

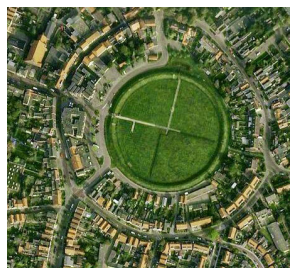
Anomalocivitas

28–29 June 2021

Organisers:

Rubina Raja and Søren M. Sindbæk

Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet), Aarhus University





Civitates Orbis Terrarum 1593 (Graphics: Wikimedia Commons)

Front cover

Top left: Angkor Wat (Photo: Shutterstock)

Top centre: Odense (Photo: Facebook/Infoboksen)

Top right: Paestum (Photo: Siti Archeologici d'Italia)

Mid left: Monte Alban (Photo: Flickr/Chemose)

Centre: Tonga (Photo: Archaeology Newsroom)

Mid right: Samnium (Photo: World Archaeology)

Bottom left: Jerash (Photo: Rubina Raja)

Bottom centre: Ribe (Photo: Museum of Southwest Jutland)

Bottom right: Oost Souburg/Zuidburg (Photo: Het Andere Gent)

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Outline

The archaeology of urbanism has developed with reference to particular emblematic examples: cities of the Bronze-age Near East, the Mediterranean of the classical period, Mesoamerican highland cities and the Northern Europe high-medieval cities are key points of reference. Urbanism, in this light, has been regarded as nearly synonymous with social complexity and with civilisation.

In recent years, more globally oriented historical and archaeological research has exposed urbanity as a phenomenon that varies widely across time and space, sometimes in surprising ways. Like the palaeontological record abounds in creatures which defy evolutionary hindsight – such as the famous Cambrian arthropod *Anomalocaris* – the past is full of extraordinary and surprising urban societies: *anomalocivitas*.

Examples of atypical urban-like developments, which have been intensely discussed in recent research, include the mega-sites of Neolithic Eastern Europe, low-density agrarian urbanism in the Tropics, late Antique urban encroachment in the Mediterranean East, classical and medieval trading ports, seasonal assemblies and nomadic camps as well as palace societies such as the Bronze-age agglomerations.

With a point of departure in archaeological research history and examples, this conference asks how an increasing body of archaeological evidence can be used to inform more appropriate models. It outlines a vision of urbanism guided by the theory of complex systems – as a cultural attractor through which the practices and routines in different societal trajectories converge on homologous patterns.

Commemorating the 20-year anniversary of the Copenhagen Polis Centre's seminal publication "A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures", this conference gathers contributions which explore the making of urban societies as a non-linear and underdetermined process, accepting that urbanity can be characterised as a recognisable pattern.

The intention is to publish selected contributions in the newly founded *Journal of Urban Archaeology* (www.urbanarchaeology.net).



Ehécatl pyramid, Calixtlahuaca, Mexico. (Photo: Rafael Saldaña / Flickr)

Programme

DAY 1: Monday 28 June 2021		Moderator
9:00–9:15	Introduction Rubina Raja and Søren M. Sindbæk	
9:15–9:30	The Naming of Parts: Inter-Relating Urban Difference Roland Fletcher, University of Sydney	Rubina Raja
9:30–9:55	Discussion	
9:55–10:10	Identifying the Low-Density Agrarian Urban System in the Ancient Tongan Polity Philip Parton, Australian National University	
10:10–10:35	Discussion	
10:35–10:55	Break	
10:55–11:10	Rurban Landscapes: Agro-Urban Sites in Iron-Age Europe Manuel Fernández-Götz, University of Edinburgh Tom Moore, Durham University	Thomas Leppard
11:10–11:35	Discussion	
11:35–11:50	Urban Dynamics: The Case of Medieval Odense, Denmark Kirstine Haase, Odense City Museums	
11:50–12:15	Discussion	
12:15–13:15	Lunch	

13:15– 13:30	Anomalopolis: Greek Colonies and Urban Networks in the Classical Period Gabriel Zuchtriegel, Parco Archeologico Paestum, Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali	Emanuele Intagliata
13:30– 13:55	Discussion	
13:55– 14:10	Urban Scalograms: An Experiment in Scaling, Emergence and Greek and Roman Urban Form John W. Hanson, University of Reading	
14:10– 14:35	Discussion	
14:35– 14:55	Break	
14:55– 15:10	Reframing the Foundation of Monte Albán Gary M. Feinman, Field Museum of Natural History Richard E. Blanton, Purdue University Linda M. Nicholas, Field Museum of Natural History Stephen A. Kowalewski, University of Georgia	Søren M. Sindbæk
15:10– 15:35	Discussion	
15:35– 16:05	Final Remarks Day 1	

DAY 2: Tuesday 29 June 2021		Moderator
9:00– 9:10	Introduction to Day 2 Rubina Raja and Søren M. Sindbæk	
9:10– 9:25	Trypillia ‘Mega-Sites’ – Neither Urban nor Low-Density? René Ohlrau, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel	Tom Brughmans
9:25– 9:50	Discussion	
9:50– 10:05	The Long Tradition of Early Medieval Urbanism on the Island of Walcheren (Netherlands): Towards a Biography of Urban Continuity Pieterjan Deckers, Vrije Universiteit Brussels	
10:05– 10:30	Discussion	
10:30– 10:50	Break	
10:50– 11:05	The Paradox of Palmyra: An Ancient Anomalopolis in the Desert Rubina Raja, Aarhus University Eivind H. Seland, University of Bergen	Emanuele Intagliata
11:05– 11:30	Discussion	
11:30– 11:45	City Links and Seedling Cities Søren M. Sindbæk, Aarhus University	
11:45– 12:10	Discussion	
12:10– 13:10	Lunch	

13:10–13:25	Urban Samnium? Towards a Literary and Archaeological Re-Evaluation Kevin S. Lee, University of Texas at Austin / The American School of Classical Studies in Athens	Elizabeth Murphy
13:25–13:50	Discussion	
13:50–14:05	Semi-Urban Settlements in the Past: What Can They Teach Us about Urbanism? Michael E. Smith, Arizona State University	
14:05–14:30	Discussion	
14:30–14:50	Break	
14:50–16:30	General Discussion and Closing Rubina Raja and Søren M. Sindbæk	Søren M. Sindbæk
16:30	End of conference	

Abstracts

The Naming of Parts: Inter-Relating Urban Difference

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With *Anomalocaris*, we had separate species names for different parts of one life form. To understand the significance of the fossil record, we needed to put the separate parts together. With urbanism, we have one name for many phenomena in order to try and put them together, but they do not integrate. We need to put the varied parts of the phenomena we call 'urban' together, in order understand the significance of the different kinds of community life and spatial organisation which we place under that label.

Urbanism is defined locally and talked about universally, which creates a problem because local traditions are entitled to their own definitions of urbanism. We all feel that we know what urbanism is. But at the universal level of a generalised category, we then risk seeking to rank, compare or explain diverse phenomena as if they are all somehow the same. What we have is immense variety and a risk that the category will become so malleable that it loses or has lost meaning and interpretative value. Somehow we need to retain local opinion and devise a way to usefully cross-compare similarity and difference globally.

To integrate a consistent analytic approach to the varied forms of settlement which are included in the category 'urban', and allow different but complementary questions to be asked about their differences, we need to recognise them as representatives of different trajectories which can all be perceived in relation to each other within a single context – the interaction and communication constraints which affect the communities in all settlement. What is important is to emphasise that this integration is not aiming to force all the variety into one category as is the conventional tendency of globalist humanities, but instead to consistently show how the numerous differences are inter-related but different. Once we can recognise that a standard label is being applied to settlements with different operational trajectories, we can begin to ask productive questions about them in terms of their trajectories and their varied longer-term outcomes. This allows differences to become an asset that will assist us in understanding the past, the present and the future. I am sure that we are versatile enough to concurrently carry out systematic analyses of the operational characteristics of diverse settlements, remain engaged by our love of the term 'urban' and retain our own distinct regional understanding of what it means to be an urban society, past or present.

Identifying the Low-Density Agrarian Urban System in the Ancient Tongan Polity

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Polynesia is ethnographically famous for its complex social and political institutions, but the spatial organisation of settlements in Polynesian societies is poorly understood because European contact in the islands was often accompanied by depopulation from disease and violence, missionary activity, social upheaval, and the imposition of colonial government. As a result, settlement planning and organisation in Polynesia have been perceived as being dispersed and unorganised. However, this view conflicts with evidence from archaeology and vernacular literature indicating significant centralisation of political, religious and economic institutions.

Lidar data collected from the main island of Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga – the seat of government for the ancient Tongan polity (approx. 1200–1800 CE) – was analysed alongside primary sources and vernacular literature to investigate settlement planning and organisation. Results suggest an integrated system of low-density agrarian urban settlements organised around a central place that were linked via terrestrial and maritime transport networks and bounded by defensive infrastructure. Within settlements, neighbourhoods and residential compounds were organised on grid alignments reflecting continuing cultural arrangements of space and systems of measurement.

Method and theory derived from the analysis of modern urban settlements can be used to reconstruct elements of the Tongan low-density agrarian urban system, which provides new insights into the structure and operation of social, political, religious and economic interactions in the ancient Tongan polity.

Rurban Landscapes: Agro-Urban Sites in Iron-Age Europe

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Among the main features of Iron-age agglomerations is their frequent low-density occupation, often including large open spaces within the enclosed areas. Some of the primary roles of these 'empty spaces' could have been to serve as places of refuge and/or assembly for the population of the surrounding rural environment, agricultural production and the keeping of livestock.

Instead of considering these open areas as unfinished projects, we should rather regard them as an essential part of the functions of large central places within an agro-urban model. M.G. Smith's (1972) term 'rurban' encapsulates the idea of the domination of these sites by unbuilt space more similar to farm landscapes than our traditional notions of urban quarters. The fact that in many Iron-age agglomerations the basic settlement units continued to be enclosed farmsteads suggests a transfer of rural settlement patterns to more confined areas. These 'translocated landscapes' with clustered habitation units were the manifestation of social systems that emphasised the autonomy of households and lineages despite the centralising attempts related to the emergence of early urban centres. In this sense, the retention of the farmstead compound could signal the continued importance of the household as the pre-eminent locus of power and decision-making.

Urban Dynamics: The Case of Medieval Odense, Denmark

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With a starting point in the medieval town of Odense in central Denmark, this paper presents a case where Jane Jacobs's theories on the processes of urban growth are applied to an archaeological material. Jacobs presents highly tangible models to explore urban dynamics through patterns of import replacement and diversification of work. Combined with analysis of practices related to self-sufficiency and specialisation that, contrary to the expected, seem to co-exist, this gives a more nuanced image of the processes that take place in what may be regarded as a fossil-type North European high-medieval city.

Describing the dynamics and processes that make places urban is a fruitful path to follow in the search for models that enable a better understanding of towns and urban societies. These are models that look beyond the physical traits of the settlement and the so-called 'check-list'-approach to urbanism, as represented in the works of V. G. Childe and M. Biddle.

Based on the close contextual studies of the archaeological record of Odense, an approach is hereby presented that can be applied across settlements regardless of time and space – from classic North European medieval cities to places that may be characterised as 'anomalocivitas'. The approach offers a way to encompass and study the wide variations and many expressions of the urban phenomenon.

Anomalopolis: Greek Colonies and Urban Networks in the Classical Period

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The ideal cities described in Plato and Aristotle's works have had a long-lasting impact on Western urbanism and political theory. However, it has rarely been considered that the philosophical debate on the ideal city took place in a context where new foundations of colonies and cleruchies were a frequent phenomenon, and where the question of how to structure a new city/polis was of common concern.

In my talk, I would like to focus on a series of anomalies characterising Greek colonies and colonial networks of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, and show how they might help explain some aspects of Classical political philosophy. In particular, I argue that the specific way in which political philosophy and economics are defined as new fields of debate and reflection is fully understandable only on the backdrop of Classical Greek colonisation and of the daily life and social structures in the colonies. By doing so, the talk advocates a shift from focusing on social construction to social production and new materialism in the field of urban and architectural studies.

Urban Scalograms: An Experiment in Scaling, Emergence and Greek and Roman Urban Form

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Although there has been extensive research on urban form, including quantifying various aspects of settlements, there has been less consideration of why certain cities had certain features. In this article, I suggest a new method for investigating the relationship between the presence and absence of monuments and the sizes of settlements, before applying it to the Roman Empire. The results show that there is a strong relationship between both the numbers and diversities of buildings and the presence and absence of different monuments and the sizes of sites. This reveals not only how the constituent elements of the built environments of cities changed as they increased in size, but also what order structures emerged in, potentially indicating what features we would expect a city of a certain size to have.

Reframing the Foundation of Monte Albán

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Monte Albán, one of prehispanic Mexico's earliest cities, was founded in the highland Valley of Oaxaca (Mexico) around 500 BC and sustained its regional dominance for longer than any central place of its foundational era. The timing of the settlement's rapid growth was a central fulcrum in a dynamic episode of multidimensional change that included material cultural, demographic, dietary and other economic shifts, which underpin subsequent regional history to the modern day. Proposed explanations for the establishment of Monte Albán are numerous and diverse; yet, to date, they have been focused mainly on environmental factors, militarism and/or the agency of the elite. We offer new theoretical perspectives on the dynamic processes associated with this multifaceted, transitional episode. Adopting a multiscale approach that weighs both top-down and bottom-up considerations, we frame this transition and the rapid growth of this hilltop center as an innovative social response to defensive concerns as well as other factors that offered new opportunities and advantages both to certain powerful individuals as well as larger segments of the population. The collective mode of governance that was instituted at Monte Albán coincided with significant in-migration and was highly sustainable, enduring for more than a millennium despite challenges, organizational adjustments, and changes in macroscale relations over time.

Trypillia 'Mega-Sites': Neither Urban nor Low-Density?

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At the end of the 5th millennium BCE, some of the vastest settlements of the time emerged on the forest steppe north of the Black Sea. These Trypillia 'mega-sites' reached sizes of up to 320 hectares with agglomerations of up to 3000 buildings in one place.

But how did people come together in settlements with several thousand dwellings? How long were such sites inhabited in detail, and how many people lived there coevally? Were these settlements the first towns, preceding the Mesopotamian development?

Some scholars have proposed to include these 'mega-sites' into the concept of low-density urbanism. Based on recent results of the investigations at the Maidanets'ke 'mega-site', this paper argues against former low-density characterisations.

To investigate population densities, an extensive radiocarbon dating programme was conducted on various parts of Maidanets'ke. In combination with pottery studies, the dating revealed several phases of continuous occupation between 3990–3640 cal BCE. According to the number of contemporary structures, the demography and density of a 'mega-site' are reconstructed in detail for the first time.

Based on the structural comparison between smaller settlements and 'mega-sites', their urban character is discussed. According to the regional geomagnetic survey, sites between 1.2 to 7 hectares show planning principles comparable to 'mega-sites'. With the regular distribution of public buildings in 'mega-sites', it is argued that up to twenty communities aggregated into a single large settlement. While these sites are not necessarily urban, the observed agglomeration process is essential to understand early urbanisation.

The Long Tradition of Early Medieval Urbanism on the Island of Walcheren (Netherlands): Towards a Biography of Urban Continuity

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The small island of Walcheren, on the estuary of the river Scheldt, is characterised by a long, continuous urban history, stretching from c. 600 CE to this day. This paper focuses on the early development of that urban tradition, which, at a glance, exemplifies the settlement typology and evolutionary sequence typically posited for the broader Low Countries, that of 7th- to 9th-century emporium to 10th-/11th-century portus (Verhulst 1999).

Until now, a coherent understanding of urban continuity on Walcheren was marred by several factors. Knowledge about the now-eroded trading site of Walichrum (Domburg) was restricted due to the antiquarian nature of documentation and finds collections. Furthermore, a dominant narrative of ringfort construction in the coastal region of the southern Low Countries in the late 9th century imposed a historical horizon disconnecting earlier and later 'types' of towns, and distracted from the nucleated occupation of these fortified settlements.

Recent fieldwork and collection studies allow a new understanding of early medieval urbanism on Walcheren: one that sees it as a locally rooted, continuous and contingent tradition as much as a reflection of more widely shared contemporary urban practices. In this paper, I will explore this long-term perspective, discussing strands of local continuity amid changing conceptions of urbanism across the North Sea area.

The Paradox of Palmyra: An Ancient Anomalopolis in the Desert

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Eivind H. Seland
University of Bergen

Palmyra, the Syrian world heritage site that tragically made the headlines as a result of ISIS' destruction of numerous of its key monuments in 2015, was once a thriving metropolis in the heart of the Syrian Desert. Although settled on a smaller scale from Neolithic through modern times, the documented urban history of the site spans a millennium, from the late centuries BCE until the late first millennium CE. Palmyra has often been cast as 'the bride of the desert', and the apparent paradox of a sizeable city 150–200 kilometers from major areas of cultivation has spurred considerable scholarly interest. In this paper we discuss the relationship between the city and the surrounding desert with an emphasis on the potential role of climate change in the urban biography of Palmyra, drawing on published palaeoclimatological evidence from the region and that offered by epigraphy, archaeological record and settlement size.

City Links and Seedling Cities

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Many major cities in world history have grown within intense networks of trans-regional exchange. These networks provided flexibility in situations of change, and enabled urban societies to deflect some of the vulnerability faced by relatively isolated, locally optimised centres. Networks enabled cities to cope, overcome and thus to persist. In any major city network, people have invested energy and resources in seeking out and cultivating new possible nodes and resource bases: ‘seedling cities’, growing from the incentives created in their founder societies. They may not (yet) have been vital to their own region, or to their founder city, but they were vital to the underlying logic of networked cities.

This paper discusses Viking-age emporia as ‘seedling cities’. These coastal and riverine trading ports, which thrived in Northern Europe in the 8th–10th century CE, contrasted a complex technological and economy culture and a global resource network with minute size and architectural footprint. Closer in size to villages than cities, these were global villages indeed.

Similar characteristics are often pointed out for maritime trading sites in other areas and periods of world history, including the Iron-age Mediterranean and the Medieval Indian Ocean world. I argue that the appearance of these anomalocivita are a strong indication of urbanisation, despite the relatively unassuming size and appearance. Being tied into the knowledge and resources of bigger and complex societies, the growth and decline of seedling cities were highly sensitive indexes to the evolution of urban networks.

Urban Samnium? Towards a Literary and Archaeological Re-Evaluation

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The Samnites of southern Italy famously resisted the Romans from the fourth to first centuries BCE. Those in the Apennine highlands ringed hill-sides and mountain-tops with monumental walls of polygonal masonry. These 'hill-forts' ranged from small enclosures to summit-encircling stone belts several layers deep. When the Roman historian Livy and the Greek geographer Strabo named specific Samnite *urbes* and *poleis*, they likely referred, in part, to these hill-top settlements. Modern scholars, however, tend to interpret the hill-forts as indicators of non- or proto-urban settlement patterns. They differ from the expected appearance of cities in the ancient Mediterranean world, lacking obvious monumental architecture and public spaces, while surveys identify most habitation sites outside their walls.

Though archaeological investigation of fort interiors remains embryonic, we nonetheless have sufficient indications of their role in the settlement system to classify them and their surroundings as cities. In this paper, I contend that Samnite hill-forts expand our inherited ideas about Mediterranean urbanism. First, I argue that Livy and Strabo understood cities as commonwealths whose appearances are of secondary importance. I then apply this understanding to the congregation of fortified centres around Presenzano, Vairano and Roccavecchia in the Volturno Valley. Building on the work of De Benedittis, La Regina, Caiazza, Capini and Oakley, I outline a model in which cities of various forms and settlement patterns share the purpose of protecting and cultivating inhabitants' spiritual and physical needs. I conclude with guiding questions for archaeological investigation of Samnite hill-forts as polity centres.

Semi-Urban Settlements in the Past: What Can They Teach Us about Urbanism?

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I discuss the implications that an expanded view of urbanism has for the analysis of semi-urban settlements in the past and present. I describe a specific expanded urban perspective in my new book *Urban Life in the Distant Past*. My focus is on a variety of settlements that are typically not considered 'cities' or 'urban settlements'. These semi-urban settlements have much to teach us about urban life and dynamics, in both the past and the present.

If we approach this theme from the perspective of population density and social interactions, it leads us to consider temporary gatherings and campsites with dense populations. Whether in the form of hunter-gatherer aggregation sites, Northern European Thing sites or modern festival camps, these voluntary camps illuminate the ways in which energised crowding shapes society and settlement.

If we approach the theme from a different perspective – temporary settlements with urban functions – the analysis leads to mobile capitals from a variety of contexts in world history. A fuller, comparative understanding of these various anomalous urban settlements can help us develop better explanations of settlements and urban dynamics in the past and the present.

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Conference website

<https://urbnet.au.dk/news/events/2021/anomalocivitas/>

Notes

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Book of Abstracts

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Back cover: Angkor Wat (Photo: Keith Cuddeback/Flickr)