

# Cities in the ‘long’ Late Antiquity, 2000–2012 – a survey essay

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay surveys major themes and developments in the recent study of late antique urbanism. First, re-evaluations of the late phase of classical urbanism are discussed, whereby a simple narrative of ‘decline’ has been replaced by a much more chronologically and geographically nuanced picture. The importance of regional, indeed local, specificity is stressed, with different areas of the ancient world experiencing often radically different urban trajectories. Key aspects of late antique urbanism are considered, including the relationship between town and country, economic urban life, political versus social and religious urban history, before concluding with consideration of areas where future research is particularly needed.

Research into late antique urbanism has developed into a substantial growth industry in recent years. The ‘long’ Late Antiquity is very much in the ascendancy, meaning that this field includes the period from the third to the eighth centuries CE, and takes in cities as far afield as Milan and Resafa. The study of urban history in this period is classically both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, involving the work of administrative, economic, political and social historians, but also archaeologists, epigraphers and papyrologists. The amount that has been written on late antique cities in recent years seems almost unmanageable for a single scholar, even though a number of useful edited collections and survey volumes have done a good job of bringing together and/or summarizing the field.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this brief essay is to give an up-to-date thematic

\* The impetus of this essay, written at the suggestion of Richard Rodger, was a conference at the University of Edinburgh on 1 Jun. 2012, entitled ‘Cities in the long Late Antiquity’. I am hugely grateful to the speakers on this day: Roger Collins, Mattia Guidetti, Simon Loseby, Meaghan McEvoy, Andrew Marsham and Jean-Michel Spieser, several of whom also offered advice in the writing of this piece. Thanks are also due to Jim Crow, Inge Jacobs and Gavin Kelly; finally, I am particularly grateful to Bryan Ward-Perkins for his support and critical acumen. None are responsible for the shortcomings of the final piece.

<sup>1</sup> Recent edited collections include T. Slater (ed.), *Towns in Decline, AD 100–1600* (Aldershot, 2000); T.S. Burns and J.W. Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (Michigan, 2001); L. Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research in Late Antique Urbanism* (Portsmouth, RI, 2001); J.-U. Krause and C. Witschel (eds.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike – Niedergang oder Wandel?: Akten des internationalen Kolloquiums in München am 30. und 31. Mai 2003* (Stuttgart, 2006); C. Goodson, A.E. Lester and C. Symes (eds.), *Cities, Texts and Social Networks*,

survey, such as may be useful (and interesting) for scholars working on urban history from a range of different perspectives and periods.<sup>2</sup> The bibliographic guidance given will, inevitably, aim at selective sampling, rather than comprehensiveness, and the survey will naturally reflect the personal preferences of its author, a historian, rather than an archaeologist, unlike many of the specialists in late antique urbanism. The intention is to open up for the eyes of both specialists, and non-specialists, what is most distinctive and interesting in the recent study of late antique urbanism. Finally, the essay will indicate where further work is clearly needed, including areas where comparison with other periods of urban history might be helpful.

In recent years, there has been an important re-evaluation of the late antique phase of classical urbanism, moving beyond a simple narrative of decline, which traditionally marked the study of the history of the period. The fate of towns in Late Antiquity has always constituted a major subject in the history of Late Antiquity *tout court*, due to the ideological and (practical) centrality of urban life in the classical world.<sup>3</sup> From the *polis* to the *civitas*, the ideal of the self-governing, self-sustaining city, with its council and its *agora* or *forum*, its gymnasium or its baths, represents a key element of what we think of as 'classical civilization'. This urban model underwent substantial change during Late Antiquity, though, as we shall see, at different times and in different ways in different areas of what was once the classical world.

The 'decline' or 'transformation' debate still rumbles on.<sup>4</sup> J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, in a long series of publications, has continued to argue for the decline<sup>5</sup> of the classical city in Late Antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Liebeschuetz

400–1500: *Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space* (Ashgate, 2010); D. Sami and G. Speed (eds.), *Debating Urbanism Within and Beyond the Walls A.D. 200–700. Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of Leicester, 15th November 2008* (Leicester, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> As a general rule, the bibliography discussed in this essay will be limited to publications post 2000; for discussion of bibliography prior to this date, consult L. Lavan, 'The late-antique city: a bibliographic essay', in *Recent Research*, 9–26. Though written prior to 2000, I found B. Ward-Perkins, 'Urban continuity', in N. Christie and S.T. Loseby (eds.), *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1996), 4–17, particularly helpful when thinking through the issues and ideas for this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Urban history, specifically urban transformation, formed a significant focus of the substantial European Science Foundation project, 'The Transformation of the Roman World', which took place from 1993 to 1998; a number of the publications cited in this essay stem directly (as well as indirectly) from this project. See further [www.esf.org/activities/research-networking-programmes/humanities-sch/completed-rnp-programmes-in-humanities/the-transformation-of-the-roman-world.html](http://www.esf.org/activities/research-networking-programmes/humanities-sch/completed-rnp-programmes-in-humanities/the-transformation-of-the-roman-world.html), last accessed 12 Sep. 2012.

<sup>4</sup> This debate can seem rather insular; Mark Whittow makes a rare comparison with the debate regarding the 'decline' of towns in late medieval England: M. Whittow, 'Recent research on the late-antique city in Asia Minor: the second half of the 6th c. revisited', in Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research*, 137–53, at 149. For a more theoretical consideration of 'decline', see A. Rogers, *Late Roman Towns in Britain: Rethinking Change and Decline* (Cambridge, 2011), esp. 27–46.

<sup>5</sup> These publications began with J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), but the more recent considerations begin with 'The end of the ancient city', in J. Rich (ed.), *The City in Late Antiquity* (London,

robustly defends his use of the concept of decline against the onslaught of interpreters who prefer to speak of 'transformation', accusing his detractors of a surfeit of 'political correctness'.<sup>6</sup> He is notably traditional in his focus on the political and administrative history of the city, making good use of epigraphic, legal and papyrological sources. Perhaps the key narrative of his major monograph on the city concerns the demise of traditional civic government, including that long-lived subject 'the flight of the *curiales*': 'a long-term trend, the change from government by decurions to government by notables. It is a principal thesis of the book that this change did make a significant difference, both to the functioning of cities themselves, and to their ability to perform the administrative tasks on which the empire depended.'<sup>7</sup> This change in the personnel and character of urban government comprises the rise of the bishop as civic leader, related in turn to the Christianization of urban space. This is a topic crucial in discussion of 'transformation', but for Liebeschuetz the Christianization of the city is a central aspect of (and cause of) 'decline', as he sees ancient Christianity as incompatible with the ideas and ideals of the classical *polis*.<sup>8</sup> The rise of religious and factional violence in the cities is also seen by Liebeschuetz (in a long tradition, going back to Gibbon) as a key characteristic of the late antique city, and another case where the finger can be pointed at Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

While Liebeschuetz, at heart a traditional political historian, largely ignores the physical fabric of the city, this is a key focus for many other scholars, who are often archaeologists, working on the urban material fabric. Late antique archaeologists have often had significant obstacles in their way, generally because the 'late' phases of ancient towns and cities have tended to have been ignored, and indeed destroyed, in an archaeological attempt to find earlier, more 'classical' layers of urbanism. In recent years, however, there has been an important change in archaeological practice and priorities, and, finally, attention has been paid to the late antique layers and epigraphic record, at long-excavated

1996), 1–49; 'The uses and abuses of the concept of "decline" in later Roman history or, Was Gibbon politically incorrect?', in Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research*, 233–45; most fully in *Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001) and most recently in 'Transformation and decline: are the two really incompatible', in Krause and Witschel (eds.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike*, 463–83. On the continuing influence of another important figure for our understanding of late antique urbanism, A.H.M. Jones, see L. Lavan, 'Jones and the cities: late antique urbanism 1964–2004', in D. Gwynn (ed.), *A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire* (Leiden, 2007), 167–91.

<sup>6</sup> See here in particular 'The uses and abuses of the concept of "decline"', which includes responses from A. Cameron, L. Lavan, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whittow. In the conclusion to *Decline and Fall*, Liebeschuetz boldly asserts: 'The story of the city in late Late Antiquity, as I have told it, is a story of decline. Some choose to see only transformation, but this is not the point of view taken in this book', 214.

<sup>7</sup> Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 405.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 247–8; for critique, see M. Whitby, 'Factions, bishops, violence and urban decline', in Krause and Witschel (eds.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike*, 441–61, esp. 456–9.

<sup>9</sup> Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, *passim*, but on the rise of the factions see in particular 203–20 and on violence and disorder, 248–83. Again, see here Whitby, 'Factions, bishops, violence'.

urban sites, as well as at new excavations.<sup>10</sup> The interests of classical archaeologists have tended to privilege certain key types of (public) building and monument as characteristic of classical urbanism: the forum/ agora, council buildings, baths, colonnaded streets, city walls. Private space, notably housing, has received less attention, though that too has been changing in recent years.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the interests of 'Christian archaeologists' have privileged a different type of construction: churches. Topographical studies of the late antique city inevitably focus on the 'Christianization' of urban space, though they are beginning to look beyond a simple focus on monumental ecclesiastical structures.<sup>12</sup>

The general picture of later antique urbanism is, however, far from uniform, and it is difficult to synthesize without resorting to gross distortion and over-simplification.<sup>13</sup> Overall, a simplistic overview of the changes to the topography and material fabric of the city during the 'long' Late Antiquity can be given as follows. Transformation involved, and was due to, a whole range of phenomena: political change, militarization/ fortification, Christianization, ruralization and abandonment. Urban space became increasingly functional or simplified in form.<sup>14</sup> However, these changes happened at varying speeds, and to different extents, in very different ways across the former classical world.<sup>15</sup> Regional and local studies are absolutely crucial.

<sup>10</sup> Aphrodisias in Turkey is one of the most important late antique sites, having been excavated and published since the 1960s. For full and up-to-date bibliography see [www.nyu.edu/projects/aphrodisias/bib.htm](http://www.nyu.edu/projects/aphrodisias/bib.htm), last accessed 12 Sep. 2012. The study of the epigraphy of late antique Aphrodisias has been of particular importance; see C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, rev. 2nd edn (London, 2004), now also available online: <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004/>, last accessed 12 Sep. 2012. Butrint in Albania has also produced a wealth of material and publication, since excavation began in 1994; see [www.butrint.org/](http://www.butrint.org/), last accessed 12 Sep. 2012. for up-to-date bibliography and information on the site.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. I. Baldini Lippolis, *La domus tardoantica. Forme e rappresentazioni dello spazio domestico nelle città del Mediterraneo* (Imola, 2001); *L'architettura residenziale nelle città tardoantiche* (Rome, 2005). These books, it should be noted, focus almost exclusively on the houses of the elite.

<sup>12</sup> See for useful summary G. Cantino Wataghin, 'Christian topography in the late antique town: recent results and open questions', in L. Lavan and W. Bowden (eds.), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology* (Late Antique Archaeology 1) (Leiden, 2003), 224–56. For a nuanced approach to Christianization of space, see the articles in G. Brands and H.-G. Severin (eds.), *Die spätantike Stadt und ihre Christianisierung* (Wiesbaden, 2003), especially F.-A. Bauer, 'Stadt und Heiligenlegenden. Die Christianisierung Ostias in der spätantiken Gedankenwelt', 43–61, and H. Thür, 'Das spätantike Ephesos. Aspekte zur Frage der Christianisierung des Stadtbildes', 259–73, as well as F.A. Bauer, 'Die Stadt als religiöser Raum in der Spätantike', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 10 (2008), 179–206.

<sup>13</sup> For a useful and up-to-date synthesis, see L. Lavan, 'What killed the ancient city? Chronology, causation, and traces of continuity', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 22 (2009), 803–12.

<sup>14</sup> See for one important challenge to this picture I. Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance of Civic Space. The 'Classical' City from the 4th to the 7th c. AD* (Leuven, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> This is an important reason why this essay speaks of the 'long' Late Antiquity: this longer period is much more suitable for presenting a full picture of urban change.

In Gallic cities such as Bordeaux, Paris and Périgueux, for example, from the late third to the fifth centuries the urban plan underwent radical constriction, as new city walls, built to repel barbarian invaders, cut off parts of the city for good.<sup>16</sup> In the Danubian frontier provinces, such as Rhaetia, Noricum and Pannonia, classical urbanism underwent dramatic change during the fifth century, with militarized settlements replacing civilian urban sites on a large scale.<sup>17</sup> However, in North Africa the fourth and fifth centuries (at least up to the period of the Vandal conquest in 429–39) marked a period of urban expansion, not constriction, for the most part.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, in the Greek east urbanism flourished, allowing for key regional and local variations, permitting a much longer Late Antiquity, throughout the entire sixth century in many places.<sup>19</sup> Crisis in Greece and Asia Minor came in the late sixth/seventh centuries, and here a long debate continues as to how far this crisis was based on structural weaknesses rather than individual crises (Persian occupation, Arab invasion, plague).<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, in the diocese of Oriens, urbanism flourished into the Umayyad period.<sup>21</sup> An east/west divide is too crude: there is much diversity within both west and east, and even within provinces and smaller regions.<sup>22</sup> Historical studies of individual cities, obviously, have much to recommend them, though Liebeschuetz makes a good point when he suggests that it is more helpful to look at regional

<sup>16</sup> See most conveniently S. Loseby, 'Decline and change in the cities of late antique Gaul', in Krause and Witschel (eds.), *Die Stadt in der Spätantike*, 67–104, and the dedicated issues of the open-access online journal *Gallia* on late antique southern Gaul: 63–4: 2006 and 2007.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Poulter (ed.), *The Transition to Late Antiquity, on the Danube and Beyond* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> See A. Leone, *Changing Townscapes in North Africa from Late Antiquity to the Arab Conquest* (Bari, 2007), and G. Sears, *Late Roman African Urbanism. Continuity and Transformation in the City* (Oxford, 2007). Even here, there is regional variation: not all cities thrived in this period, e.g. Utica and the cities of Tripolitania.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, H.G. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century: Literary Images and Historical Reality* (Athens, 2006), and Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*.

<sup>20</sup> The work of Foss, stressing the role of crisis, is still hugely influential, starting with *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), but most accessible in C. Foss, 'Archaeology and the "twenty cities" of Byzantine Asia', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 81 (1987), 469–86. More recent work has added nuance and modifications to Foss' interpretation; see Whittow, 'Recent research'; D. Parrish (ed.), *Urbanism in Western Asia Minor: New Studies on Aphrodisias, Ephesos, Hierapolis, Pergamon, Perge and Xanthos* (Portsmouth, RI, 2001), and, especially, O. Dally and C. Ratté (eds.), *Archaeology and the Cities of Asia Minor in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> See here, for instance, A. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Appraisal* (London, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> One notable example of diversity comes from Italy, where there is notable distinction not just between north and south, but between different parts of northern Italy: that is Roman *municipia* survived to AD 1000 to a remarkable extent in Tuscany, quite well in Lombardy but strikingly less so in Liguria, as well as in southern Italy. See, for instance, A. Augenti (ed.), *Le Città Italiane tra la Tarda Antichità e l'Alto Medioevo (Atti del convegno (Ravenna, 26–28 febbraio 2004))* (Florence, 2006).

networks and the interactions between cities, rather than at 'typical' cities when attempting overall assessments.<sup>23</sup>

Just as a focus on individual cities can be misleading when attempting a holistic view, urban history in this period cannot be studied in a vacuum: cities could only function within a broader economic context, and urban and rural life were entirely interdependent.<sup>24</sup> Urban/rural relations, though comprising a whole range of aspects, including social and religious relations, perhaps most obviously concern the realm of economics. Traditionally, not least, the wealth of the social and political elite of the town was based on their landholdings in the hinterland.<sup>25</sup> A study of the relationship between a town and its rural hinterland can be especially revealing when this relationship fluctuates over the chronological time-span of Late Antiquity.<sup>26</sup> 'Ruralization' is an important aspect of the history of the period, though this term needs to be understood in a properly nuanced fashion.<sup>27</sup> It is clear that in many areas rural settlements were increasing in prosperity, with a notable growth in villages, in terms of both number and economy, while cities were declining.<sup>28</sup>

The economic relationship between town and hinterland raises the broader question of the economic role of cities, which, particularly with relation to the Pirenne debate, continues to be an area of considerable interest.<sup>29</sup> Developments in the nature of trade in the Mediterranean during the 'long' Late Antiquity are central to recent work, most importantly that of Chris Wickham, which has looked to archaeological evidence (largely ceramic) in order to create a more complete and complex picture of trade in this period.<sup>30</sup> Wickham's comparative study indicates the great regional variety in trade trajectories over this period, which saw the emergence

<sup>23</sup> Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 9. Recent book-length studies of individual cities include M. Heijmans, *Arlés durant l'antiquité tardive: de la duplex Arelas à l'urbs Genesisii* (Rome, 2004); L. Jones Hall, *Roman Berytus: Beirut in Late Antiquity* (London, 2004); C. Sotinel, *Identité civique et Christianisme: Aquilée du IIIe au VIe siècle* (Rome, 2005). Regional/provincial studies include R. Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London, 2002); Rogers, *Late Roman Towns in Britain*.

<sup>24</sup> See Burns and Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts*.

<sup>25</sup> There were exceptions to this rule, for instance late antique Berytus (amongst other coastal cities), where artisans and traders were socially prominent: see L. Jones Hall, 'The case of late antique Berytus: urban wealth and rural sustenance – a different economic dynamic', in Burns and Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts*, 63–76.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, F. R. Trombley, 'Town and *territorium* in late Roman Anatolia', in Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research*, 217–32.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, the warnings of M. Kulikowski, 'The interdependence of town and country in late antique Spain', in Burns and Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts*, 147–61, esp. 147.

<sup>28</sup> This picture is clear in Byzantine Egypt, thanks to the use of papyrological evidence: see Alston, *City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt*.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, the many publications of R. Hodges including *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne* (London, 2000), and S. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne thesis, II: "ville morte"?'', in I.L. Hansen and C. Wickham (eds.), *The Long Eighth Century* (Leiden, 2000), 167–93.

<sup>30</sup> C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), 693–824.

of new trading centres as well as the eclipse (and indeed continuity) of others. In this context, the port city of Marseille constitutes a particularly interesting case-study.<sup>31</sup> It was clearly in some sense a *unicum*: it had the longest 'Late Antiquity' of any city in Gaul, and was able to maintain its position through dual engagement with the late antique Mediterranean world on the one hand and the more markedly 'medieval' system of Frankish Gaul on the other. Marseille actually benefited from the fall of the Western Roman Empire, which led directly to its becoming an important economic centre, though retrenchment is clear in the seventh century, with obscurity descending at the advent of the eighth century. The history of late antique Marseille is greatly elucidated by detailed pottery studies, demonstrating once again the importance of ceramics for our understanding of urban economic history.

Political and administrative history continue to dominate the study of late antique cities, however. The 'great' imperial capitals inevitably receive the lion's share of detailed study, due to the relative wealth of textual material, including inscriptions, that is available to elucidate the political and administrative history of these larger cities, unlike their smaller counterparts. The establishment of a number of imperial capitals in this period is a striking feature of the Later Roman Empire.<sup>32</sup> The same applies, to a lesser extent, to the capitals of provinces, which seem generally to have fared relatively well in Late Antiquity, due to the opportunities afforded for lucrative employment and imperial patronage. This is not to say that the archaeological evidence for late antique capitals is always more striking, or accessible. Ravenna is of course an exceptional case, although only recently has serious attention been given to the secular buildings of Ravenna, alongside its world-famous churches.<sup>33</sup> However, a city as important as Milan has left a disappointingly elusive material footprint.<sup>34</sup>

The great imperial capital cities of Rome and Constantinople continue to dominate the bibliography. The development of the city of Rome

<sup>31</sup> The following discussion is based on Simon Loseby's Edinburgh conference paper, 'Marseille and the end of Antiquity'. From a long list of publications see further S. Loseby, 'Lost cities: the end of the *civitas*-system in Frankish Gaul', in S. Diefenbach and G.M. Müller (eds.), *Gallien in der Spätantike* (Berlin, 2011); 'Mediterranean cities', in P. Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2009), 139–55; 'The Mediterranean economy', in P. Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. I: 500–700 (Cambridge, 2005); 'Le rôle économique de Marseille pendant l'Antiquité tardive', in M.-P. Rothé and H. Tréziny (eds.), *Carte archéologique de la Gaule, 13/3: Marseille et ses alentours* (Paris, 2005), 274–8.

<sup>32</sup> On the development of tetrarchic (and later) capitals, see E. Mayer, *Rom ist dort, wo der Kaiser ist: Untersuchungen zu den Staatsdenkmälern de dezentralisierten Reiches von Diocletian bis zu Theodosius II.* (Mainz, 2002). Attempts to look at late antique capitals in comparative perspective have been strangely lacking until very recently, but see now T. Führer (ed.), *Rom und Mailand in der Spätantike: Repräsentationen städtischer Räume in Literatur, Architektur und Kunst* (Berlin, 2012); R. Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History in Late Antiquity* (Baylor, 2010); L. Grig and G. Kelly (eds.), *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (New York, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> See D. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> See now Führer, *Rom und Mailand in der Spätantike*.

from the classical to the medieval world has come under particularly intense scrutiny in recent years. Excavation of the Crypta Balbi sites, as well as the Imperial Fora in its early medieval phase, has been of huge significance, providing an absolutely crucial counterpoint to the traditionally ecclesiastical focus of the archaeology of Rome in the late antique and medieval periods.<sup>35</sup> Our understanding of the infrastructure of the city produces a less bleak picture of 'decline' than that traditionally understood.<sup>36</sup> The 'Christianization' of the city of Rome remains a key topic of research meanwhile, with recent studies looking beyond top-down, ecclesiastical models of religious change.<sup>37</sup> Most work, however, continues to focus on the religious history of the elite within the city of Rome.<sup>38</sup> A social, economic and cultural history of this elite, focusing, in particular, on their activity as patrons is gradually coming into view.<sup>39</sup> The political and civic activities of the elite within the city continue to constitute a dominant focus of scholarship.<sup>40</sup> Cultural historical approaches to the late antique city of Rome are only gradually making their impact. A concern with collective memory and cultural identity has brought new insights to the study of both religious and secular aspects of the city.<sup>41</sup> An interest in symbols and ideology, including a focus on the city less as objective materiality than as subjective experience is also an emerging trend.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See M. S. Arena et al., *Roma dall'Antichità al Medioevo: Archeologia e storia nel Museo Nazionale Romano Crypta Balbi* (Milan, 2001); R. Meneghini and R. Santangeli Valenzani, *Roma nell'altomedioevo: Topografia e urbanistica della città dal V al X secolo* (Rome, 2004); R. Meneghini and R. Santangeli Valenzani, *I Fori Imperiali: Gli scavi del Comune di Roma (1991–2007)* (Rome, 2007). The housing of the elite has also come under considerable scrutiny, see most recently C. Machado, 'Aristocratic houses and the making of late antique Rome and Constantinople', in Grig and Kelly, *Two Romes*, 136–58. On intra- and extra-mural urbanism see H. Dey, *The Aurelian Wall and the Refashioning of Imperial Rome AD 271–855* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, R. Coates-Stephens, 'The water-supply of Rome from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages', *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, 17 (2003), 165–86.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), 61–124 (on Rome and Constantinople).

<sup>38</sup> E.g. A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York, 2011); C. Machado, 'Roman aristocrats and the Christianization of Rome', in P. Brown and R. Lizzi (eds.), *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue (IVth to VIth Century A.D.)* (Münster, 2011), 493–516.

<sup>39</sup> See K. Cooper and J. Hillner (eds.), *Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, c. 300–900* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> E.g. L. Cracco-Ruggini, 'Rome in Late Antiquity: clientship, urban topography, and prosopography', *Classical Philology*, 98 (2003), 366–82, and R. Lizzi Testa, *Senatori, popolo, papi. Il governo di Roma al tempo dei Valentiniani* (Bari, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> E.g. S. Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume. Heiligenmemoria und kollektive Identitäten im Rom des 3. bis 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr* (Berlin, 2007), and M. Meier, *Die Stadt als Museum? Die Wahrnehmung der Monumente Roms in der Spätantike* (Berlin, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> See M. Roberts, 'Rome personified, Rome epitomized: representations of Rome in the poetry of the early fifth century', *American Journal of Philology*, 122 (2001), 533–65; L. Grig, 'Imagining the Capitolium in Late Antiquity', in A. Cain and N. Lenski (eds.), *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, 2009), 279–91; L. Grig, 'Competing capitals, competing representations: late antique cityscapes in words and pictures', in Grig and Kelly (eds.),



By contrast, late antique Constantinople remains much harder to access, whether through text or material remains. The early phase of the city's existence, that of the late antique period, has undoubtedly suffered from the perspective of hindsight, which seeks to cast a more stereotypically 'Byzantine' vision of the city than is helpful. However, the topography and infrastructure of the city in this period have received attention from archaeologists and materially minded historians.<sup>43</sup> Outside traditional concerns with the political status and history of the city, a more cultural or social history of the city in this period has yet to be written, perhaps unsurprisingly, given the constraints of the available textual evidence.<sup>44</sup>

Rome and Constantinople predominate in bibliographies dealing with the performance of urban ritual: an analysis of urban space as the primary location for the performance of ritual is a notable theme in current scholarship.<sup>45</sup> Ritual, as is widely accepted, played an important role in demarcating space, in constructing both community and power relations. Imperial, or royal, cities clearly had particularly important roles in this regard. However, at certain times, alternative locations might offer more appropriate locations for possibly controversial ritual performance.<sup>46</sup> In Late Antiquity, new forms of religious ritual gradually replaced the old, notably, for instance with Christian ceremonial working together with an emergent Christian topography to map the late antique city in new directions. Contemporaneously, new forms of civic and political ritual also developed, though it is, of course, difficult to separate 'secular' from 'religious' ritual in this period. Some cities offered particularly rich, and potentially controversial, opportunities in this regard. Jerusalem

*Two Romes*, 31–52, and L. Grig, 'Deconstructing the symbolic city: Jerome as guide to late antique Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 80 (2012), 125–43.

<sup>43</sup> Topography: A. Berger, 'Streets and public spaces in Constantinople', *Dunbarton Oaks Papers*, 54 (2000), 161–72; K. Dark, 'Houses, streets and shops in Byzantine Constantinople from the fifth to the twelfth century', *Journal of Medieval History*, 30 (2004), 83–107; J. Matthews, 'The *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae*', in Grig and Kelly (eds.), *Two Romes*, 81–115. Infrastructure: J. Crow, 'The infrastructures of a great city: earth, walls and water in late antique Constantinople', in L. Lavan and E. Zanini (eds.), *Technology in Transition* (Late Antique Archaeology 4) (Leiden, 2007), 251–85; J. Crow, J. Bardill and R. Bayliss, *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople* (Journal of Roman Studies Monograph 11) (London, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Though for a different approach to urban material culture see S. Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> In Constantinople: F.A. Bauer, 'Urban space and ritual: Constantinople in Late Antiquity', *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam pertinentia*, 15 (2001), 27–61; P. Van Nuffelen, 'Playing the ritual game in Constantinople (379–457)', in Grig and Kelly (eds.), *Two Romes*, 183–200; in Rome, J. Latham, 'The making of a papal Rome: Gregory I and the letania septiformis', in Cain and Lenski (eds.), *Power of Religion*, 293–304; C. Machado, 'The city as stage: aristocratic commemoration in late antique Rome', in Éric Rebillard and Claire Sotinel (eds.), *Les frontières du profane dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Rome, 2010), 287–317.

<sup>46</sup> At the Edinburgh conference, Meaghan McEvoy spoke on 'Why not Rome? Milan as an imperial centre in Late Antiquity'. While the strategic geographical position of Milan has long been noted by scholars seeking to explain the choice of this city in particular, McEvoy persuasively suggested another important advantage possessed by the city: its suitability as a stage for the development and rehearsal of imperial piety, via the use of notably Christian ceremonial, something that would be more difficult at Rome at this time.

is a notable case in point, highlighted by the striking example of the accession of the Umayyad monarch Mu'awiya I as caliph in Jerusalem in 660 or 661.<sup>47</sup> This was a very particular moment of ritual appropriation: Mu'awiya deliberately made use of traditional sacred spaces and rituals in Jerusalem that united Christians, Jews and Muslims.<sup>48</sup> In discussing these rituals, Andrew Marsham has emphasized the various different social, religious and ethnic groups who made up the 'audience' for Mu'awiya's performance, an important reminder of the heterogeneity of the urban population in Late Antiquity.

Still more work remains to be done on the subject of the transformation of classical urbanism in the early Islamic world. The traditional, highly schematic view, made iconic by Jean Sauvaget's diagram, which depicted the transformation from colonnaded street into the *suq*, embodying the 'degeneration' (*dégénérescence*) of the classical street plan, has long been rejected, and research in this area has generally since accepted the 'transformation' paradigm.<sup>49</sup> Ongoing work on late antique and early Islamic Palmyra, for instance, has shown important transformations during this period, including the building of one of the largest churches in Syria in the north-west quarter and then a congregational mosque in the former Severan Caesareum, as well as the incursion of small shops into the Great Colonnade.<sup>50</sup> Early Islamic Syria is obviously a key location where thriving urbanism can be detected at a 'late' stage.<sup>51</sup> Continuity of classical urbanism is manifested in the use and upkeep of such distinctive classical urban public features as bathhouses and marketplaces, in urban sites such as Scythopolis, Edessa and Resafa.<sup>52</sup> This involved the continuation of such

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Marsham gave a paper at the Edinburgh conference, on which the following is based. See also A. Marsham, 'The architecture of allegiance in early Islamic Late Antiquity: the accession of Mu'awiya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE', in A. Beilhammer *et al.*, *Ceremonies in the Medieval Mediterranean*, forthcoming. See further A. Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh, 2009), 86–94.

<sup>48</sup> Marsham also argues that in so doing, Mu'awiya in his actions deliberately evoked the victory celebrations of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, in 630.

<sup>49</sup> Jean Sauvaget, *Alep: essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne des origines au milieu du XIX siècle* (Paris, 1941), 247. See, for instance, H. Kennedy, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Aldershot, 2006), and S. Westphalen, "'Niedergang oder Wandel?" – die spätantike Städte in Syrien und Palästina aus archäologischer Sicht', in Krause and Witschel (eds.), *Die Städte in der Spätantike*, 181–97.

<sup>50</sup> A poster was presented at the Edinburgh conference by Emanuele Intagliata: 'A new approach to urbanism in late antique and early Islamic Palmyra'. See further on the results of the 2008 archaeological season at Palmyra: [www.pcma.uw.edu.pl/index.php?id=83&L=2](http://www.pcma.uw.edu.pl/index.php?id=83&L=2), last accessed 12 Sep. 2012.

<sup>51</sup> See again Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*.

<sup>52</sup> At the Edinburgh conference, Mattia Guidetti presented a paper entitled 'Bathhouses, marketplaces, and houses of worship: the early Islamic refurbishment and revitalization of towns in greater Syria'. See further M. Guidetti, 'The Byzantine heritage in Dar al-Islam: churches and mosques in al-Ruha between the sixth and the twelfth century', *Muqarnas*, 26 (2009), 1–36, and 'Sacred topography in medieval Syria and its roots between Umayyads and Late Antiquity', in P. Cobb and A. Borrut (eds.), *Umayyad Legacies* (Boston, MA, 2010), 337–64.

seemingly classical characteristics as local euergetism and its traditional counterpart, the epigraphic habit.

While the story of late antique urbanism ultimately involves the disappearance of some cities, some new urban centres were also born during the post-classical period. In Syria, for instance, Aleppo and Damascus grew to outstrip previous classical centres. One particularly tantalizing case, however, is that of Reccopolis, in Spain.<sup>53</sup> In a reminder of the potency of classical urbanism, even in a post-classical world, the Visigothic king Leovogild founded Reccopolis in 577 (he also founded the city of Victoriacum in Vasconia in 581, but this city has not been found). This compact site is centred on a striking and unusual building, usually interpreted as a royal palace, though it would be wise to exercise caution in this interpretation, when so much remains unclear. Recent excavations suggest continuity and reoccupation, rather than catastrophe, during the Arab Conquest, though from the mid-eighth century rapid decay of much of the physical fabric seems to have set in and in the course of the ninth century a fortified village emerged nearby as a new settlement.

There remain a number of important challenges in the study of late antique urbanism. In recent years, great progress has been made in gaining an understanding of the urban material fabric and topography. Scholarship has moved beyond a picture of straightforward decline, and is starting to progress beyond the limiting debate of decline versus transformation. The particular challenge, from the point of view of this particular urban historian, is to write a history of the late antique city which focuses more on people and less on buildings on the one hand, and institutions on the other. Some are starting to think about applying the 'biographical' approach to ancient towns, much as scholars focusing on later periods have done. Writing a social and cultural history of urban populations, particularly the non-elite, is clearly a challenging enterprise, but there are a number of instances and opportunities pointing a way ahead.<sup>54</sup>

In common with much scholarship on the ancient world, cities have tended to be approached from an unashamedly elitist viewpoint. That is, scholars have tended, consciously or not, to identify themselves with the class running the (late) ancient city, and tended to lament the passing of traditional curial government, the abandonment of elite housing in intramural areas, and the transformation in the use of monuments traditionally seen as symbolic of (elite) classical culture. These changes, as noted above, and as is well known, have tended to be labelled as 'decline', as 'decadence', while the elitist and at times orientaling assumptions

<sup>53</sup> What follows is based on Roger Collins' Edinburgh paper: 'Reccopolis: a Visigothic royal city'; amongst a whole host of publications see R. Collins, *Visigothic Spain, 409–711* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> See E. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley, 2006), for an interesting attempt to marry urban and intellectual history, embedding the institutional history of the philosophical schools in their urban contexts, also making use of the available archaeological evidence.

behind these interpretations have often gone unchallenged. But what did it mean for the non-elite population of the city when, for instance, elite housing was taken over by lower-class housing, artisanal or commercial structures?<sup>55</sup> How far were the living standards of the poorer inhabitants of the cities affected by changes to classical urbanism? Can we in fact see different consequences of urban change for different social groups? These are all questions that remain to be dealt with.

The urban masses traditionally feature in the history of late antique towns largely as rioters, as members of the factions, as perpetrators of religious violence or as undifferentiated members of the congregations of the great metropolitan bishops, categories which tend to overlap. Of course, social historians of the period have begun to write about the (urban) non-elite in more sophisticated and differentiated ways, using the same patristic, legal and historiographical sources as more traditional histories.<sup>56</sup> Late antique historians could undoubtedly learn from the methods and approaches used by urban historians writing on later periods, even if the sources available to them will differ greatly.

In a development that moves towards putting (ordinary) people back into the late antique city, archaeologists themselves are moving beyond an approach that focuses narrowly on built structures, from merely describing topographical and architectural developments, as ends in themselves.<sup>57</sup> Attempts at a more theoretically informed, and perhaps more *humane* archaeology can easily be found in the Late Antique Archaeology volumes, and other projects spearheaded by Luke Lavan.<sup>58</sup> In the first volume, Lavan noted aptly that the traditional classical-archaeological focus on building type had often obscured secondary activities taking place in architectural spaces, while ignoring non-architectural spaces altogether, and suggested an approach that studied 'activity spaces', rather than buildings.<sup>59</sup> Lavan is continuing this attempt to people the ancient city with a current project 'Visualisation of the Late Antique City', which looks at 'daily life' in smaller

<sup>55</sup> Late antique Ephesus is an important example here, where detailed excavation of the 'Hanghäuser' (terraced houses) complex outside the walls, with occupation from the first to seventh centuries AD, has illuminated an area where aristocratic houses were divided at a late date into smaller workshops and houses. See for a recent synthesis P. Scherrer, 'The historical topography of Ephesos', in Parrish (ed.), *Urbanism in Western Asia Minor*, 86–121.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, J. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2006), e.g. 65–87.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, 'The appearance of the urban framework is thus not treated as a stand-alone phenomenon, but as something which is imbedded in daily life, connected to other aspects of society such as its political organisation, its ideological (including religious) and aesthetic preferences and priorities, and other features of daily existence', Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> This ongoing series of thematic edited collections now stretches to seven volumes, published by Brill, from 2003 to 2013.

<sup>59</sup> See here L. Lavan, 'Late antique urban topography: from architecture to human space', and 'The political topography of the late antique city: activity spaces in practice', in Lavan and Bowden (eds.), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*, 171–95, 314–37.

cities.<sup>60</sup> Digital technology offers exciting new possibilities in terms of virtual reconstruction of past cities, including, obviously, during the period of Late Antiquity. For instance, the 'Digital Roman Forum' created at UCLA is the basis for a web-project entitled 'Visualising Statues in the Late Antique Roman Forum'.<sup>61</sup> The website has the sub-sites 'Ritual Experience' and 'Spatial Context', though the specific reconstructions depicted must often, inevitably, depend on highly speculative reconstruction of statue location and identification.<sup>62</sup>

Finally perhaps, there is room for more consideration of the ideological and symbolic aspects of urbanism. One of the key starting points for this essay was the ideological centrality of the *polis/civitas* in the ancient world, while the transformation of this ideal, alongside the actuality, constitutes an important part of the debate regarding late antique urbanism. Liebeschuetz' notion of the Christian rejection of this ideal, and its (at least partial) responsibility for the urban 'failure' in this period remains problematic,<sup>63</sup> but the subject should form an important part of ongoing discussion.<sup>64</sup> A more 'post-modern' discussion of the late antique city as constructed space, as subjective experience, indeed as an 'imagined community' – or rather as a palimpsest of overlapping and conflicting visions of these – should take its place alongside more empirical work, just as with scholarship on the modern and contemporary city. While this is an inevitably personal view of the field, it seems a good place to conclude, looking forward to the myriad opportunities that remain for future research in late antique urbanism.

<sup>60</sup> See the project website: <http://visualisinglateantiquity.wordpress.com/>, last accessed 12 Sep. 2012.

<sup>61</sup> The late antique site is <http://inscriptions.etc.ucla.edu/>, last accessed 12 Sep. 2012, while the original is <http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Forum>. See <http://hypercities.com/>, last accessed 12 Sep. 2012, for the home of these, and other, projects at UCLA.

<sup>62</sup> The importance of statues as part of the urban landscape, in the late antique city as before, is receiving more attention today; the 'Last Statues of Antiquity' online database is an extremely welcome resource in this regard: <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/>, last accessed 12 Sep. 2012.

<sup>63</sup> See n. 9 above.

<sup>64</sup> Saradi, *The Byzantine City*, the work of a literary historian, is notable for its explicit concentration on urban ideas and images, including urban iconography. See also G.P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins, *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1999), just before the essay's 2000 cut-off point, but sadly not paralleled since.