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“Cities fascinate” (p. 205), this motto may sum up the thrust behind this innovative volume. *Explaining the Urban Boom. A comparison of regional city development in the Roman Provinces of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula*, is the result of a conference held in the German Archaeological Institute, Madrid, in January 2018. The workshop and resulting book gathered 26 scholars from several countries, including Germany, Britain, France, The Netherlands, Tunisia, the USA, Portugal, and Spain, most of them producing chapters for the volume. The book comprises fifteen chapters organized in four sections: 1. “Macro- and micro-regional approaches to the Urban Boom” (pp. 17-108, five chapters); 2. “Stages of an Urban Boom. Pre-Roman origins and imperial developments” (pp. 109-202, four chapters); 3. “Home, sweet Rome. Connectivity of people, resources, and trade” (pp. 203-314, five chapters); and 4. “New Perspectives” (pp. 315-330, one chapter). The fourth part proposes further directions of research and the first three deal with the economic preconditions (p. 8), the social trigger (p. 9), and the value of urban living (p. 10). “Home, sweet Rome” evinces a fresh informality and word game, as the book tries to address not only the scholarly reader but also the broader public. Within this framework, most ancient inscriptions are reproduced and transliterated, but also translated (pp. 163-171, 226, 229). One chapter is in Spanish, two in German, three in French, and the rest in English, all of them with abstracts in the *lingua franca*, English. It contains very informative maps, including topographic ones, urban plans, street grids, building planimetries, reconstruction drawings, photos, tables, graphs, artifacts, stratigraphic sections, listings, and graphical realizations of many archaeological sites. The volume fosters further discussions and fruitful inquiring (*Forschungen*, p. VII).

It is impossible to attempt to summarize every chapter due to the vast range of topics examined in them. It is perhaps more useful to discuss some general key concepts and issues, starting with the emphasis on a historiographical approach to each issue, such as the association of past analyses with European colonialism (p. 24), or more recent ones like the upsurge of archaeological surveys and digs threatening the established narratives (p. 111), and breaking with the historiographic traditions (p. 323) towards a paradigm shift (p. 3). Another aspect to consider as key subject is the sources of information used, among which archaeology stands out as the main provider of new data (p. 326). Inscriptions are very recurrent archaeological evidence (pp. 23, 25, 28, 163, 167-9, 171, 226), although “anepigraphic sources” are even more numerous in the urban context, such as architecture, pottery (pp. 126, 183, 185, 186, 195, 196, 197, 297) bricks (pp. 196, 302, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309), amphorae (p. 186) or *instrumentum domesticum*.

Recurrent concepts exist, some of them ancient ones, most of them from contemporary social theory. It is perhaps useful to discuss them by the amphibology of the *Latin hostis*, absent in the volume, but present in derived terms, such as hosting (p. 122). Indeed,

there is no boom without both attraction and rejection, at the root of *hostis*, at the same time a guest or stranger and possibly hostile person or enemy. This is at the heart of urban boom in any time and place: people coming from elsewhere and living together in between assimilation and rejection, to a variety of degrees. Rome, from the beginning, developed from the concentration of people of very diverse origins in interaction. Emperor Claudius in the Table of Lyon (CIL XIII, 1668, ca. 48 CE) was clear about this: *Supervenerere alieni et quidem exter | ni, ut Numa Romulo succescerit ex Sabinis veniens, vicinus qui | dem, sed tunc externus* ("Foreigners and certain outsiders arrived, such as Numa, who succeeded Romulus, coming from the Sabines – indeed a neighbor, but at that time an outsider"). Cities and towns are the result of people coming from many parts of the known world and there is no way of dealing with the phenomenon without considering this issue (p. 127). The Roman way of life (p. 319) proved to be both attractive and repelling in contradictory ways, both on individual and collective basis. Local elites were lured by Rome and profited from this position, and towns and cities played a role for them by promoting their status through imperial and religious dedications and a variety of munificence (p. 223) in favor of the community (p. 66). Therefore, cities comprising a variety of people in a complex urban/rural relationship: indigenous, Roman citizens, and Italians (p. 26, 91, 94, 99). *Oppidum, municipium* (and the modern municipalization, p. 32), *colonia, pagus, urbs* (cf. urbanization p. 1), are the most studied ancient terms because of their key role in the understanding of the urban dynamics.

Even more extraordinary are modern concepts, such as those used to understand the dynamics of social relations, starting with the cultural broker, a social theory concept, defined as a go-between (p. 210 *als Mittler zwischen zwei Kulturen*). Urban contexts offer wide-open opportunities for the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or people of different cultural backgrounds. A related and key social theory concept is agent (p. 217, used in English and French in the volume), actor (p. 255), or *Akteur* (in German, p. 252), dealing with the agency of people and, in this case, the modern term comes precisely from the Latin root *ago*, to do, a doer, an agent *lato sensu*, including freedmen (pp. 146, 277) and slaves (pp. 146, 273, 277) or females (p. 225), to go beyond the elites and to include the subaltern (p. 66). Connectivity, monumentalisation, and municipalisation depended on social agents to connect people, build or keep monuments, as well as cities and towns.

Obviously, the most ubiquitous concept is "boom" (rapid expansion or increase). It is a modern concept, derived in this sense from the industrial and capitalist world and its use for the ancient world is thus an adaptation, as "rapid" is here relative. The Urban Boom (p. 321 *l'explosion urbaine*) is properly described as a slow change process started several decades before. This Urban Boom happened in the second half of the first century CE in Hispania and a century later in North Africa, that is, in the second half of the second century CE (p. 1). Transition is thus also a key concept (pp. 157, 182): "going through", from one situation to another. The chapters explore a significant variety of possible reasons for the prerequisite phenomena of an Urban Boom (p. 1), starting from the economic preconditions, such as mining, cash crops, and the *Annona* or supply network (p. 8), in the context of the Roman peace. Amphorae are clear archaeological evidence of olive oil, wine, and fish-sauce circulation, particularly in urban contexts. Modern economic criteria are thus considered relevant (p. 255). The social trigger is the result of the connectivity between local elites and the political and economic system in the two regions seems to represent a key element in the preconditions for a Urban Boom, stressing again the interconnection of urban elites (p. 10) and the most often

used connectivity concept, possibly from *nōdus* (“knot”). Indeed, even if “knot” is absent in the volume, as a literal reference, it is most frequent as meaning links or relations. Connection has been one of the main features of our period of globalization (p. 11), since, at least, the 15th century, much more so in recent decades. And the Roman apex was a globalisation moment indeed (p. 11).

There is still a most overarching concept: fiction (p. 317), even though mentioned explicitly only in the concluding remarks (*ordre imaginaire*). Fiction comes from *finco* (to form, to shape, a narrative or tale, a story). This is a concept taken directly from the Israeli historian Yuval Harari in his best-seller *Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), applied to the acceptance by people of a model *imago Urbis*, or idea of city living, from Augustus onwards, strongly supported by local elites (p. 317). This concept may be related to the contemporary importance of narratives or stories, beyond the mere tentative of describing facts. And indeed, perceptions and subjective interpretations are most important in shaping behavior. The Urban Boom of the Roman world for first and second centuries CE) is thus also considered as a result of a perception of opportunities by the elites, in particularly favorable economic, social, and cultural conditions. It is also possible to relate our contemporary understanding of the topic to the present-day debates about fake news and the spreading of narratives above and beyond any evidence. For instance, a third of young Americans thinks that the earth is flat, and 40% consider it was created a few thousand years ago, attesting to the overwhelming relevance of the narrative. Challenging established narratives may come from different approaches and sources, as is the case of the old view of a neglected and devastated post-Carthage destruction (146 BCE) in North Africa (p. 111).

Another most updated subject, female agency, depends on narrative, taken not as a false story, but as an inevitable account of the importance of framing theory and evidence. After decades of women’s history, feminist history, archaeology, and classics and amid an upsurge of movements like Me Too and Mary Beard’s best-sellers, TV, and radio shows, it is not surprising that women are mentioned as female citizens (p. 223). The benefactresses were members of the wealthiest families of each town. The vast majority belonged to the decurial elite, while others, less numerous, were from higher senatorial ranks (p. 224). Female munificence was centered around cult buildings, including the Imperial cult. This female euergetism or philanthropy can be read as a sign of the emancipation of women in North Africa in the late second and third centuries (p. 230). The volume as a whole opens several research paths and triggers other regional overviews empire-wide. New data and new ideas offer the opportunity to think anew about the complexities of life in the Roman world, fostering emancipation, to use the term employed in the volume by Cristina Murer. It is a most needed and inspiring message, as the presence of the past may serve for a better future.

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