

The Emergence of Cities

Even answering the question “What is a City” is not straightforward. Some authors require that each of a long list of structures, infrastructure and societal characteristics be represented at an archeological site before it can be called a city. These range from residential areas with social stratification to temples, public spaces including permanent markets, and administrative precincts. Yet there are also sites that demonstrate that these components existed much earlier, separately, and that the “cities” assembled (and sometimes disassembled) them in various sequences. In this seminar we will be concerned with exploring the characteristics that make a city as well as why this form of living has been successfully adopted in so many different places and at so many different times in the history of man.

The list on the reverse side therefore includes sites that some archeologists might not classify as cities, but they are as important for understanding how humans came to adapt their societies to a city life as are later, more fully developed ancient cities in the Mediterranean basin and other well-studied archeological areas. They help us fill in what is missing in the archeological record: the early nuclei of today’s major cities, such as Paris, where archeological evidence has been deeply buried or destroyed, or sites from climates less conducive to preservation than the arid Middle East.

Several recent books written for the non-specialist attempt to re-evaluate the standard definitions of a city and elucidate new aspects of early urbanization, including:

Monica Smith (2019). **Cities: The First 6000 Years**

Greg Woolf (2020). **The Life and Death of Ancient Cities: A Natural History**

David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021). **The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity.**

Any of these books provide a good introduction to the issues that we will be discussing in this seminar as we learn about a subset of the sites. Participants are welcome to choose a site that is not on the reverse side of this handout with the consent of the moderators.

Site	Early dates (very approximate!)	Region
Çatalhöyük	6th millenium BCE	Turkey
Xi'an	6th millenium BCE	China
Metsamor	2nd millenium BCE	Armenia
Uruk	4th millenium BCE	Iraq
Tell Brak	4th to 1st millenium BCE	Turkey
Susa	1st millenium BCE	Iran
Nebelivka	4th millenium BCE	Ukraine
Caral	3rd millenium BCE	Peru
Harappa	3rd millenium BCE	Pakistan
Akrotiri	3rd, 2nd millenia BCE	Santorini
Palaikastro	4th, 3rd millenium BCE	Crete
Thebes	3rd, 2nd millenia BCE	Egypt
Troy	4th to 2nd millenia BCE	Turkey
Sanxingdui	3rd, 2nd millenia BCE	China
Mojendo-daro	3rd, 2nd millenium BCE	Pakistan
Knossos	3rd millenium BCE	Crete
Kanesh	2nd millendium BCE	Turkey
Poverty Point	1st Millenium BCE	Louisiana
Amarna	2nd millendium BCE	Egypt
Chavin de Huantar	1st millenium BCE	Peru
Benin	1st millenium CE	Nigeria
Carthage	1st millenium BCE	Tunisia
Hill of Tara	~0 CE	Ireland
Caracol	1st millenium CE	Belize
Cổ Loa	3rd century BCE	Vietnam
Timgad	1st millenium CE	Algeria
Teotihuacan	1st millenium CE	Mexico
Xunantunich	1st millenium CE	Belize
Tiwanaku	1st milleniumCE	Bolivia
Tikal	1st millenium CE	Guatemala
Kolomoki	1st century CE	Georgia
Great Zimbabwe	10th to 17th centuries CE	Zimbabwe
Cahokia	8th to 15th centuries CE	Illinois