Ancient Cities
Why study ancient cities?

• Gives us examples of cities other than our own
• Brings us to consider the fundamentals of what makes a city
Pre-History

- Old Stone Age/Palaeolithic
  - Basic stone, bone tools
  - Hunting & gathering, no farming
  - Only domesticate: the dog
- New Stone Age/Neolithic
  - Sophisticated stone/bone tools
  - Farming, cities, writing
  - All domesticates
The First Cities

• Very few urban centres in the Palaeolithic
  – Catal Hayuk, Anatolia (made obsidian tools)
  – Permanent fishing villages of the Pacific Northwest

• Need strong food supply to sustain urban settlement
  – Really need farming
Settled agricultural life

• Old world:
  – Agriculture begins c. 10,000 years ago (YBP)
  – Cities begin 5,300-5,500 YBP Mesopotamia, Indus valley

• New world:
  – Agriculture begins 2,000 YPB
  – Cities begin 1,700 YBP

• Why the difference?
The First Cities

• Emerge once crop agriculture begins
• Cities perform specialised non-agricultural functions:
  – Specialised manufacturing, trade
  – Government
  – Religion
The First Cities

- Had powerful god-kings
- Often had monumental structures
- Hierarchic societies
  - god-king at top
  - various layers underneath
- Spatial order
  - Power at the centre
  - Palaces, temples at centre
First Cities

- **Mesopotamia:**
  - Southern Iraq, Tigris & Euphrates rivers: Ur,
- **Indus valley:**
  - Harrapa, Mohenjo-Daro etc.,
Mohenjo-Daro
Ur
First Cities

- Cities emerge after long pre-urban period of settled agricultural life
- Cities emerge before writing
Exception: Catal Huyuk

- urban almost 10,000 YBP
- pre-agricultural
- 5-10,000 population
- based on mining and trade in obsidian
First Cities

- Very rapid emergence of sophisticated urban civilizations
  - writing
  - complex buildings
  - skilled craftsmen
  - luxury items
  - long-distance trade
First Cities

• Small by modern standards
  – 10,000 was a big one

• Ancient monster cities:
  – Classical Athens: 300,000
  – Classical Rome: 650,000
Why were they so small?

• Large cities require:
  – large empire to feed and supply them
  – complex, but effective organization
  – significant military forces
First Cities

• Key issue is urban social organization
• Can be fairly rural in setting:
  – Mayan cities
Chichen Itza
First Cities

• Stark social contrasts:
  – god-King, priest
  – craftsmen
  – slaves
Aztec Calendar
First Cities

• Places where power was projected
  – social
  – religious
  – military
  – economic

• Connected with monumental structures
  – helped to project the power?
• Giza
Tenochtitlan
• Bayon, Cambodia
Cahokia
Cahokia – Men’s House
Cahokia
First Cities

• Connected to the emergence of states
  – projection of political power
  – urban control over rural populations
First Cities

- need to control rural territories
  - obtain food, slaves
  - collect “taxes”
The First Cities

• Theocracies, monarchies
• Not democracies
Classical Greece

- Complex long-distance trading networks
  - Brings in goods, technology, ideas
- Expensive iron technology becoming vital to warfare
  - Greek kings too poor to equip iron-age armies
Classical Greece

• Greek kings rely on wealthy farmers, merchants to provide the army
• Diminishes the power of the king
• Power falls into the hands of farmers & merchants
  – Democracy
Theories of Urban Origins

- Childe theory
- Trade theory
- Wittfogel’s Hydraulic theory
- Pivot and Four Quarters
Childe Theory

• V Gordon Childe
• Technology allows
  – accumulation of surpluses
  – increased production
• Leads to more complex social organization
  – cities
Trade Theory

• Braidwood
• Cities emerge out of complex trading routes
  – Catal Huyuk
Hydraulic Theory

- Karl Wittfogel
- First cities emerge in agricultural regions dependent on irrigation
- City states developed as means of organizing irrigation schemes, agriculture
  - OK in Mesopotamia, doesn’t work in Egypt
Pivot & Four Quarters

- Paul Wheatley
- Religious activity is the key factor
- Cities emerge as key control points, temple locations, centres receiving religious tributes
  - Works, especially in China, Mesoamerica, but annoys the Marxists
Synoecism

- Rural area gradually evolves into an urban one
- If rural develops urban social organization
- Gradually transformed
  - ancient Athens, Rome
  - rural district surrounding fortified temple/refuge site
Classical Athens

• Began as a rural region focussed
  – on a central fortified temple site (the Acropolis)
  – on a central marketplace (the Agora)

• Developed into a city-state

• Ordinary Athenians
  – Lived in simple, even crude housing
  – Public space more elaborate
Classical Athens

- Private space
  - Not very opulent

- Public space
  - Adorned, ornamented
  - Public life important in a democracy
  - Public space beautified as a make-work scheme for urban unemployed
Classical Athens

• Segregation by social status
  – Citizen/foreigner/craftsman/slave
  – Male/female
Classical Athens

• Classical Greek homes were gender-segregated
  – Gynaekonitis: for the women
  – Andron: for the men
Priene

Plan and restored view of the upper city:
B: Temple of Athene Polias
C: Ecclesiasteron
D: Prytaneum

Agora

Downtown Priene