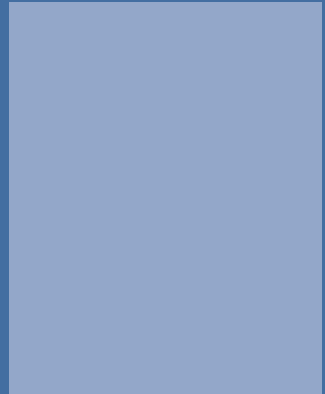


ANCIENT CITIES 1

# ROMAN IMPERIAL CITIES

IN THE EAST AND IN CENTRAL-SOUTHERN ITALY

N. Andrade, C. Marcaccini, G. Marconi, D. Violante (eds)



«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

# Ancient Cities

1

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ITALY

Edited by  
NATHANAEL ANDRADE, CARLO MARCACCINI,  
GIULIA MARCONI, and DONATA VIOLANTE

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

*Ancient cities, 1*

Series Editor

ARIEL SAMUEL LEWIN (Università della Basilicata)

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## CONTENTS

- 8 *List of contributors*
- 14 A.S. LEWIN, *Presentazione della collana Ancient Cities*
- 21 N. ANDRADE, *Why Ancient Cities?*
- I. FROM THE HELLENISTIC POLEIS TO THE ROMAN CITIES
- 33 S. GALLOTTA, *I Greci, l'acqua e le città*
- 43 F. GERARDIN, *Citizenship and Economic Behavior in the New Póleis of Egypt, Judea, and Mesopotamia in the Second Century B.C.E.*
- 55 J. THORNTON, *Istituzioni democratiche e tensioni sociali: dalla pólis ellenistica alla città imperiale*
- II. ROMAN CITIES IN THE EAST
- 93 A. HELLER, *Leading Families in the Cities of Roman Asia Minor: a Quantitative Approach*
- 107 H. FERNOUX, *Les colonies romaines dans le Nord-ouest de l'Asie mineure (Alexandria Troas, Lampsaque, Parion et Apamée-Myrléa): les conditions de leur fondation et leur évolution sociologique à l'époque impériale*
- 141 A.V. PONT, *Comment inclure les monothéistes dans une histoire des cités grecques au Haut-Empire? Étude de cas à partir de la Carie*
- 157 E. BORGIA, *The Role of Client Kingdoms in Cilicia (First Century B.C. – First Century A.D.) within the Promotion of Urbanisation*
- 177 A. MASTROCINQUE, *Tarsus in the Age of Septimius Severus and Caracalla*
- 193 B. RITTER, *Judeans in the Cities of Asia Minor: First Century B.C.E. to Third Century C.E.*
- 215 F. GRELE, *Un municipio grecolocuente in un responso di Cervidio Scevola*
- 227 A. AVRAM, *Titoli onorifici nelle città greche delle coste occidentali e settentrionali del Mar Nero in età imperiale*

- 245 R. LORETO, *Dumata, the Ancient Adummatu. A Caravan Port of Trade on the limes arabicus*
- 263 E. DĄBROWA, *The Title of 'Colonia' and Colonisation as Factors in the Development of Cities in Roman Syria*
- 281 D. VIOLANTE, *Modelli cittadini e gerarchie urbane nella Galilea del I secolo: il caso di Magdala/Tarichee*
- 295 D.F. GRAF, *Palmyra: The Indigenous Factor*
- III. ROMAN CITIES IN CENTRAL-SOUTHERN ITALY
- 327 G. CAMODECA, *Puteoli nel II sec. d.C.: nuovi dati su istituzioni e società*
- 349 C. LETTA, *Mutamenti istituzionali nei municipi dell'Italia nella prima età imperiale: il duovirato a Marruvium e l'emissario claudiano del Fucino*
- 365 M. SILVESTRINI, *Città e proprietà senatoria nella Puglia di età imperiale*
- 381 E. MIRANDA DE MARTINO, *Neapolis, una città plurale*
- 395 M.L. MARCHI, *Riflessioni sulla forma urbana di Venusia e sull'Ager Venusinus. Tra vecchi e nuovi dati*
- 413 J.S. KLOPPENBORG, *Occupational Guilds and Cultic Associations in Ostia Antica: Patronage, Mobility, Connectivity*
- 437 S. ROCCA, *Foreigners at Home: The Historical Geography and Demography of the Jews of Ancient Rome*
- 469 K. KORHONEN, *Paesaggi urbani linguistici nella Sicilia romana*
- 479 C. SORACI, *L'assetto istituzionale delle città siciliane dall'età augustea al III sec. d.C. Strategie di subordinazione e integrazione politica*



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# Presentazione della collana *Ancient Cities*

Ariel Samuel Lewin

Negli ultimi decenni abbiamo assistito alla proliferazione di studi sul mondo antico che presuppongono l'impiego di nuove metodologie. Modelli quali la New Institutional Economy e la valorizzazione di campi di indagine quali la connectivity, la teoria dei networks, l'integrazione, la mobilità hanno avuto ampia diffusione, giungendo a cambiare la nostra comprensione del carattere delle antiche città. Si è così aperto un nuovo scenario che privilegia la tematica dei contatti fra le persone e fra gruppi come un elemento fondamentale del mondo antico e in particolare della società imperiale romana. Dobbiamo ammettere che il mondo antico era molto più dinamico di quanto si fosse precedentemente ritenuto. La gente era solita viaggiare. I contatti erano il risultato di attività commerciali, ma — in particolare nel mondo di lingua greca — essi erano la conseguenza della partecipazione a feste o competizioni sportive. In queste circostanze, infatti, i notabili erano soliti spostarsi da un luogo all'altro e gli stessi competitori provenivano da tutto il bacino del Mediterraneo.

Uguualmente, anche il carattere della vita politica cittadina è stato interpretato in modo nuovo: nell'epoca imperiale romana, benché i notabili fossero riusciti ad ottenere il privilegio di sedere a vita nei consigli cittadini, non si verificò per questo la fine della politica. Per lungo tempo il dibattito in assemblea rimase una consuetudine importante. Inoltre la partecipazione a cerimonie, feste civiche e a culti religiosi rese più intenso il senso di appartenenza a una comunità o a una classe specifica di individui. All'interno delle città i notabili si mostravano ed erano percepiti come un gruppo rilevante che ostentava i propri privilegi, ma spesso osserviamo come le diverse componenti sociali tendevano a cooperare. In genere la gente della *plebs media* era desiderosa di acquisire una posizione di rilievo e la pressione di questi gruppi emergenti contribuì a ravvivare la vita politica. In particolare le associazioni di mestiere, arricchitesi grazie all'espansione dell'impero e alla pace romana, giocarono un ruolo molto importante nello sviluppo delle città. Il corpo civico era composto e ben strutturato, uno strumento idoneo a promuovere la coesione civica e

la crescita economica. E' interessante notare in tal senso che gli stessi ginnasi erano frequentati sia dai rampolli delle élite sia da coloro che erano esclusi dai senati cittadini. Dobbiamo ammettere che le antiche città erano luoghi dove erano possibili una vita sociale di buon livello, l'integrazione degli stranieri, la mobilità delle persone e varie attività culturali.

E' in qualche modo sorprendente che la riscoperta di vari aspetti positivi delle città antiche vada di pari passo con un processo di involuzione delle città dei giorni nostri. Per esempio, molte città dell'Italia meridionale, che hanno più o meno la dimensione di una città media romana (tra i 5000 e gli 8000 abitanti), stanno andando incontro a uno spopolamento. I giovani non le trovano attraenti e non solo per la mancanza di un lavoro. La mancanza di attività culturali e l'impossibilità di avere una vita sociale interessante causano insoddisfazione e il desiderio di emigrare. Allo stesso tempo ovunque nelle grandi città è possibile scorgere segnali disturbanti di estraneità a un comune senso di appartenenza. Queste città appaiono spesso dei luoghi di solitudine, nonostante il proliferare dei moderni mezzi di comunicazione. Inevitabilmente, i nuovi meccanismi lavorativi hanno finito col distorcere radicati sistemi di vita e hanno reso i contatti umani più difficili.

Il contrasto fra le città antiche e quelle dei giorni nostri è alla base delle riflessioni che hanno dato impulso al progetto *Ancient Cities*. Apparirà così proficuo studiare vari aspetti delle città antiche che potrebbero risultare modelli utili per stimolare nuovi modi di socializzazione, di sviluppo culturale e il senso di un'appartenenza civica, aperta alle diversità e dotata di anticorpi più forti contro il dilagare della cosiddetta società liquida.



## Foreword to the series *Ancient Cities*

Ariel Samuel Lewin

Recent decades have witnessed an intensification of studies on the ancient world that have invited new approaches. Models provided by New Institutional Economics and the contributions made by concepts like connectivity, network theory, social integration, and mobility have accordingly become widespread in ways that are changing our understanding of ancient cities. Contacts among people and groups have become fundamental for the study of the ancient world, and in particular the Roman Empire, and as a result we must accept that the ancient world was much more dynamic than we had previously imagined. People routinely traveled. Commercial activities, feasts, and competitions created contact, especially in the Greek world, and they attracted wealthy spectators and competitors from various cities throughout the Mediterranean basin. Some scholars now claim that popular politics in Roman cities did not end even after their most powerful members had obtained the privilege of membership for life in local senates. In fact, for a long time cities remained vital entities, and political competitors could not ignore debate happening in the assemblies.

All these aspects highlight the dynamism of ancient cities. Participation in public ceremonies, civic feasts, and religious cults intensified what it meant to belong to a community or to a specific group. The wealthy quite often behaved as a special segment of cities that aimed to stress its superiority. Yet, in other situations different elements of the city cooperated, and we can assume that the people of the *plebs media* were striving for social mobility. In the cities of Greek world in particular there were gymnasia, civic feasts, and competitions in athletics, music, and literature deep into the Roman period. Civic bodies, being vital and well structured, provided social cohesion and economic development. The sons of persons who were not members of local senates frequented gymnasia alongside the scions of the civic elite. In the Roman Empire the development of trade associations represented a central aspect of economic, political, and social life in cities. These groups were involved in

the lucrative forms of production and commerce that flourished in the conditions stabilised by the Roman Empire. Being important, trade associations were eager to safeguard their own political and economic interests. The pressure exercised by these groups in pursuit of social mobility in fact prevented political life from being dominated by the longstanding members of the local senates and ensured a vibrant political situation. We must admit that ancient cities were places where it was possible to have a high level of sociability, contact, integration of expatriates, mobility of people, and cultural activity. Politics were a matter of face-to-face encounters.

It is somewhat surprising that the rediscovery of many positive aspects of ancient cities serves as a point of contrast with the devolution of modern-day urban communities. Let us take as example the many towns of southern Italy that have more or less the dimension of an average Roman town, say 5000 – 8000 inhabitants. These towns suffer from depopulation as young people move to more attractive places. Unemployment is not the only cause of this negative trend. The towns are unattractive for young people because they do not offer anything interesting to them. Social life is inert and cultural activities are absent. At the same time many features of large contemporary cities undermine a common sense of belonging. These cities often appear to be places of solitude, even in spite of the proliferation of modern communication systems. New developments in technology have created distortions in life networks and have made human contact more difficult.

The contrast between ancient and contemporary cities is the basis for the reflections that have prompted the idea of the *Ancient Cities* project. The project aims to study various aspects of ancient cities that could serve as worthwhile models for stimulating new modes of socialization, cultural development and civic belonging that are open to diversity and that prevent the onset of so-called liquid society.



# ESSAYS