. J. Wickham, 'European Forests in the Early Middle Ages: landscape and

heavily debated, few would doubt that between, say, the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, ‘cited civilization’ sprung up across the Latin west. How did this happen? The priestly hierarchy are at the centre of the medieval ‘urban revolution’, which altered the face of the landscape as a whole. The ‘white mantle of churches’ seen by one contemporary observer to have covered the earth at the turn of the first millennium stand like Childe’s Mesopotamian temples, as a witness to a grand civilization, its monumental aspirations, and the human cost involved in pursuit of these.¹¹

That said, the congruence between the narrative and the documentary sources ought to give us pause. Before we accept that history happened the way the Bible says it did, we ought to ask why the story of the urban revolution is told as it is. Surely it reflects the concerns of elite city dwellers as they consider the ethical cost of the social order they have constructed — rather than an empirical account of how that order came into being. We need, like Scott, to read ‘against the grain.’¹² We discuss below (Section III), the power of narrative to give retrospective shape to contemporary perceptions of the city.

land clearance’, in Wickham, *Land and Power in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400-1000* (London, 1994), 155-200 places less emphasis on land clearance.

¹¹ Ralph Glaber, *Five Books of Histories* 3. 4, ed. and tr. J. France (Oxford, 1989), 114-16 for the white mantle; see further N. Hiscock (ed.), *The White Mantle of Churches: Architecture, Liturgy, and Art Around the Millennium* (Turnhout, 2003), and R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution* (Oxford, 2000).

¹² Scott, *Against the Grain*, in homage to R. Manning, *Against the Grain: How Agriculture Has Hijacked Civilization* (New York, 2004).

We start by expanding the geographical frame. The story of the Childean ‘urban revolution’ seems at first glance to work well enough for Eurasia. What of elsewhere? In this paper, we attempt to tell that story from different geographical standpoints, exploring alternative trajectories to urban society. We begin with Africa, which offers a new way of thinking about towns and permanence, and reflect back on the record of western Europe and East Asia respectively. We know the African past by a different route; our primary sources of evidence come from archaeology, not history, and the different perspective is partly created by this data source. Yet, this is not an attempt to privilege archaeology over history, or to suggest that it is any more objective: the material record is simply created by a different set of dynamics. Nor is this an attempt to ‘export’ an African model that might replace western narratives of origins. Rather, the African examples alert us to the possibilities of recognizing different forms and paths to urbanism, allowing an exploration of diversity within the Eurasian story also.

I. The ‘Urban Revolution’ in Africa

The archaeological record of the late first and early second millennium CE in Africa is replete with examples of developing urban centres evidenced through a move towards nucleated, complex settlements that served a broader hinterland.¹³ The shift is particularly striking in the second half of the first millennium, and is often linked to (or maybe recognized through) an acceleration in external trade, particularly with the Islamic world. These trading relationships also resulted in the creation of a historical record for parts of Africa: toponymies

¹³ For overview, see G. Connah, *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective* (Cambridge, 2001).

of trading partners recorded by Arab and North African travellers across the Sahara and down the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts (Map 7).¹⁴ For a continent short of written histories these provide an invaluable insight into landscapes of power from about the ninth century onwards. Travellers and scholars of the medieval Islamic region described cities at the edges of their world, peopled by wealthy and powerful elites, some of whom were swiftly Islamized through this contact. African towns were understood by these writers as comparable — if not equal — to towns in their homelands of North Africa, the Levant, and the Persian Gulf. Yet, this recognition also entailed a misinterpretation, as the characteristics of African towns were glossed or misunderstood by outsiders whose frame of reference reflected their own experiences.¹⁵ Subsequent scholars have wasted a lot of effort searching for the ‘metropolises’ of the documents,¹⁶ or the particular cities discussed, only to conclude that they may have looked rather different from historical descriptions, or our expectations.

¹⁴ For collections of these documents see N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge, 1981); G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1962).

¹⁵ Tim Insoll, ‘The External Creation of the Western Sahel’s Past: The Use and Abuse of the Arabic Sources’, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, xiii (1994), 39–49; S. K. McIntosh and R. McIntosh, ‘From Siecles Obscurs to Revolutionary Centuries on the Middle Niger’, *World Archaeology*, xx (1988), 141–65.

¹⁶ S. K. McIntosh and R. J. McIntosh, ‘The Early City in West Africa: Towards an Understanding’, *African Archaeological Review*, ii (1984), 73–98; B. Dato, ‘Rhapta: The

Permanence and Territory

The issue of permanence provides a key example. There is evidence from several parts of the continent for much greater settlement mobility than was seen in contemporary Europe or the Islamic Middle East. In the West African Sahel, historians and archaeologists searching for capital cities discussed in historical sources have often struggled to find candidates that fit all the attributes assigned to them in texts.¹⁷ One exception might be the site of Awdaghost (Tegdaoust), described by historians of the late ninth to twelfth centuries as the key southern terminus of Saharan caravan trade. Al-Yaqubi describes it in the ninth century as the residence of the king of the pastoralist Sanhaja,¹⁸ and by the tenth century Ibn Hawqal's account describes the city as a central focus for a huge population of pastoralists, who when they gathered would form a group of '300,000 tents'.¹⁹ Excavations at Tegdaoust have revealed a period of 'urban explosion', with rich architectural and artefactual remains from

Location and Importance of East Africa's First Port', *Azania*, v (1970), 65–75; L. Kirwan, 'Rhapta, Metropolis of Azania', *Azania*, xxi (1986), 99–104.

¹⁷ For example: Tim Insoll, *Islam, Archaeology, and History: Gao Region (Mali) c. AD 900–1250* (Oxford, 1996); M. Posnansky, 'Archaeology and the Origins of the Akan society in Ghana', in G. de G. Sieveking, *et al.* (eds.), *Problems in Economic and Social Anthropology* (London, 1976), 49–59; H. Lhote, 'Sur l'emplacement de la ville de Tadmekka: antique capitale des berberes soudanais', *Notes Africaines*, li (1951), 65–9.

¹⁸ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus* 22.

¹⁹ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 48.

the tenth to eleventh centuries, followed by a period of decline.²⁰ This relative permanence within a mobile pastoralist population was linked to control of salt resources, which had a special importance in the West African Sahel. Elsewhere, Al-Bakri describes the capital of Ghana in the eleventh century as a sumptuous city with rich investment in monumental tombs, as well as luxurious material goods at the court of the king.²¹ Excavations at Koumbi Saleh, commonly held to be that capital city, have recovered surprisingly little evidence of this material investment²² along with sparse evidence of external trade.²³ The explanation of this is probably that the Empire of Ghana had several capitals at different times, with towns shifting along with the court. This is implied by oral accounts, which are used in combination by scholars of the African past, identifying consistent references to people and events between inevitably partial sources; here the references to the capital of Ghana seem often to describe different places.²⁴ The notion of shifting capitals is also supported by what is known of other settlements in the Sahel at this time, dominated by pastoralist groups for whom authority and

²⁰ J. Devisse, 'Les fouilles de 1962 à 1965: stratigraphie et architecture', *Tegdaoust III. Recherches sur Aoudaghost. Campagnes 1960–1965* (Paris, 1983), 33–244.

²¹ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 80.

²² S. Berthier, *Recherches archéologiques sur la capitale de l'empire de Ghana: étude d'un secteur d'habitat à Koumbi Saleh, Mauritanie* (Oxford, 1997).

²³ P. Mitchell, *African Connections: Archaeological Perspectives on Africa and the Wider World* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2002), 153.

²⁴ D. Conrad, 'A Town Called Dakajalan: The Sunjata Tradition and the Question of Ancient Mali's Capital', *Journal of African History*, xxxv (1994), 362.

permanence were not functionally linked.²⁵ Likewise, David Conrad has convincingly argued from the oral traditions that the capital of the thirteenth–fifteenth century Empire of Mali was not a single place, but a series of sites that provided the base of operations for successive rulers.²⁶ This was misunderstood by Arab writers who ‘had the bureaucratic notion that power belonged to a place rather than to a person or clan’ as well as by later historians and archaeologists who have sought the location of Mali’s capital.²⁷ These towns, their shifting locations, and their relationship with a resource landscape, undermine the notion that urban life must be linked to agricultural dominance. Haour documents the importance of impermanent towns in the African past, recognizing a range of variation from the massive-walled but sparsely occupied enclosures on the Niger-Nigeria border, to the famous ‘mobile courts’ of fifteenth to seventeenth century Ethiopia.²⁸ Continuity was provided by authority, not by location in the landscape.

Greater settlement mobility has been linked to the scarcity of resources, as well as to the relatively low population density found in areas of Africa. Yet urban centres of long standing do exist, albeit based on a diverse range of relationships with those scarce resources.

²⁵ E. A. McDougall, ‘The Sahara Reconsidered: Pastoralism, Politics and Salt from the Ninth Through the Twelfth Centuries’, *African Economic History*, xii (1983), 272.

²⁶ Conrad, *Dakajalan*, 362.

²⁷ J. O. Hunwick, ‘The Mid-Fourteenth Century Capital of Mali’, *Journal of African History*, xiv (1973), 195–206.

²⁸ Anne Haour, ‘Power and Permanence in Precolonial Africa: A Case Study from the Central Sahel’, *World Archaeology*, xxxvii (2005), 552–65; R. Horvath, ‘The Wandering Capitals of Ethiopia’, *Journal of African History*, x (1969), 205–19.

One of the more famous indigenous urban traditions is that found in the Zimbabwe plateau, most fully realised at Great Zimbabwe from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. Yet, Great Zimbabwe is a particularly grand manifestation of a much longer tradition of central places, going back to the eleventh-century site of Mapungubwe in the Limpopo Valley.²⁹ These sites can be seen as fixed points in a mobile landscape created by an economic emphasis on pastoralism. They themselves have considerable archaeological evidence for the penning of livestock or cattle, but this may have occurred at these sites only seasonally. Perhaps more than any other example, Zimbabwe tradition sites suggest a territorial state model, as each successive capital was the largest in a network of smaller, presumably subsidiary settlements suggesting a hierarchical settlement structure. The evidence for cattle keeping on a massive scale suggests that the elites responsible for the urban centres were also managers of a lineage-based system of control over herds and grazing land; wielding power over a shifting territory of seasonal pastoralism.³⁰ Great Zimbabwe may have been built up

²⁹ I. Pikirayi, *The Zimbabwe Culture: Origins and Decline of Southern Zambezi States* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2001); P. Sinclair, I. Pikirayi, G. Pwiti and R. Soper, 'Urban Trajectories on the Zimbabwean Plateau', in P. Sinclair, T. Shaw, B. Andah, and A. Okpoko (eds.), *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns* (London, 1993), 705–31; P. Sinclair, 'Towards an Archaeology of the Future: the Urban Mind, Energy Regimes, and Long-Term Settlement Dynamics on the Zimbabwe Plateau', in P. Sinclair, G. Nordquist, F. Herschend and C. Isendahl (eds.), *The Urban Mind* (Uppsala, 2010), 591–616.

³⁰ M. Hall, Archaeology and Modes of Production in Pre-Colonial Southern Africa, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, xiv (1987), 1–17; P. Sinclair, *Space, Time and Social Formation: A*

over generations, perhaps by successive rulers creating their own space or centre of operations.³¹ Great Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe tradition thus seem to represent fixed points in a mobile landscape, with urban life coming together perhaps only on a seasonal basis.

Thus in African urban landscapes we can see variations in the ways that towns interacted with resource landscapes. There is no single path, and no clear link between the development of central places and dependence on or control over an agricultural hinterland. Rather, there is a focus on people, on the ability to bring people together for either economic or ritual purposes, and this provides a more dynamic notion of urban development, less tied to a fixed landscape. It is not that medieval Africa has no stable urban hierarchy, but that it is not tied to the landscape in the way implied by models derived from European narratives.

Conglomeration and Composition

The classic example of alternative urbanism in African archaeology is Jenne-jeno, an ‘urban cluster’ in the Inland Niger Delta, occupied from around 200 BCE until around 1400 CE.³² This long period of occupation witnessed the growth of the site from a small settlement in a single location to a dense urban settlement of 33 hectares surrounded by a clay city wall

Territorial Approach to the Archaeology and Anthropology of Zimbabwe and Mozambique c. 0–1700 AD (Uppsala, 1982); Pikirayi, *Zimbabwe Tradition*.

³¹ S. Chirikure and I. Pikirayi, ‘Inside and Outside the Dry Stone Walls: Revisiting the Material Culture of Great Zimbabwe’, *Antiquity*, lxxxi (2008), pp. 976–93.

³² S. K. McIntosh (ed.), *Excavations at Jenné-Jeno, Hambarketolo, and Kaniana (Inland Niger Delta, Mali), the 1981 Season* (Berkeley, 1981).

between c. 600 and 800.³³ An adjacent mound was occupied around 300 to create the site of Hambarketolo, extending the urban cluster to a total size of around 41 hectares. These central mounds were part, in turn, of a highly clustered pattern of settlement in the surrounding floodplain, with hinterland villages clustered along the river tributaries that provided transport to farther flung regions, and on the floodplain sediments that would have been vital for the cultivation of rice.

The excavators of Jenne-jeno have engaged explicitly with debates on urban origin and form in this region.³⁴ Jenne-jeno lacks any form of citadel or monumental centre that might be linked to an urban elite,³⁵ but contains ample evidence for social differentiation in the form of highly-specialised craft activities.³⁶ Susan McIntosh has used the notion of heterarchy to explain this complexity without hierarchy, evoking a social structure in which distinct groups held authority over a particular realm of social life.³⁷ Rod McIntosh has

³³ S. K. McIntosh and R. J. McIntosh, 'The Early City in West Africa: Towards an Understanding', *African Archaeological Review*, ii (1984), 89.

³⁴ McIntosh and McIntosh, *Early City*.

³⁵ S. K. McIntosh and R. J. McIntosh, 'Cities without Citadels: Understanding Urban Origins along the Middle Niger', in P. Sinclair, T. Shaw, B. Andah and A. Okpoko (eds.), *Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns* (London, 1993), 622–41.

³⁶ A. LaViolette, *Ethno-Archaeology in Jenne, Mali: Craft and Status among Smiths, Potters and Masons* (Oxford: 2000).

³⁷ S. K. McIntosh, 'Pathways to Complexity: An African Perspective', in *Beyond Chieftdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge, 1999), 1–30.

expanded this to the broader resource landscape.³⁸ These offer a way of thinking differently about towns, divorced from a coercive elite, and apparently built on a form of composition. The notion of composition, or ‘wealth-in-people’, is discussed below; it describes a social strategy of the accumulation of skills and knowledge in a particular place, contained within a diverse population. Jenne-jeno was a hub in a varied landscape, apparently a central point where farmers, traders, and craft workers traded, prayed, and lived their daily lives. The functional divisions in evidence at the town suggest that the urban population was not homogenised, but maintained their separate identities, skills and knowledge, as essential parts of the urban mix. That mix lends itself well to a consideration of what composition might look like on the ground. This way of understanding urban society has ramifications for our understanding of later urban transitions in the Empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai which followed. The view from Jenne-jeno also gives a perspective on the ‘double cities’ reported by Arab merchants at Gao and Koumbi Saleh.³⁹ These are described as divided between the royal settlement and the merchants’ settlement, also understood as being a spatial divide between Muslims (merchants) and non-Muslim indigenous elites. Although two parts of the town of Gao exist (Gao Saney and Gao Ancien), archaeology has suggested that the differences between them were more functional, as with the spatial differentiation at Jenne-jeno. Excavations have suggested a polyglot community from the ninth century onward, with evidence for differentiation of craft products and producers across both sites. Nomads also

³⁸ R. J. McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-Organizing Landscape* (Cambridge, 2005).

³⁹ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 80, 87, 174.

periodically established camps around town, adding to the diversity and spatial differentiation.⁴⁰

II. Out of Africa: ‘Pop-Up Cities’ in Eurasia

African urbanism poses hard questions for the comparative history of the city across Eurasia.⁴¹ As we have seen, the period of intensification in Africa coincides precisely with the ‘urban revolution’ in China, in the world of Islam, and in the Latin West — and yet the more fluid, networked, and impermanent cities we see mushrooming in Africa recall the trading emporia of an earlier period in medieval Europe (to which we now turn), an older form of urbanism, seen to be replaced by permanent settlements from the tenth century.⁴² In the subtropical sinitic southeast of the Eurasian continent, new ‘organic’ types of town were largely southern latecomers added to an older and originally northern tradition of ‘classic’ administrative centres. Is this a great divergence — or have we in fact misconstrued the European evidence and missed some of the East Asian evidence? Is ‘urbanization’ a one-way

⁴⁰ Tim Insoll, ‘Iron Age Gao: An Archaeological Contribution’, *Journal of African History*, xxxviii (1997), 1–30.

⁴¹ This is to follow a trail blazed in Anne Haour, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics. The Central Sahel and the North Sea, 800–1500* (London, 2007).

⁴² ‘Mushroom cities’ is the coinage of Jan Dhondt (‘villes champignons’), see Jan Dhondt, ‘Les problèmes de Quentovic’, in *Studi in Onore di Amintore Fanfani* (Milan, 1962), 57–78. See further R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: A New Audit* (London, 2012), Ch. 5, ‘Debating the History of ‘Mushroom Cities’, 91–115.

developmental process, as the Genesis narrative would insist, or do we see the fluid, but long-lasting configurations of Africa elsewhere too?

European Emporia

Where western Eurasia is concerned, these questions take us away from Milan or Barcelona of the eleventh century, to Ipswich and Hedeby some three centuries earlier (Map 1). This is the world of ‘Dark Age economics’ as described in particular by Richard Hodges, and more recently by Søren Sindbæk.⁴³ In 1982, with calculated brio, Hodges looked to reconfigure the relationship between History and Archaeology, and to set the study of urbanism in post-Roman Europe on a new footing.⁴⁴ Early medieval historians, fixated as they were on the literary and documentary evidence, could see only the story of the city as Henri Pirenne had told it: a Mediterranean urbanism surviving barbarian invasion in the fifth and sixth centuries, but collapsing in the face of the rise of Islam; and then a gap until the recrudescence of long-distance trade in the eleventh century, issuing in the urban centres of the northern Mediterranean (Venice, Genoa) and in the Low Countries (Bruges, Arras).⁴⁵ Hodges posited an entirely different account, based in the archaeological record. The classical

⁴³ See further references below. See now D. Skre, ‘The Development of Urbanism in Scandinavia’, in S. Brink and N. Price (eds.), *The Viking World* (2008), 83-93; and C. Loveluck, *Northwest Europe in the Early Middle Ages, c. AD 600-1150: A Comparative Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁴⁴ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade* (London, 1982).

⁴⁵ Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1922); and *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London, 1939).

city, based on taxation and the administration of justice, did not survive the barbarian invasions unscathed; conversely, western Europe after the conquests of Islam was not in fact bereft of all urban living. Across the seventh century, a new type of settlement emerged, the 'emporium'. This was a 'non-place': it did not register in the literary or documentary record, nor did it enjoy political or ecclesiastical importance. That said, its social and economic presence as witnessed in the archaeological record was palpably real.

Hodges drew a distinction between two types of emporium. Type A emporia were impermanent settlements, based on seasonal long distance exchange. The example explored by Hodges was Ipswich, for which the pottery evidence starts from the end of the sixth century, contemporary with the great cemetery at Sutton Hoo. Within a few generations, however, these settlements were replaced by Type B emporia, of which the key example is Hedeby in northern Germany. These were on different sites from the Type A emporia, were more permanent settlements, and they had a different economic basis. Instead of long-distance networks of exchange involving prestige goods, Type B emporia grew out of local exchanges between craftworkers. In a third phase, these emporia were connected back up into networks of long-distance exchange, under the awning of Carolingian power, which itself was nested within the world economic system of the Abbasid caliphate.

Søren Sindbæk has refined Hodges' model and his typology.⁴⁶ He posits a network of 'nodal points' (taking a select list of seven: Ribe, Kaupang, Birka, Åhus, Truso, Gross Stroemkendorf, Hedeby). These were key, unfortified centres mediating long-distance traffic with more local craft markets. (that is, combining 'Type A' and 'Type B' emporia in Hodges'

⁴⁶ Søren Sindbæk, 'Networks and Nodal Points: The Emergence of Towns in Early Viking Age Scandinavia', *Antiquity*, lxxxi (2007), 120–1.

terms). Sindbæk's nodal points are not easily plotted in political terms: he indeed insists upon the dynamic quality of these nodes, functioning as they did within networks of exchange whose characteristics 'cannot be reduced to any one of its properties'.

[The emporia] were those sites in the interstices of this small world where foreigners might engage in controlled exchange at periodic intervals. First, these were beach fairs or markets on saints' days. Dozens, hundreds, perhaps thousands of people would camp together and transact business in valuables that could not be obtained locally. These places, sometimes the precursors of real towns or ports, [...] were not towns so much as gatherings, the result of the economic underdevelopment of the post-classical world. Such places remained largely unknown to the writers of the age because they were temporary and without substantive history.⁴⁷

In other words, here we have a European landscape of 'pop-up' urbanism very similar to that we have seen explained by Africanists. There is potential here for a breaking of the Childean mould, and a recasting of the city in Europe.

So far, however, this potential lies unexploited. For all their seeming boldness, the pioneers who brought us emporia have backed away here. The story ends tamely: emporia fade and give way to the 'classic' European city. 'A phase of demise separates the unfortified emporia in the eighth and early ninth century from the more general urbanisation of north-western Europe'.⁴⁸ Tenth-century towns are seen to have all the vertebrate features — fortifications, mints, royal and ecclesiastical presence — missing from the earlier, teeming,

⁴⁷ R. Hodges, *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne*, (London, 2000), 120.

⁴⁸ Sindbæk, 'Networks and Nodal Points', 128.

‘protozoic’ era. Is this accurate, or a failure of interpretative nerve? We return to this question below.

Mushroom Towns of East Asia

In East Asia the emporia model runs up against a conventionally tight association between cities and the state, but does bear comparison in some subregions and periods. Roughly between the late eighth and thirteenth centuries, a large number of new towns emerged organically, mostly south of the Yellow River 黃河 (Map 5). After the major rebellions of the mid-eighth century, the reach of the Tang 唐 (618-907) court weakened while regional leaders acquired autonomous access to economic, fiscal and military resources.⁴⁹ Following from a key article by Denis Twitchett in 1966 (himself drawing upon the Japanese scholarship), we have been acquiring an ever growing set of local studies showing how large-scale southward population movement contributed to accelerated economic development especially in the Yangzi 長江 valley, which included the growth of

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Charles A. Peterson, ‘The Autonomy of the Northeastern Provinces in the Period Following the An Lu-shan Rebellion (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1966); Wang Gungwu, *The Structure of Power in the Five Dynasties* (Kuala Lumpur, 1963); Denis Twitchett (ed.), *Cambridge History of China. Vol. 3: Sui and T’ang China 589–906*, pt. 1 (New York, 1979).

many small and medium-sized market towns that were subordinated to but distinct from the formal administrative structure.⁵⁰

These new towns often diverged in numerous ways from the cosmologically, ideologically and politically approved ideal. It was the state's responsibility to provide (and control) markets, which it located within cities. The classic Chinese city was meant to be, and on the plains around the Yellow River sometimes was, a square with walls and evenly spaced gates, divided internally by a symmetrical, orthogonal street plan. Although the ideal shape might be modified to accommodate the realities of local landscapes, the classic city was above all *planned*, as an essential contribution to the ordering of the empire and the cosmos. Such cities were established as the seat of a court-appointed administrator with responsibility for population registration, tax collection, justice, general administration, policing, hosting military forces – and the provision of markets. In administrative geographies, a local official's urban base was rarely distinguished by name from the resource landscape represented by its

⁵⁰ Denis Twitchett, 'The T'ang Market System', *Asia Major*, xii (1966), 203–4, with references to the Japanese literature. Regional studies in English include Hugh Clark, *Community, Trade and Networks: Southern Fujian Province from the Third to the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. 137–40; and Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), esp. 191–202. The stages of development and diversity of forms emerging from subsequent research are summarised by Joseph McDermott and Shiba Yoshinobu, 'Economic Change in China, 960–1279', in John Chaffee and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5, Pt. 2: Sung China, 960–1279* (New York, 2015), 322–4, 333, 379–84, 406–7, 422–5.

surrounding prefecture or county, so that the empire could be presented as quite literally a hierarchy of cities.

Although we can sometimes see attempts to maintain the normative layout, the new towns in the south were much more often obliged to follow the significant irregularities of a landscape greatly broken up by river valleys, lakes, canals and hills, and to accommodate growth. Even in a case like Quanzhou 泉州, where the first wall, in the eighth century, was square, the city had an irregular (and longer) wall by the tenth century, and in 1230 incorporated an extramural ‘foreign merchant ghetto’.⁵¹ The origins of these ‘mushroom’ towns and cities was more varied too, arising as they did in a fluid context of settler colonialism. As in an early case in seventh-century Zhangpu county 漳浦縣 in the river valleys of Fujian 福建 province, expansion by migrants tended to displace earlier inhabitants into yet uncleared forest as the incomers built padi fields and developed agricultural specialisms and often manufacturing.⁵² A good deal of settlement was driven by the great estates of local magnates or Buddhist monasteries, whose varied activities in agriculture, processing, manufacturing, moneylending and services required establishments such as granaries, mills, workshops, shop fronts and offices in proximities that could foster urbanisation.⁵³ In other places, markets and communication hubs could grow into ‘half-towns’,

⁵¹ Clark, *Community, Trade and Networks*, 138.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12–17, esp. 16.

⁵³ See Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: an Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York, 1995), original published in 1956.

larger towns or cities, which might well lack walls, as at the town of Ganshuizhen 甘水鎮 (as well as at least six county seats: cities by definition) in the Yangzi delta.⁵⁴ On a somewhat different trajectory, outposts of colonial civil or military authority sometimes attracted services and suppliers and became the walled core for expanding collections of suburbs, as at Yangzhou 揚州.⁵⁵ Like the ideal Chinese city, the organic towns provided a backbone for populations with social and occupational differentiation, and were permanently located in an agricultural hinterland, but now they might just as readily exploit as service the rural producers⁵⁶ and we know from efforts to suppress some of them that many existed outside state-defined hierarchies.⁵⁷

In not a few cases the new centres, regardless of their origins, became more economically important than the county or prefectural town where the local magistrate resided, but prosperity was not a reason by itself for transferring the loci of administrative authority, nor for increasing the number of administrative centres.⁵⁸ During the eleventh and twelfth

⁵⁴ McDermott and Shiba, 'Economic Change', 425.

⁵⁵ Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats*, 73–83.

⁵⁶ Von Glahn, *Country of Streams and Grottoes*, 201.

⁵⁷ McDermott and Shiba, 'Economic Change', 383–4.

⁵⁸ Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats*, 183–9 and n. 21, which observes that prefectures fell in number from 331 in the reign era 742–56, at the peak of the Tang dynasty, to 220 in the Song reign era 1078–85 — the period of the shortlived 'New Policies', which sought to raise government revenue by unleashing the population's economic drive and taxing the resulting commerce.

centuries there were repeated reorganisations of administrative geography driven by political arguments over revenue, defensibility, irredentism and local interests, but while prefectures and counties were frequently abolished in some places and created in others, the overall numbers of administrative districts could remain relatively static for centuries.⁵⁹

Perhaps ironically, the increasing legibility to central government of the elements of the centrally appointed administrative hierarchy seems to have been, at least partly, enabled by the increased revenues collected from the organic network of often unrecorded commercial towns, which were too numerous for many to be subsumed into governmental structures.⁶⁰ These urban centres did have coercive functions to varying degrees, primarily – for those with a guise as tax collection stations – as sources of government revenue, or as nodes of communication and trade for colonists, or as bases for their military backers. But although things like new agricultural techniques were disseminated through government channels, many of the new urban centres in the south were not the local outposts of top-down authority imagined by a cosmological orthodoxy that would be familiar to Childe, and which would

⁵⁹ Ruth Mostern notes that the Song had a higher density of counties than any other period of imperial history, but that the total number of prefectures and counties ‘remained almost constant’ while the population nearly tripled, *‘Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern’: The Spatial Organization of the Song State (960–1276 CE)* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), esp. 12. Cf. Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats*, 202–3, nn. 11, 21. Nobody has yet considered, so far as I know, how these ‘small-scale’ and sometimes short-term changes of function were (or were not) reflected in the city itself, whether in spatial arrangement, contents, population size and types, and so on.

⁶⁰ Clark, *Community, Trade and Networks*, 110–19.

have allowed them to become ‘classic’ towns in the Chinese context. Instead the emerging urban sites were much more the products of the bottom-up – or at least, middle-out – aspects of rapid economic expansion and diversification that outstripped government efforts at control, and often even management. One result is that it was no longer clear what a city was.

Despite – or perhaps because – of the disconnect from government authority, urban centres, without distinction between ‘classic’ or ‘organic’ origins, are commonly cast as sites of social developments featuring competition featuring old elites, a new literati class and rising mercantile wealth.⁶¹ Despite this diversity, these were not, or not only, centres of voluntaristic urban composition. Rather, both primary and secondary materials present these sites, often implicitly, as engines of a *mission civilisatrice*, securing the implantation of hard-won agricultural productivity upon ‘wasteland’ by providing markets and nodes of communication, and manufacturing sites feeding booming commercial demand both domestic and foreign.⁶² What this means is that organic towns and cities as much as their state-planned counterparts contributed to processes of colonial displacement, violence and environmental destruction,⁶³ which is much less part of the story that Childe wanted to tell.

⁶¹ For a dazzling survey including, but not confined to, urban centres, see Robert Hymes, ‘Sung Society and Social Change’, in *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5, Pt. 2*, 526-664.

⁶² E.g. Clark, *Community, Trade, and Networks*.

⁶³ See, for example, Von Glahn, *Country of Streams and Grottoes*, esp. Ch. 4-5. Despite this, neither the Turnerian model of frontier expansion (Frederick Jackson Turner, ‘The Significance of the Frontier in American History’, in Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 1–38), its critiques, nor postcolonial theory have featured much in this body of scholarship, which of course lacks sources from the perspective of the colonised.

III. Urban Narratives

If we attempt to take seriously these multiple urban forms in Africa, Europe and Asia; if we try to understand them as effective alternatives to a monothetic urban narrative; how then are we to understand the transition from emporia to ‘classic’ towns? There are two possibilities. We may accept that there is change in the mode of production and/or exchange and look to explain it. This has been and remains a subject of intensive debate, to which we do not seek directly to contribute here.⁶⁴

The other, more disarming, possibility is that ‘urban development’ is an optical illusion — or, less extreme, is a function of narrative as much as of change on the ground. In the African context, continuity of authority and of urban tradition often far exceeded the longevity of individual settlements. In Chinese-language sources, standardised information on administrative hierarchies tidies up a variety that emerges most clearly from archaeology. What happens in Europe in the Carolingian and post-Carolingian period is not, or not only a social, but a literary revolution, in which emporia, the ‘non-places’ of the Dark Age world, or some of them, were made permanent through their incorporation in ‘substantive’ history. From study of the post-Roman West, we know that there is often a divergence between the

⁶⁴ For further discussion, from a huge bibliography, see F. Theuvs, ‘Exchange, Religion, Identity and Central Places in the Early Middle Ages’, *Archaeological Dialogues*, x (2004), 121–38; and J. Henning, ‘Early European Towns: The Way of the Economy in the Frankish Area between Dynamism and Deceleration 500–1000 AD’, in J. Henning (ed.), *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium I, The Heirs of Rome in the West* (Berlin, 2007), 3–40.

constructs of literary record and the urban structures on the ground. The sixth-century bishops of Arles and of Tours, for example, give a misleadingly grand impression of the shrunken cities over which they presided.⁶⁵ Narrative here looks at best like calculated nostalgia, at worst a form of wilful denial. Rewriting the past can be productive, however: what we explore in the rest of this chapter, is the function of urban narrative in Afroeurasia around the turn of the first millennium.

As we have seen, people across a broad spectrum of urban possibility have constructed their own understandings of town. Rather than trying to categorise urbanism — which inevitably excludes as much as it includes — perhaps it might be more productive to historicise it. The Mesopotamian stories of Cain and Gilgamesh as city founders can be counterpoised with the other ways that groups across the Afroeurasian landmass have established their own myths of urban origin.

African Stories of Town

In Africa, a scarce historical record and a reliance on archaeology undoubtedly colours our contemporary understandings of past urban configurations. Yet, it is possible to explore urban biographies in several regions, partly from the material record itself. At the edges of the forest in Nigeria, for example, large and sumptuous towns are found from the ninth century onwards, famous for their artistic traditions of terracotta and brass manufacture. These are the legacy of massive technical skill among a group of specialist craftspeople, whose talents emerged initially at the town of Ife, and later spread to successor sites such as Old Oyo and

⁶⁵ N. Christie and S. T. Loseby (eds.), *Towns in Transition* (Aldershot, 1996), esp. the contribution of Loseby on Arles.

later Benin. This craftsmanship is strongly associated with the Yoruba religion and with the traditions of kingship in this region, all of which are seen to have their origin at Ife: urbanism and the urban story began here and spread to other sites as part of a single narrative journey.⁶⁶ Ife is recognised as the ancestor of the region's urban tradition, as well as remaining a sacred site. It was occupied from at least the ninth century, with a 'Classic' period from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, and a later decline that mirrored the growth of centres elsewhere, notably at Benin. Ritual, art, and kingly power were all bound together, recreated in household shrines across the town.⁶⁷ Institutions of divine kingship developed here, represented particularly clearly in the many examples of human sacrifice found in shrine and palace contexts,⁶⁸ that later travelled to Old Oyo, Owo, and Benin.⁶⁹ The spread of new

⁶⁶ A. M. Obayemi, 'The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours Before 1600', in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowther (eds.), *History of West Africa*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1985), 255–322; A. Ogundiran, 'Filling a Gap in the Ife-Benin Interaction Field (Thirteenth–Sixteenth Centuries AD): Excavations in Iloyi Settlement, Ijesaland', *African Archaeological Review*, xix (2002), 27–60.

⁶⁷ P. S. Garlake, 'Excavations at Obalara's Land, Ife: an Interim Report', *West African Journal of Archaeology*, iv (1974), 111–148; P. S. Garlake, 'Excavations on the Woye Asiri Family Land in Ife, Western Nigeria', *West African Journal of Archaeology*, vii (1977), 57–95; F. Willett, 'Ife and its Archaeology', in J. D. Fage and R. A. Oliver (eds.), *Papers in African Prehistory* (London, 1970), 303–26.

⁶⁸ For example, Garlake, *Obalara's Land*.

⁶⁹ G. Connah, *The Archaeology of Benin: Excavations and Other Researches in and Around Benin, Nigeria* (Oxford, 1975).

settlement in the post-Classic period, has been analysed according to an internal frontier model, in which would-be leaders split from the central settlement and established their own on the margins of the cultural zone.⁷⁰ This is made possible by the strong narratives of divine, ritual and kingly power linked to the urban tradition here.

On the eastern African coast, a different urban story took hold, based on connection with the Indian Ocean world and with Islam. Numerous towns of this Swahili coast modelled themselves from the raw material of earlier trading settlements, drawing on the material world and creating urban settings replete with mosques, tombs, and palaces built in coral.⁷¹ These were often relatively small settlements, distinguished by their townscapes, but also by a common urban narrative. Along the coast, numerous versions exist of a story in which six brothers sailed from Shiraz and founded towns along the coast.⁷² This ‘Shirazi myth’, preserved in oral tradition and in written form from Portuguese times onward, offers a powerful origin story and source of authority for urban elites, reiterated through objects such as coins that circulated the names of rulers claiming exotic connections.

Thus, part of the transition that can be seen in Africa in the period from the 10th century onwards is the development of a set of urban traditions that can be glimpsed in different ways in different places. In Nigeria, the development of the urban narrative began at

⁷⁰ I. Kopytoff, ‘The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture’, in I. Kopytoff (ed.), *The Internal African Frontier* (Bloomington, 1987), 3–84.

⁷¹ Stephanie Wynne-Jones, *A Material Culture: Consumption and Materiality on the Precolonial East African Coast* (Oxford, 2016).

⁷² Randall Pouwels, ‘Oral Historiography and the Shirazi Myth’, *History in Africa*, xi (2014), 237–67.

If and formed the identity of ‘successor’ towns at places like Benin. On the Swahili coast, the urban narrative privileges external sources. What is interesting is that in both cases we see a different spatial relationship with a resource landscape, and the development of an urban story that transforms the way that landscape is viewed. It is this story, rather than a consistent development of settlement, that is the real defining feature of urbanism here.

Eastern Eurasian Narratives and Varieties of City

The Chinese-language sources, no less than the associated scholarly literature on urbanism, have been framed by the powerful idea of the ‘classic Chinese city’, which has been applied to recorded and archaeological sites from Central Asia to the Japanese archipelago and from Guangzhou to Mongolia. While there is now a broad consensus about the developmental trajectory of the organic southern market towns, as presented above, when we move to Northeast Eurasia,⁷³ new archaeological work is increasingly suggesting that ‘steppe urbanism’ was also more diverse than the classic Chinese model can accommodate. There is a tension between the literary sources and the archaeological data. This can be read not in terms of ‘ideal and reality’, but to reflect a social and political tension on the ground. There were competing narratives about what a city was.

The official history of the Liao 遼 dynasty (907-1125), the *Liao shi* 遼史, provides most of the written evidence for a steppe-based empire founded by a group known as the Kitan 契丹. In the *History*’s ‘Treatise on Geography’ 地理志, completed in 1344, the

⁷³ A potentially contentious term, here it runs from the Yellow River basin and across Mongolia and Manchuria.

establishment of the fourth of five co-existing capitals is presented as the visionary act of a sinicising emperor:

Once, when Shengzong 聖宗 (982–1031) in passing Qijin mountain 七金山 along the Tu river gazed 土河 off to the south, the clouds presented a vision of city suburbs and storied buildings. Consequently, the establishment of a capital was discussed. Fine artisans selected from Yan 燕 and Ji 薊 directed the work for two years. The suburbs, palaces, towers, treasuries and depots, market places, and galleries followed the arrangement of the divine capital 神都.

In the twenty-fourth year of Tonghe 統和 (1006) the Five Tents Division 五帳院 offered the land where of old the imperial tent of the kings of Xi 奚 stood. In the twenty-fifth year (1007) it was walled and filled up with Chinese households. It was named the Central Capital 中京 [Zhongjing], the administration being called Dading 大定. In the Imperial City 皇城 was an [imperial] ancestral temple and a hall with the images of Jingzong 景宗 and Empress Chengtian 承天皇后.

聖宗常過七金山土河之濱，南望雲氣，有郛郭樓闕之狀，因議建都。擇良工於燕、薊，董役二歲，郛郭、宮掖、樓閣、府庫、市肆、廊廡，擬神都之制。統和二十四年，五帳院進故奚王牙帳地。二十五年，城之，實以漢戶，號曰中京，府曰大定。⁷⁴

Artisans from Yan and Ji (around present-day Beijing) are implicitly Chinese while the ‘divine capital’, its contents and its wall refer to the classic Chinese ideal city,⁷⁵ and the ancestral temple implies the adoption of Confucian — so, Chinese — practices and ideology. The naming of the administration follows a model found in other sinitic dynastic histories, and it is populated with implicitly agricultural Chinese households.

This kind of story is rare in the geographical treatises. More typical is the list that precedes it, of the previous urban administrative centres and major events on the site. The enumeration begins with the mythical Yu 虞 and Xia 夏, when the town ‘was Yingzhou 為營

⁷⁴ *Liao shi* 遼史 [History of the Liao Dynasty] (Beijing, 2016), ch. 39, 545–6, trans. Karl

Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)* (Philadelphia, 1949), 371. The transliteration of Chinese has been changed to *pinyin* and the capitalisation regularised.

⁷⁵ See Nancy Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning* (Honolulu, 1990), 29–36; Paul Wheatley, *Pivot of the Four Quarters* (Edinburgh, 1971), 411 and references.

州’ and ‘belonged to Jizhou 屬冀州’ respectively, then ‘under the Zhou 周 (1045–256 BCE) was a branch of Youzhou 幽州. When the Qin 秦 (221–207 BCE) ruled the *tianxia* 天下, it was Liaoxi 遼西. Under the Han 漢 (202 BCE–220 CE) it was Xin’anpingxian 新安平縣.’⁷⁶

After events listed for the politically complex period following the Han, we learn that none other than the great second emperor of Tang (r. 626–649) camped there on campaign against Goguryeo 高句麗 (37 BCE–668 CE) in the northern Korean peninsula. The text legitimises the Liao emperor Shengzong for a sinitic audience by having him establish a thoroughly orthodox capital city in what by the time the *History* was finalised in the fourteenth century was seen as a Chinese mode, with an extensive genealogy of association with ancient, admired and sometimes mythical figures from the sinitic tradition.

Some of the *History*’s physical description is borne out by the remains of the Central Capital, the pounded-earth ramparts of which still stand in agricultural countryside in

⁷⁶ 周在幽州之分。秦郡天下，是為遼溪。漢為新安平縣。 *Liao shi*, ch. 39, 545. I have retained the suffixes *-zhou* and *-xian* rather than a translation because names including this term can refer either to the whole district or just to the city which was its seat.

southeastern Inner Mongolia.⁷⁷ Measured on Google Earth, the perimeter is nearly square and just over 8 km long, with internal walled enclosures generally identified as palaces by analogy with Central Plains capitals such as Chang'an and Luoyang 洛陽.⁷⁸ The surviving gates are

⁷⁷ Zhongguo lishi bowuguan yaogan yu hangkong sheying kaogu zhongxin 中国历史博物馆遥感与航空摄影考古中心 [National History Museum Archaeological Centre for Remote Sensing and Aerial Photography] and Nei Menggu Zizhiqu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 内蒙古自治区文物考古研究所 [Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute], ed. *Nei Menggu dongnanbu hangkong sheying kaogu baogao* 内蒙古东南部航空摄影考古报告 [Report of aerial photographic archaeology in southeastern Inner Mongolia] (Beijing, 2002); and Liao Zhongjing fajue weiyuanhui [Liao Zhongjing Excavation Committee], 'Liao Zhongjing chengzhi fajue de zhongyao shouhuo' 辽中京城址发掘的重要收获 [Important outcomes from the excavations of the site of the Liao Central Capital], *Wenwu* 文物 (1961:9), 34–40.

⁷⁸ Different lengths have been recorded for the walls. *Wenwu* 1961, 35, gives 4.2 x 3.5 km; Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, 193, n. 12, gives 2 x 1.4 km, following Tamura Jitsuzô 田村實造, *Chûgoku seifuku ôchô no kenkyû* 中國征服王朝の研究 [Research on the Chinese Conquest Dynasties] (Kyoto, 1964–86), vol. 1, 336; Chen Shu 陳述, *Qidan shehui*

symmetrically placed along their particular wall. Two Liao-period pagodas ('towers', *ta* 塔) survive, one within and one outside the walls.

What the text effaces but fresh archaeological investigation reveals is an eastern extension creating a rectangle with more than twice the perimeter of the visible square.⁷⁹ Furthermore, within the walls were not only certain buildings neatly arrayed, but large open spaces with no trace of foundations, supporting fleeting notes of seasonal occupation of these areas, at Liao capitals and elsewhere, by 'tent cities' of sojourning courtiers, chiefs and their

jingji shigao 契丹社會經濟史稿 [Historical survey of Kitan society and economy] (Beijing, 1963), 90, gives 30 *li* 里 (15 km) around, with a reference to Liao Zhongjing fajue weiyuanhui, 'Neimenggu fajue Liao Zhongjing 'Zijincheng' faxian xuduo zhongyao yiji yiwu' 内蒙古发掘辽中京“紫金[sic]城”发现许多重要遗迹遗物 [Excavations of the 'Forbidden City' of the Liao Central Capital in Inner Mongolia discover much of archaeological importance] *Wenwu* (1960:2), 77, which Steinhardt follows, although this dimension is not in fact given there but in *Wenwu* 1961.

⁷⁹ Peng Shanguo 彭善国, personal communication.

followers, and armies.⁸⁰ If pounded-earth techniques and wall designs had perhaps been borrowed from the Central Plains, the intramural plan had not.⁸¹ These different forms also

⁸⁰ Zhang Ruijie 张瑞杰, 'Liao Shangjing, Liao Zhongjing yizhi shilue' 辽上京、辽中京遗址述略 [A note on the sites of Liao Shangjing and Zhongjing], *Chifeng xueyuan xuebao* 赤峰学院学报, 35/2 (2014), 18. Lu Zhen 路振, *Chengyao lu* 乘轺录 [Diary of travelling in a light carriage], in Jia Jingyan 贾敬颜, *Wudai Song Jin Yuan ren bianjiang xingji shisan zhong shuzheng gao* 五代宋金元人边疆行记十三种疏证稿 [Critical edition of thirteen frontier travel accounts of the Five Dynasties, Song, Jin and Yuan], 67 (trans. David Wright, *The Ambassadors' Records: Eleventh-Century Reports of Sung Embassies to the Liao* (Bloomington, 1998), 41) notes residence in tents in Zhongjing.

⁸¹ Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, notes that the Central Capital's non-concentric city plan diverged from the Chinese model, but the buildings 'were unquestionably influenced by China', 126 ff, citing other scholars in support while chiding Tamura for overclaiming the Central Capital as 'a humble version of the Song capital Bianliang'. Chen, *Qidan shehui*, 89–90, does not in fact distinguish the buildings from the city plan, Whether the concentric city plan was standard in Song China is a whole other question, especially given the consensus about the diversity of city plans south of the Yellow River, noted above. Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats*, emphasises the large open areas created in the Tang city plan by its immensely wide streets, but these scholars dwell on pattern rather than space.

suggest different or additional functions as compared with the classic city, although as yet we have little evidence for what those other functions were.⁸²

Geographical treatises, then, including that in the *Liao History*, were primarily concerned with positioning each administrative unit within the official hierarchy. Yet the formal organisation of this administrative information also ensured the recording of units particular to the Liao, such as the *ordo* 斡鲁朵 and the *natpat* or *nabo* 捺钵, of population movements and administrative complexity. The *ordo* are referred to in Chinese as ‘palaces’, *gong* 宫, and they could be the recipients of political exiles, but this gives a misleading impression of necessary fixity. The *Liao History* indicates that the *ordo* had significant military functions and were controlled by senior members of the imperial family, including

⁸² City forms, and especially functions, have not yet been examined in depth. Steinhardt, *Chinese Imperial City Planning*, provides analysis restricted to capitals and Lin Hu, a detailed case study: *Urban Landscape and Politics: The Making of Liao Cities in Southeast Inner Mongolia* (PhD Diss, University of Chicago, 2009). Standen’s PhD student, Lance Pursey, is working on aspects of this issue as part of the AHRC-funded Understanding Cities project. For earlier steppe cities such as those built by the Uyghurs, discussion includes an intriguing suggestion of possible Sogdian influence: Judith G. Kolbas, Khukh Ordung, a Uighur Palace Complex of the Seventh Century’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Ser., xv (2005), 303–27 .

empresses. At the very least they had the mobility of armies.⁸³ The *nabo* have been explained as the seasonal campsites of the court and also the associated migration, and by extension its participants. The full nature of either *ordo* or *nabo* is not entirely clear, either textually or archaeologically, but in both cases we see a significant concern with groups of people who can move, rather than solely with fixed places.⁸⁴

The possible links between *ordos* and *nabo* have been investigated and arguments made for *nabo* as sites for markets.⁸⁵ Some *ordos* were based at imperial tombsites and in those cases were probably associated with the walled urban forms also found there, but the

⁸³ Wittfogel and Feng, *Liao*, who call them ‘camps’, esp. 508–17; Wu Yuhuan 武玉环,

‘Liaodai woluduo tanxi’ 辽代斡鲁朵探析 [An Investigation of the Woluduo, a Liao Dynasty Organization], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (2000:2), 12 pp.

⁸⁴ Wittfogel and Feng, *Liao*, 131–4.

⁸⁵ Li Xihou 李锡厚, ‘Liao zhongqi yihou de nabo ji qi yu woluduo, Zhongjing de guanxi’ 辽

中期以后的捺钵及其与斡鲁朵、中京的关系 [The *nabo* after the mid-Liao and its

relationship to the *ordo* and Zhongjing], *Zhongguo lishi bowuguan guankan* 中国历史博物馆

馆刊, xv–xvi (1991), 99–100, 115; Xiao Aimin 肖爱民 and Li Xiao 李潇, ‘Liaochao jingnei

shichang tanxi’ 辽朝境内市场探析 [An investigation of markets in Liao territory], *Hebei*

daxue xuebao, cxxxviii (2007:6), 108–12.

details of both institutional and physical relationships are obscure. One collection of artificial mounds has been claimed as the first *nabo* site to be identified, but that has been challenged.⁸⁶

Many Liao districts of all kinds, not least in the large circuit formally subordinated to the Central Capital, are recorded as being founded or later supplemented with large scale and long distance population transfers from other districts or conquered groups.⁸⁷ In the eleventh century we may observe a pattern whereby *ordo* units were increasingly incorporated into the standard administrative hierarchy of prefectures and counties. Qianzhou 黔州 and Enzhou 恩州 were both moved from control by the second emperor's *ordo* (which guarded his tomb) to that of the Central Capital; Yuzhou was also placed under the Central Capital instead of an

⁸⁶ Kaogu zhengshi Jilin 'chun *nabo*' wei Zhongguo mianji zui da gu youmu min jijixing yulie yingdi 考古证实吉林‘春捺钵’为中国面积最大古游牧民季节性渔猎营地

[Archaeology confirms that the Jilin 'spring *nabo*' is the largest pastoralist seasonal hunting camp in China], http://www.jl.xinhuanet.com/2012jlpd/2014-09/25/c_1112617343.htm

(viewed 29 October 2016); cf. Zhao Limeng 赵里萌, Jilin Qiananhua Aobao duitu yizhiquan

xingzhi kaobian 吉林乾安花敖泡堆土遗址群性质考辨 [Verification of the nature of the collection of earthen mounds at Huaaobao in Qian'an, Jilin], unpublished paper.

⁸⁷ Conveniently listed for Zhongjing in Wittfogel and Feng, *Liao*, 76–9, though lacking the specific wording of the original text, *Liao shi*, j. 39, 546–54.

imperial family member.⁸⁸ These changes are usually read with approval as an indicator of increasing centralisation affecting the whole population, and thus a move towards the sinicisation that is also implied by the textual record of the city's founding.

But this is to collude in the source's perspective. What we should be saying is that the official narrative is therefore less about the ideal city itself than a representation of an administrative geography that implies (ideal) cities and thus sinicisation, and which can efface an alternative geography based on groups rather than locations. This narrative of sinicisation gradually consumed elements that do not fit, like *ordos* and *nabo*, and feels no need to offer adequate or even accurate explanations of what they were.

Western Eurasian Narratives

In much of the imaginary of Latin Christendom, the city remained in the shadow of Cain.⁸⁹ Writing of Laon in the early twelfth century, Guibert of Nogent, a Benedictine monk, had this story to tell.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ One could argue instead that the standardisation was primarily directed at the growing imperial family, members of whom repeatedly made coup attempts, facilitated by independent access to *ordo* resources both economic and military.

⁸⁹ See further R. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Imagination* (London, 1994).

⁹⁰ Guibert de Nogent, *Monodiae* III.7, ed. E. R. Labande (Paris, 1981); trans. P. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent* (University Park, 1995), 145–6.

Every Saturday country people from various parts would come there to buy and sell. The citizens of Laon would carry around for sale in the marketplace vegetables, wheat, or other produce in bowls, platters, or other containers. They would offer these to the peasants who were anxious to buy them; and once a price had been fixed and the purchaser had agreed to buy, the seller would say, 'Come over to my house and I'll show you the full supply of the product I'm selling you'.

City dwellers selling food to peasants: this is parodic, fantastical subversion of the actual workings of the urban market.⁹¹ Guibert's point must be understood as a moral one. When the gullible peasant went along, the 'honest' seller would show him a vat, and encourage him to have a close look:

The buyer would then hoist himself up and lean over the edge... Then the good vendor would come from behind, lift the unsuspecting peasant by the feet, dump him into the chest and keep him in the safe prison until he had paid a ransom.

This was just one example, which 'if it had occurred among barbarians or Scythians, people who have no laws, it would have been considered the highest form of profanation.' The whole city, in fact, its leaders included, was a den of thieves and murderers. Churchmen

⁹¹ With thanks to Chris Wickham for this observation.

might be no better. With an acuity born of his own frustrated ambition, Guibert bears witness to the false promise of the new world of opportunity.⁹² So much for ‘civilization’.

This was not the only way to figure the city and its relation to the Scythians.⁹³ Writing some hundred years before Guibert, Dudo, canon of St Quentin in Normandy, tells a story which starts in Scythia, but ends in the city of Rouen. Dudo is widely acknowledged as the founder of ‘the Norman myth’: he recounts how the marauding Northmen became ‘Normans’, a Christian people settling in the Carolingian world, aspiring to succeed the Franks.⁹⁴ Dudo’s chronicle established the template for subsequent Norman historiography, both in England, in Sicily, and in the Holy Land.

Dudo here features less as an ‘ethnic’ historian, and rather as a narrator of the steppe and the sown. The division between these remains, but it is permeable, and the ‘civilizing process’ as the Normans pass from one to the other is not conceived as a fall into exploitative social relations. Put another way, Dudo takes up ‘Type A and B emporia’ and gives them a history and a future.

⁹² See further R. I. Moore, ‘Guibert of Nogent and his World’, in H. Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985), 107–17.

⁹³ For the start of the literary tradition on the Scythians, see the classic study of F. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (Berkeley, CA, 1988).

⁹⁴ R. H. C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1978). See now B. Pohl, *Dudo of St Quentin's Historia Normannorum: Tradition, Innovation and Memory* (Woodbridge, 2015).

Dudo's is a global history, or at least of the parts of the world with which we are concerned in this essay. 'Now the cosmographers who have surveyed the world's whole mass', he begins, taking his readers on a tour of 'Asia, Europe, and Africa'. He moves in closer to describe the border between Europe and Asia.

Spread out within the huge space between the Danube and the edge of the Scythian Sea, there dwell savage and barbarous peoples... For there lies the region of the great multitudes of Alania, the exceedingly fertile site of Dacia, and the farreaching reaches of Getia. Of which, Dacia stands in the middle, looking like a crown, or resembling a city fortified by enormous Alps.⁹⁵

Dudo's people, 'the Daci, call themselves Danai or Danes, and boast that they are descended from Antenor; who when in former times the lands of Troy were laid waste, slipped away through the middle of those Greeks'.⁹⁶ In other words, Dudo here at once evokes the barbarous nomadic origins of his people, and simultaneously anticipates their urban future. They come from a city — Troy — and even their redoubt looks like a city.

⁹⁵ Dudo of St Quentin, *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, ed. J. Lair (Caen, 1865) I.1, trans. E. Christiansen, *Dudo of St Quentin, History of the Normans*, 15 (all citations from this translation).

⁹⁶ Dudo, *De moribus*, I.2, tr. 16.

As Eleanor Searle showed a generation ago, Virgil's Aeneid serves as a narrative template for Dudo, as he writes the Normans into the canon of Latin historiography.⁹⁷ The part of Aeneas is taken by Rollo, who leads the Danes from Dacia, undergoes a series of trials and tribulations, and then finally comes to rest in Christian conversion, and in Francia. On his voyages, Rollo has a vision of himself on a mountain, cured from leprosy, and surrounded by a flock of birds of many different colours, nesting all around him. This is interpreted to mean his conversion to Christianity, and the men of many different provinces following. 'By the nests, you may understand the walls of devastated cities are to be rebuilt.'⁹⁸

And so it comes to pass. Rollo takes a lovingly described journey up the Seine to Jumièges.

And when the poor people and the needy merchants who lived at Rouen and the inhabitants of that region, heard that a mighty throng of Northmen was present at Jumièges, they all came as one to Franco, the bishop of Rouen, to discuss what to do.

Franco sent for Rollo, who came to Rouen guaranteeing the safety of the bishop and the citizens.

⁹⁷ Eleanor Searle, 'Fact and Pattern in Heroic History: Dudo of St Quentin', *Viator*, xv (1984), 119–37.

⁹⁸ Dudo, *De moribus*, II. 6, tr. 29–30.

Landing from the fleet, and inspecting the city at a rapid pace, he saw its great buildings thrown down, and the stones of its temples torn out, churches 'shaken from the foundations', walls broken down everywhere and a small and weaponless garrison, and he began to be 'lost in a gaze on one object, remembering the vision which he had seen across the sea.

Rollo retires to his ships to take counsel with his men. They enjoin upon him:

This land is fertile, abounding in all fruits, well shaded with trees, divided by rivers full of fish, and well stocked with various kinds of game; but it is devoid of warriors and knights. Let us subject it to our power, and claim it as our own. Let us win in battle the towns, villages, and cities of the peoples who live here, so that the bands of banished men behind us will be able to rest in peace.⁹⁹

Dudo here has the Norsemen decide to turn their violence to the cause of citted civilization.

In reading Dudo, we may suspect his description of the extent of devastation (there has been in fact a huge debate about this).¹⁰⁰ But another way to say Rouen is a 'small and weaponless garrison' is to say that it is a Type B emporium. Rouen, had of course, a Roman

⁹⁹ Dudo I. 18, tr. 35–36.

¹⁰⁰ See further L. Abrams, 'Early Normandy', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 35 (2013), 45-64, and the literature there cited.

past, but its revival in the seventh century seems to have largely ignored the Roman topography, and to have started again.¹⁰¹ The point here, as we have seen elsewhere in this essay, is to resist the empirical allure of narrative. Dudo's text completes a long drawn out process of urban regeneration--but like every story of conversion or transformation, it is a retrospective account, traducing what came before, in the name of the glory of the new order.

IV. Conclusion: Rewriting Global Cities

The history of citted civilization has been based on questionable assumptions. The Mesopotamian myths of urban origin are but one of many ways in which peoples across the Afro-Eurasian landmass have chosen to account for the development of cities — but they have loomed disproportionately large in the scholarship. Accounts like Gordon Childe's *What Happened in History* repeat the tropes of the city found in ancient traditions, and so enforce a top-down typological orthodoxy. The Mesopotamian model conveniently relegates the aberrant mushroom towns of early medieval western Europe Dark Age obscurity. Different narratives enliven and explain urban settlement beyond Europe, from the Chinese administrative geography and linkage of urbanism and sinicisation, to the genealogies of divine kingship that legitimise the urban tradition in the west African forest.

What, then, can we take from this discussion, from the recognition of a diversity of urban form irreducible to a linear trajectory? We hope to show how comparison between regions can challenge us to ask new questions of old knowledge. A focus on what towns

¹⁰¹ See N. Gauthiez, 'Rouen pendant le Haut Moyen Âge', in H. Atsma (ed.), *La Neustrie: les Pays du Nord de la Loire de 650 à 850* (Sigmaringen, 1989), 1–20; and see now L. V. Hicks and E. Brenner (eds.) *Society and Culture in Medieval Rouen, 911–1300* (Turnhout, 2013).

thought of themselves, together with a consideration of what towns *do*, allows us to draw comparisons between some extremely different datasets.

One rather obvious answer to this question might be that towns are places that bring people together. Again, the incorporation of African material might offer an interesting way to think about this. Rather than aggregating these disparate groups into a single urban identity, we should see that a diversity of individual knowledge, skills, and identities characterise the urban context. Writing specifically about equatorial Africa (and warning of the dangers of extrapolating elsewhere), Guyer and Belinga have captured this dynamic through the concept of ‘wealth in people as wealth in knowledge’.¹⁰² Wealth-in-people has provided many Africanist historians with a means of exploring economic and political activity that emphasises accumulation of followers, dependents, clients.¹⁰³ Yet, Guyer and Belinga have refined this to an emphasis on wealth-in-knowledge: the particular skills and knowledge that individuals and groups contribute to society. Rather than viewing this as a process of accumulation – whereby leaders or elite groups (or towns?) draw together the accumulated knowledge of their society– they develop the notion of composition. This more open, flexible vision of social structure suggests a key role for multiplicity and diversity in social life, seeing this diversity as an effective adaptation to risk, as well as a means of achieving social goals.

¹⁰² J. I. Guyer and S.M.E. Belinga, ‘Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, xxxvi (1995), 91–120.

¹⁰³ W. Arens and I. Karp, *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies* (Washington, 1989); S. Myers and I. Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977).

It is certainly tempting to view aspects of composition in the archaeological record of urban transitions in Africa, where it is possible to see towns as places where people brought together their composite skills and knowledge.¹⁰⁴ At sites like Jenne-jeno, the diversity of skills and knowledge is literally written into the infrastructure of an urban cluster with differentiated craft groupings and neighbourhoods, but no definable administrative structure. Elsewhere, the notion of composition helps to account for some of the ways that towns existed as points in diverse networks of resource exploitation, none of which are reducible to an agricultural hinterland serving an urban elite, or to a need to provide for an increasingly non-productive urban population. Guyer and Belinga offer the possibility of recognising forms of urbanism which are more than simply imperfect or primitive versions of the true urbanism based on specific traits such as agricultural extraction, administrative structures, and a literate elite, which are less amenable to recognizing diversity of forms.

A similar approach looks increasingly likely to be fruitful in Northeast Eurasia, where work on the urbanism of 'nomadic empires' is still in its infant stages. Although almost everything remains to be done, discoveries so far may suggest the presence of recurrent elements that could be combined in different ways to generate, within a single polity, several forms of urbanised settlement, most of which were not written about then or now. In other words, 'nomads', widely considered as 'barbarians' with no use for urban forms, in fact used several types of cities for their own ends. Such cities were not merely imitations of Central Plains 'Chinese' models but used features from them creatively, alongside elements from an

¹⁰⁴ J. B. Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, 'Authorisation and the Process of Power: The View from African Archaeology', *Journal of World Prehistory* xxiii/4 (2010), 177–93; McIntosh, *Beyond Chieftoms*.

older steppe tradition, from the Korean peninsula, and perhaps from elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ There was coercion here, at the very least for construction of the ubiquitous pounded earth walls, but also involving population transfers, military postings, individual banishment and (sometimes?) taxation. At the same time the *nabo*, and perhaps the *ordo* or even certain capital sites, provided venues for more voluntaristic gatherings with important political (and possibly economic) functions. Southern market towns also borrowed creatively from existing models though were largely unplanned, and yet provided significant government revenues. Their capacity to act as centres for composition sat alongside their roles in colonial displacement. Given this variety and complexity, thinking about cities in terms of coercion or voluntarism may be missing the mark.

The stories of Cain and Gilgamesh have exerted a powerful and distorting magic. In their thrall, scholars of medieval Eurasian cities have mistaken narrative adventures in elite self-legitimation (or self-criticism) for social historical accounts of urban origins. From this Babylonian captivity, it is surely time to release ourselves. We need to revisit the great and storied cities--Paris and Rome, Constantinople and Cairo, Hangzhou and Beijing—to ask whether they were really what they have seemed to us. The deep impression of permanence and embeddedness in an agricultural hinterland may turn out to be misleading. ‘All that is solid melts into air.’¹⁰⁶ Stories of urban permanence served a purpose—and this is what we should be studying, on a global scale. The message of the ancient Mesopotamian creation stories is that cities could will themselves into new forms of being.

¹⁰⁵ The Sogdians are candidates here, as noted above, n. 64.

¹⁰⁶ M. Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (New York, 1982), quoting of course Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, ch. 1.