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978-1-107-06918-3 - The Afterlife of the Roman City Architecture and Ceremony in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Hendrik W. Dey

Excerpt

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: URBAN LIVING AND
THE 'FALL' OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

I envision the structure of this book as a set of Russian nesting dolls. In its outermost shell, it is a treatment of monumental architecture in cities across the Roman and post-Roman world, roughly from the mid-third century into the ninth. It explores how the types of public buildings and infrastructure that came to predominate beginning in the third century both reflected and actively constituted evolving sociopolitical and spiritual exigencies, chiefly by framing, channeling and preserving for posterity the intricate panoply of ritual and ceremony that underpinned the claims to authority advanced by civic and ecclesiastical luminaries. The underlying silhouette confronts urban topography and traditions of urban living in a broader sense, by seeking to present monumental architecture and the ensemble of ceremony and collective ritual that animated and inspired it as an independent stimulus to the survival of an urban paradigm – what we might call an enduring ‘urban habit’ – capable of transcending more prosaic economic and demographic realities. The minuscule innermost figure (it is a sparse set of dolls) represents an attempt to provide an alternate lens through which to consider age-old questions of ‘decline and fall,’ ‘Dark Ages,’ and (dis?)continuity between the late Roman period and the Middle Ages in both the eastern and western halves of the (former) Roman empire. In my view, the idea of the city developed during the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods and reforged in the crucible of late antiquity remained remarkably vibrant throughout the ‘darkest’ centuries following the dissolution of Rome’s Mediterranean-wide empire, thus helping both to extend the life of

an essential characteristic of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean cultural *koine*, even as the political and economic collective fragmented, and to stimulate the recrudescence of cities and towns beginning around the ninth century across much of Europe and the eastern Mediterranean alike.

My views on the signal and continuing importance of monumental architecture and urban lifestyles in the cultural matrix of the postclassical period ultimately depend on the premise that urban living was a defining characteristic of Roman, or better Greco-Roman, society. For many centuries before the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, and thereafter across the hellenophone East and the increasingly urbanized provinces of the Latin-speaking West, urban centers – and the civic institutions and lifestyles they represented – epitomized what it meant to be civilized. Such a formulation did not wholly exclude rural dwellers from civilization, for a *polis* extended beyond the eponymous city to embrace its surrounding territory: the urban center and the countryside were in fact inseparable, a real and ideal unity effortlessly rendered by the Greek *polis* and its approximate Latin equivalent, *civitas*, which English speakers tend to express with the awkward paraphrase ‘city-state.’ Ultimately, however, civilized living meant urban living. Urban living framed by well-tended and well-governed countryside, to be sure, but in the end, the country – the Greek *chora* and the Latin *rus* – served the political, economic and ideological ends of the city. It furnished foodstuffs, wood for heating and skins and fabrics for clothing; stone and wood for building; sturdy farmers to take up arms when need arose; raw materials to be ‘civilized’ into manufactured goods and traded in urban markets; even a pleasant escape for those urbane enough to require periodic retreats to a state of cultured rural tranquility, that *otium rurale* cherished by well-heeled Roman urbanites from Cicero to Sidonius Apollinaris.¹ But the city-center was unmistakably at the head of this complex organism: the *polis* was the only place for the *aner politikos* (the Aristotelian ideal of the socially engaged and politically enfranchised citizen), just as the *civitas* was the epicenter of *civilitas* (society, civility and civilization).²

In the West, throughout much of which the urban traditions long characteristic of the eastern Mediterranean were a relative novelty, a single city became an archetype for towns everywhere. Rome was ‘the’ city, the *urbs* without further qualification, a topographical model and a template for a new way of life that the Romans eagerly put before the eyes of their subjects, current and prospective.³ So Virgil’s Mantuan rustic could only express the glory of Rome to a companion via a series of bucolic analogies to the only city he knew,

¹ Cicero, *de Oratore* 1.224; *Epistulae ad Atticum* 1.7; Sidonius, *Epistulae* 2.2; 8.8, etc.

² Cf. Wickham 1984, 15–16; Liebeschuetz 1992, 1–2; Woolf 1998, 125–26; Millar 2006, 25–31.

³ Cf. Zanker 2000; Ando 2000, 14–15.

Mantua, which like all cities was to the *urbs* itself as are ground-hugging osiers to a soaring cypress.⁴ Mantua was the local reality, and Rome the ideal that gave the reality its special, almost mystical significance.

That such a vision was more than a literary topos nurtured by a political and cultural elite is clear from the extent to which ‘Romanization’ and urbanization went hand in hand in the western provinces of the empire. There was no more effective agent in the diffusion of Roman cultural constructs, and no more visible manifestation of the success thereof – today as well as two millennia ago – than the towns that followed closely in the wake of victorious Roman armies. One of the really remarkable features of the development of Roman provincial society, from Africa to Britain, is the exceptional eagerness newly minted provincials demonstrated in their emulation of Roman urban habits.⁵ Usually within a few generations of the Roman conquest, regions with little or no previous history of monumental urbanism witnessed the creation of new towns festooned with more-or-less faithful copies of all the hallmarks of a Mediterranean city in the Greco-Roman tradition: regular street grids, porticoes, forums, baths, atrium houses, basilicas, temples, senate houses, even (in some cases) theaters, arenas and circuses.⁶ The speed with which ‘native’ populations adopted the Roman model, helpfully illustrated for them by the veterans’ colonies established in their midst, might have been surprising even to self-identified Romans, had they been less convinced of the manifest superiority of the way of life they championed. In the East, meanwhile, novel forms such as basilicas, circuses and opulent bath complexes heralded the rise of the

⁴ *Ecl.* 1.19–25. Four centuries later, Rome’s ideological centrality remained unchallenged in the West. Writers of imperial panegyric could think of no better way to exalt new provincial capitals than to compare them with Rome (see, e.g., *Pan. Lat.* 10(2).14.3; 6(7).22.4–5); Ausonius famously called the flourishing provincial capital of Arles, with its unusually rich panoply of monumental public buildings, a ‘little Gallic Rome’ – *gallula Roma Arelas* (*Ord. nob. urb.* 24.75). Similar examples might be adduced almost ad infinitum.

⁵ The bibliography is beyond vast. Accessible recent surveys of provincial urbanization for the regions covered in this study include, on Spain: Kulikowski 2004, 1–38; on Gaul, Woolf 1998, 106–41; Gros (ed.) 1998; on Britain: Burnham and Wachter 1990 and 1995; on Italy: Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 73–143. Wider-ranging overviews include Veyne 1976; Gros and Torelli 1988; Fentress (ed.) 2000; Sewell 2010; Laurence, Esmonde Cleary and Sears 2011.

⁶ This is naturally an extreme compression of a very complex process, which often took a century or more to unfold and was characterized both by common internal rhythms and by distinct local and regional particularities. Forums and street grids tended to precede the introduction of baths and entertainment venues, while Roman-style domestic architecture followed still more slowly. In some areas, particular building types never became common: while amphitheaters were often found in the leading towns of Gaul, for example, they were much less common in Britain, where only six examples are known from the whole province, most of which went out of use in relatively short order (Esmonde Cleary 1987, 177; see generally Laurence, Esmonde Cleary and Sears 2011). Further, as Pierre Gros points out, studies of late antique urbanism in particular too often tend to homogenize the period before the later third century into a ‘classical’ model of provincial urbanism, when in fact cities of, say, AD 50 often looked and functioned very differently than they did a century or two later (Gros 1998).

new power, even as the rhythms of an urban tradition already centuries old remained substantially unaltered.⁷

Of course, much of this necessarily broad-brush *mise-en-scène* might seem a caricature redolent of the comfortable tropes of colonial-era scholarship; and nearly every aspect of my characterization of Roman provincial society has been called into question at one time or another. The whole idea of ‘Romanization’ has been so successfully problematized that its accompanying quotation marks are now *de rigueur*,⁸ and indeed the very concept of ‘cities’ and ‘urbanism’ as both an analytical construct and an historical phenomenon has been stimulatingly, though I think ultimately unconvincingly, challenged.⁹ Yet the fact that Roman social, political, economic, religious and juridical institutions took root unevenly and in locally distinct ways does not obscure the fact that a vast sweep of territories was integrated into a supra-regional system of distinctively Roman stamp;¹⁰ nor do the very real difficulties sometimes involved in distinguishing between what is urban and what is not – between towns and cities on the one hand, and villages and rural settlement on the other – fatally compromise the subdiscipline of urban history as a useful lens through which to view broader processes of institutional and cultural development and transformation in the Roman empire and beyond.

Were we to attempt a summary definition of a Roman city in the imperial period (a *colonia*, *municipium*, *civitas* or *polis* in the language of contemporaries), we might say that it was an entity with well-defined (though mutable) legal, administrative and sacral boundaries; a distinct juridical status, which included administrative and tax-collecting responsibilities for its dependent territory; a physical presence typically characterized by a pronounced concentration of population and economic activity relative to its surroundings; access to a productive surplus sufficient to allow a sizeable percentage of its inhabitants to engage in activities unrelated to subsistence; and a reasonably homogenous

⁷ Millar 1993, 225ff.; Boatwright 2000.

⁸ Woolf 1998; cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 9ff.; Laurence, Esmonde Cleary and Sears 2011, 2–4. Among other difficulties, ‘Romanization’ tends to presuppose the existence of a homogenous and readily definable Roman cultural archetype, when in fact constructions of ‘Roman-ness’ were infinitely varied and constantly evolving over time.

⁹ Horden and Purcell 2000, 89–122; *contra* Wickham 2005, 591 and ff.

¹⁰ The studies of Jacques 1984 and Ando 2000 are fundamental; see now also Noreña 2011. All the same, Romanizing culture was often slower to catch on and more tenuously rooted in rural areas, particularly those either structurally or geographically remote from urban centers: the Isaurians in mountainous southern Anatolia remained effectively autonomous and resolutely hostile to the imperial system as late as the fifth and sixth centuries AD (Millar 2006, 49–50); the African countryside in Augustine’s day still teemed with Punic-speaking, often seriously disaffected (or heretical) peasants, more than five centuries after the creation of the Roman province (Aug. *Ep.* 66.108; cf. Possidius, *Vita Aug.* 10); so too in Gallaecia in northwest Spain, rural dwellers seem to have clung tenaciously to traditional structures of kinship-based social organization through the Roman period and beyond (Díaz and Menéndez-Bueyes 2005).

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INTRODUCTION

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topographical ‘kit’ of public buildings and infrastructure.¹¹ The places that met these standards were recognized as a *sine qua non* for the conduct of ‘civilized’ life, and as the pride of their surrounding regions, by a majority of the peoples living within the Roman empire, over a period of several centuries.¹²

Similar views evidently inform the perspective of the many recent scholars who have made cities into a central player in a reanimated and often contentious discussion about how and why the Roman empire turned into its disparate western, Byzantine and Islamic successor polities, or declined and fell, as it is often still – or again – said to have done. On the one hand, late antiquity’s coming of age as a scholarly field in its own right in the past two generations has prompted a sweeping revision of old notions of decline and fall. A generation of scholars weaned on the likes of Peter Brown, Glen Bowersock, Walter Goffart and Averil Cameron has tended to stress change, continuity and transformation over collapse,¹³ and to question the validity of ‘decline’ (and other allegedly ‘negative’ or ‘value-laden’ terms) as an historical paradigm.¹⁴ Such views have now provoked something of what James O’Donnell aptly called a ‘Counter-Reformation,’ whose proponents emphatically vindicate the right of historians and archaeologists to talk about decline, and in some cases – now provocatively – to emphasize doom-and-gloom scenarios.¹⁵

¹¹ A Roman *civitas*, *colonia* or *municipium* is in fact easier to define than the general concept of an urban center (a town or city as opposed to a village or rural settlement, for example), as the former were reasonably fixed legal constructs (on the legal definitions of urban status prevalent during the imperial period, see, e.g., Wachter 1995, 18–21; Ward-Perkins 1998, 371–73). One way to avoid some of the endless possibilities for wrangling over what is urban and what is not (cf. Gros 1998; Horden and Purcell 2000, 96–105) is to adopt a formulation akin to that proposed some time ago by Martin Biddle, who outlined twelve constituents of urbanism (ranging from city walls to housing types to central place functions), three to four of which together are generally sufficient to qualify a place as urban. Though naturally open to endless debate, Biddle’s model still seems as good as any yet proposed (Biddle 1976; for alternative schemes, see, e.g., Kostof 1991, esp. 37–41; Halsall 1996, 236–37). By such criteria, all *civitas* capitals and a substantial number of additional centers would at one time or another have qualified as urban.

¹² Cultural prejudices in favor of cities and city life often seem to grow, if anything, stronger under the late empire and at times even beyond: see, e.g., Amm. Marc. 15.11.7–15; Ausonius, *Ordo nobilium urbium*; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 5.20; Procopius, *De aedificiis* 6.6.16. Cf. Loseby 1997 on the urban horizons of Gregory of Tours; Orselli 2006 on sixth-century Italy, and on the East, Millar 2006, e.g., 25: ‘In the Greek world of the fifth century cities were, if anything, even more central than they had always been in Greek culture’; see also Jones 1964, 712ff.

¹³ Bowersock, Brown and Grabar (eds.) 1999 is a sort of *summum opus* of the ‘continuity’ school.

¹⁴ Cameron 1993, 128–29; Bowersock 1996.

¹⁵ See Liebeschuetz 2001a, 2001b, 2006; Ward-Perkins 2005; Heather 2005, alongside the outraged response of Fowden 2006 (to Ward-Perkins); and the more measured but still dissenting tones of O’Donnell’s review of both Ward-Perkins and Heather (*BMCR* 2005.07.69); for a pair of thoughtful *status quaestionis*, see Wood 2007 and Marcone 2008; cf. also Delogu 2010a.

The more extreme characterizations of the opposing positions proposed by the protagonists in the debate themselves would pit Pollyanna liberal apologists for cultural relativism and political correctness against reactionary conservative cultural imperialists;¹⁶ and cities have become vital testing grounds for the arguments and counterarguments proposed by both sides. Because cities and urban living were central to the configuration of Roman imperial society, the reasoning goes, and because they were again central during the high Middle Ages across much of the erstwhile empire, including western Europe and the surviving Byzantine heartland, the intervening period becomes crucial. For those who want to say that medieval society was born out of rupture and discontinuity with the Roman past, the ‘urban habit’ disappeared in the interim, while those who favor an uninterrupted evolutionary progression from Roman to medieval stress the continuous occupation of urban sites and the resiliency of a distinctly urban mode of living.¹⁷

To get a sense of the conceptual divide between the two sides, we might compare the approach taken by Ward-Perkins in his provocatively titled *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* with Michael Kulikowski’s book on the cities of late Roman Spain, both of relatively recent vintage.¹⁸ For Kulikowski, invasions and regime changes and famines and plagues and so on are essentially transient phenomena, *événements* that at best ripple the surface of deeper cultural waters, where change occurs only gradually, over the *longue durée*. Language, spirituality, ethnic identity and the continued inclination to live in nucleated settlements (regardless of how clean the streets, how shiny the dishes, how full of exotic imports the markets) are the resilient strands that connect the Roman world with what came after. Meanwhile, for Ward-Perkins, military instability, social upheavals and eventual political fragmentation in the fifth century irrevocably damaged the interregional networks of communications and trade that had made the Roman empire so unusually prosperous and so distinctly Roman. The gradual disappearance of, for example, high-quality imported pottery in many regions becomes a telling indicator of the disintegration of a whole way of life: as the interconnected economy of the Roman Mediterranean and the intensity of mechanisms of trade and exchange diminished, cities lost their reason for being and the world experienced a sort of rural involution.¹⁹

¹⁶ E.g., Ward-Perkins 2005 vs. Fowden 2006.

¹⁷ Ironically, as Chris Wickham has pointed out, those on the left of the discussion in modern political terms have tended to emphasize the survival of Roman urban centers and the ongoing ability of their inhabitants to maintain a lifestyle that distinguished them from their rural counterparts, while those on the right have commonly stressed the disintegration of urban structures (physical and social) and the corresponding suffering of the huddled masses left to scrape out an existence amongst the ruins of the past (Wickham 2005, 598–99).

¹⁸ Kulikowski 2004.

¹⁹ Ward-Perkins 2005, 87ff. and *passim*.

None of this will come as news to scholars of late antiquity. The parameters of the debate are well established; most of the historical syntheses – not to mention book reviews – written in the past couple of decades fall broadly into one of the two camps; and the two sides are becoming in some respects only more entrenched. At the same time, however, both factions have implicitly upheld the idea that cities tend to be a mirror of society and a valuable gauge of broader patterns of cultural evolution, while the supporters of continuity have further affirmed the surprising vigor of the urban phenomenon itself. What has been less remarked, I think, is another basic similarity common to both approaches. It seems to me that discourse on all sides continues to unfold within essentially processual, or even structuralist frameworks, in the sense that it has tended to make not only individuals and events but even cities and urban living epiphenomenal. Such things are the inevitable corollary of their cultural matrix on the one hand, or of political, economic, environmental and geographical imperatives on the other.

Discussions of the postclassical city are thus processual in the same sense that Marxist history is processual, to take an obvious example, or in the sense that both the Pirenne Thesis and the reactions of its staunchest critics are processual. Here we might mention Hodges and Whitehouse's study *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe*, now more than three decades old, which is notable for being one of the few attempts by specialists in late antique material culture to present a sort of grand vision of historical causation and societal change over the long term.²⁰ Yet for Hodges and Whitehouse as much as Pirenne, Roman cities are made possible by Mediterranean-wide networks of production, exchange and communications: whether you think these networks disintegrated with the Muslim conquests of the seventh century (Pirenne), or rather with the political fragmentation of the empire in the fifth (Hodges and Whitehouse), cities are a by-product of their environment.

To take a more recent example, we might consider the much-cited *The Corrupting Sea* by Horden and Purcell, whose treatment of urbanism is symptomatic of their broader approach: they argue for its abandonment as an analytical category altogether.²¹ There is no fundamental difference between Antioch, say, and a Cappadocian mountain hamlet: both are simply what geography, topography, communications networks and population density allow them to be. If you have more people and more resources and a more accessible location, you get Antioch; if you have fewer people and fewer goods and a more remote location, you get a Cappadocian hamlet.

²⁰ Hodges and Whitehouse 1983; cf. also Hodges 1982. The authors react strongly against the views expressed most comprehensively in Pirenne 1937. Hodges 2010 resolutely continues in the same vein.

²¹ Horden and Purcell 2000, 89–122.

It might further be remarked that most of the really ambitious overviews of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages produced in recent years have been written by scholars who are more historians than archaeologists *stricto sensu*, notwithstanding their interest in material culture in general and cities in particular.²² Since Klaus Randsborg a generation ago,²³ archaeologists have not been much inclined to undertake similar works of grand synthesis. They work on particular sites or regions, and depending on their perspective and the local character of their site or region, they stress rupture or evolution, survival or disintegration. In some places, urban infrastructure did disintegrate quite completely, as Andrew Poulter has convincingly argued of the lower Danube in the fifth and sixth centuries;²⁴ and the same still appears to be largely true for Britain following the departure of the legions in the early fifth century, though a more nuanced picture is now emerging.²⁵ In other areas, including but not limited to Italy, much of Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula, and parts of Anatolia and the Levant, the situation is much less clear-cut. While the topographical contours characteristic of cities in the early and middle imperial period, with their diffuse scatters of public buildings and solidly built residential complexes, linked by regular, well-maintained grids of streets, did indeed tend to evolve, contract and even disintegrate with the passage of time, many of the leading urban nuclei of the Roman period continued to be characterized in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages by a relative concentration of population, by new kinds of monumental and domestic architecture, by continued signs of political, economic and cult activity, and also by the continuing presence of the most prominent members of society, as we shall see.

All of which brings us more or less to the present, and to the state of affairs that motivates many of the avenues of inquiry pursued in what follows. In the best of cases, scholars recognize the need to move beyond dialectical frameworks of continuity and catastrophe, but they have thus far been largely unable to do so.²⁶ They now tend (again in the best of cases) to accept that different parts of the Roman empire followed very different historical trajectories in late antiquity, but they cannot agree on why, and they often have trouble even formulating the question in a way that will allow these differences to be accounted for. This fundamental difficulty, I think, results in part from continued reliance on ‘deep structural’ or processual models, which are conspicuously

²² In addition to the works of Liebeschuetz and Heather cited at n. 15, we might add Michael McCormick’s *The Origins of the European Economy*; Chris Wickham’s monumental survey of the whole Mediterranean and beyond from 400–800 (Wickham 2005); and Julia Smith’s study of post-Roman Europe (Smith 2005). Welcome recent exceptions now include Christie 2011 and Esmonde Cleary 2013.

²³ Randsborg 1991.

²⁴ See esp. Poulter (ed.) 2007.

²⁵ Wachter 1995, 408–21; Faulkner 2000; for ongoing signs of life, Rogers 2011.

²⁶ Wickham 2005 is a notable exception.

deficient when it comes to accounting for regional differences. Whether one privileges structural upheaval or cultural continuity, one follows a theoretical or methodological trajectory that should, by definition, be universal or at least supra-regional in its application: what is good for the goose in one region should be good for the gander in another. This leaves one to try to squeeze the textual or archaeological data available for any given area into the procrustean bed of one's preferred model of change and historical causation.

In my view, one of the most promising exit strategies for this conceptual impasse requires the reintroduction of people and, more to the point, personalities into the equation, not as an undifferentiated mass quantified in abstract demographic terms, but rather as individuals, as beings with needs and wants and volition and complex cultural and personal agendas. The way cities changed and evolved in different regions of the Roman world over the course of centuries depends to some extent on how people in any of those regions chose to live, beginning with those in the positions of greatest influence, politically, militarily and spiritually speaking.²⁷ We need, in other words, to account better for human agency when considering why some cities survived and others did not, and to keep in mind that human agents sometimes fail to act in predictable or strictly pragmatic ways.

With regard to the cities that did remain relatively vibrant, one of the primary challenges now confronting scholars is the issue of how and why the urban paradigms that prevailed at the height of the Roman empire came to look so different in the following centuries. Proponents of the idea that the ancient city 'fell' at the end of antiquity often point to the decline of 'classical' urban forms as an indicator of impending doom, and it is true that public spaces such as streets and forums often – but by no means always – grew more crowded with ad hoc structures erected by individual proprietors, while once-essential public amenities such as temples, civic basilicas, *palestrae*, entertainment venues and so on tended to fall into disrepair or to disappear entirely.²⁸ The crucial point is that in many places, new kinds of constructions supplanted the older forms: churches and other religious foundations, grandiose city walls, opulent palaces and official residences sprang up in impressive numbers and often endured for centuries, while the venerable colonnaded street experienced a startling – and highly underappreciated²⁹ – renaissance beginning in

²⁷ This in fact is one of the basic premises of Pirenne's much-maligned *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, one that deserves to be salvaged from the historical wreck made of him by recent scholarship; for a useful historiographical overview, see Delogu 1998. Halsall (2007, 32 and passim) also stresses the need to put individuals back into the study of late antiquity; see also 26–27 for a succinct overview of processual and post-processual trends in late antique historiography.

²⁸ Liebeschuetz 2001a, esp. 29–103; Saradi 2006, passim; Delogu 2010b, 40ff. For recent overviews of these developments in the West, with a welcome focus on archaeological evidence, see Christie 2011, 112–41; Esmonde Cleary 2013, 97–149.

²⁹ But see Chapter 3, n. 1 for noteworthy exceptions.

the fourth century and continuing at least through the fifth in the West and the sixth in parts of the East. In the process, both the physical contours of cities and the prevailing idea of what a city should be changed almost beyond recognition, as for example Helen Saradi, Franz Alto Bauer, Neil Christie and Sarah Bassett have all recently helped to demonstrate.³⁰

It is my intent to build on the pioneering work of these and other scholars by thinking further about the purpose and inspiration of the new architectural forms that came into fashion beginning around the third century AD, which in my view are neither as fortuitous nor as inevitable as they are often made to seem. Proponents of structural failure stress the straitened economic conditions characteristic of late antiquity,³¹ or the declining capacity of city councils to intervene meaningfully in local politics and administration,³² to arrive at a picture characterized by a sort of creeping entropy. Continuing efforts on the part of civic leaders to maintain walls and main streets and official residences are thus explained away as stopgap measures intended at best to stave off the inexorable decay of the most essential infrastructure. Cultural continuists in turn tend to concentrate on the vitality of the church and its ability to restructure existing cityscapes with a collection of churches, episcopal complexes, martyrial shrines, monasteries and foundations dedicated to the care of the poor and the infirm. Yet there is an air of inevitability about this picture as well: a triumphant Church opportunistically sought to translate its ascendancy into the realm of constructed space, inserting its edifices rather haphazardly into existing townscapes, and creating in the process a sort of ‘alternative city’ on the margins of the crumbling classical one, with which it rarely entered into meaningful dialog.³³

I would say on the contrary that in leading administrative and ecclesiastical centers, urban topography came in late antiquity to be governed by a more coherent spatial logic and a more closely defined ideological agenda than ever before.³⁴ No longer simply showpieces of ‘Romanization’ or privileged foci of civilized living endowed with a congeries of characteristically urban features, the surviving urban centers of late antiquity were reengineered to promote the conjoined power of civic and ecclesiastical institutions as effectively as possible, and to translate social hierarchies into a material form capable of reinforcing and propagating those hierarchies over the *longue durée*. Let it be clear that I do

³⁰ Saradi 1995, 2006; Bauer 1996; Christie 2001, 2006; Bassett 2004.

³¹ E.g., Hodges and Whitehouse 1983; Ward-Perkins 2005.

³² This is a central thesis of Liebeschuetz 2001a; cf. also, e.g., Haldon 1997, chapter 1; Speiser 2001, esp. 13–14.

³³ Cantino Wataghin, Gurt Espaguerra and Guyon 1996, 30–36; Gauthier 1999; Guyon 2006; Saradi 2006, 386–440, esp. 339–40. The comments of Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998, 162 are emblematic in this regard: ‘Fino al VII secolo, i luoghi di culto non costituiscono dunque elementi ideologici della topografia urbana.’

³⁴ *Contra*, e.g., Lavan 2003a, 175 and ff.