The Busy Periphery

Urban Systems of the Balkan and Danube Provinces (2nd – 3rd c. AD)

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Chapter I
Introduction

The place of the study in current scholarship of ancient urbanism

The following study aims to reconstruct the urban geography of the Balkan and the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire at the time of the Severan dynasty, with a particular emphasis on the quantitative properties of the regional urban systems and the urban hierarchy.[1] Although distinguished by its ambitious scope, this book is part of a relatively recent wave of studies focused on the regional urban hierarchies in the Roman Empire.[2] The undiminished interest in this topic is in part related to the perceived relevance of urbanism to the character of the ancient economy. In the context of the rekindled debate about the structure and performance of the ancient economy, it is only too natural that the town – the basic cell of the Classical Mediterranean societies – has remained in the focus of scholarly attention.[3] The most recent wave of studies in ancient urbanism also coincides with a revival of interest in a number of concepts and methods from the field of Economic Geography, such as new versions of Rank-size analysis.[4] In some quarters there was, and still is, an unconcealed optimism that the application of these techniques can make an important contribution to the understanding of the town's role in the ancient economy, levels of economic integration and the nature of the economic relations existing between the different corners of the ancient world. A far more important departure from the earlier studies of ancient urbanism has been the shift in perspective. Urbanism is by no means a study topic recently introduced into the fields of Ancient History and Archaeology. It is a subject with a century-old tradition of theoretical considerations and empirical research. What sets this study apart from the older approaches to ancient urbanism is the focus on the integral urban system rather than on an individual or group of towns. Until fairly recently, most theoretically informed studies of ancient urbanism were concerned primarily with the economic activities or the town-country relationship of individual towns.[5] These studies have been extremely valuable in expanding our understanding of the workings of individual or groups of towns, but their limited scope has meant that they could neither set the towns studied in a wider urban landscape nor could they make a profound contribution to the principal debates that have shaped the field of Ancient Economy. Virtually every town followed a distinct historical trajectory and had a specific economic orientation, so that the more that is known about a concrete town, the less can be said about the ancient or the Roman town in general.[6]

However, studies of urban systems do not aspire to unravel the essence of the town in a given time-period or area. Towns, or rather the network of towns and settlements, are only the means by which the geographical aspects of economic and administrative organization are studied. It is important to stress that the main assumption behind studies of this sort is that the urban system is not the simple sum of its constituent towns.[7] The integral urban system represents a qualitatively different entity. Its essence lies in the quantitative relationships between the towns rather than in the specific economic relations that bind the system together. Neither the identity nor the history of the individual towns is of major relevance, as the changing size and status of the individual towns does not necessarily impact on the shape of the integral system. This peculiarity of the urban systems contains at least two benefits for the study of ancient urbanism. One is conceptual and it has to do with the opening of a novel perspective on the study of ancient societies. Economic geographers have long since recognized the fact that the variable distributions of settlement-size directly reflect the unequal distribution of population, wealth and power.[8] A downside of this approach is that the properties of the urban hierarchy hide the

[1] The research for this monograph was carried out in the context of the ERC Advanced project 'An Empire of 2000 Cities' (ERC grant agreement num. 324148).

[2] Woolf 1997, 1-14; Tacoma 2006; Marzano 2011, 196-228; Hanson 2011, 229-275; De Ligt 2012; de Graaf 2012, Hanson 2016; De Ligt 2016, 17-51.

[3] Parkins ed. 1997; Temin 2006, 133-151; Mattingly, Salmon eds 2002; De Ligt, Northwood eds 2008; Lo Cascio, Malanima 2009, 391-411; Scheidel ed. 2012; Temin 2013.

[4] Krugman 1995 and 1996. For a good discussion of earlier versions of Rank-size analysis see Hodder, Hassal 1971, 391-407. Various older publications, such as Kunow 1988, 55-67 and Bekker-Nielsen 1989, have drawn some inspiration from Central-Place Theory. In our view, the last approach continues to be a useful tool for analysing town-country relationships.

[5] Jongman 1988, Engels 1990, Morley 1996.

[6] Finley 1977, 305-327.

[7] A starting position that already presupposes at least a basic level of integration between the individual towns, cf. De Vries 1984, Morley 1997, 41-56.

[8] Jefferson 1939, 226-232; Berry 1961, 573-588; Chorley, Haggett eds 1967.

general aspects of the political and economic relations in a given society. In theory, it should be possible to attain a better understanding of such relationships by focusing on micro-regions or by combining the results of investigations into individual towns, but so far, no synthesizing studies of this type seem to have been attempted. As we shall see farther down the road, success on this front is still not necessarily in sight. Economic historians and geographers of later periods are in a far more advantageous position than the ancient historian, as they can always check their inferences based on the settlement-size distributions against the volume of internal or external trade in a given territory or on other direct indicators of the level and modality of economic integration.[9] However, in the absence of alternative approaches to the study of the integral urban infrastructure, it is far from warranted to write this path of inquiry off. Its potential to cast light on the political economy of the ancient empires surely deserves to be tested.

The other benefit of the study of urban systems is purely pragmatic. This approach does not necessitate an intimate knowledge of the individual towns that constitute the system.[10] At the moment, detailed data about the history or the topography of every individual town in the Roman Empire is unavailable and, for a fairly large number of towns, it is unlikely that it will ever become available. Even if these data were existent, the sheer amount of information would present a formidable obstacle to any attempt at systematization and analysis.

When we commenced our investigations, we did not have a strong opinion about the levels of economic integration in the Roman Empire. Our principal goal was to present a detailed and structured survey of the urban geography of the study-region. In that sense, the following study is primarily empirical. Very little was known about the urban geography of the area at the onset of the project and only during the final stages of our research have we been in a position to formulate research questions in the form of testable hypotheses. Under these circumstances, we have often refrained from engaging directly in the mainstream debate about the character of the Roman economy. However, this neutral stance does not translate into a purely descriptive account of the urban system in the study-region. This would have run contrary to the underlining assumption informing this study, namely: that it is impossible to make sense of the data when seen in isolation from the social and economic realities that brought the system into existence.[11] Even if we consciously avoided taking sides in the debates between the primitivists and modernists, the implications contained in the spatial or size distributions of the urban settlements for the economic infrastructure of the study-region are impossible to ignore.

The main point of difference between the present and related studies of the urban systems of Antiquity is in the accent place of the inquiry. In most scholarly studies devoted to the economic geography of the Roman Empire, the central question is the performance of the Roman economy – expressed in per capita levels of production and consumption – in comparison with the economies of earlier and later complex societies.[12] This will not be the central question of the present study, although it will inevitably touch upon this problem. We are rather more interested in the possible nature of the economic relations implied in the variable distribution and size of the urban settlements. There is nothing wrong in claiming that urbanization is a symptom of economic and demographic growth. In fact, this entire study rests on that premise. It simply adopts a slightly different perspective, looking at the variable developments within, rather than between, the systems. The idea is to chart the economic geography of the study-region rather than to compare the Roman town to its medieval or Oriental counterpart. There was nothing programmatic in this choice. It was a rational reaction to the large size and heterogeneity of the study-area. As we shall shortly see, the study-region is composed of contrasting geographies and its constituent parts developed along different historical trajectories. In such circumstances, intraregional comparison was the obvious way forward.

There is an additional reason to emphasize differential developments, not only in this particular study-region but in general. Urban growth in our study-area could not always be sustained from the resources available locally. Quite often the impulse came from outside and it was guided by political and strategic considerations. But at least a portion of the resources – grain, animal products, labour - needed to secure the excessive growth of certain towns was extracted from within the study-area. This would have been the most feasible mechanism to ensure the supply of sustenance to the oversized towns and it also seems to account for the absence or failure of urbanism in a number of fertile and well-connected micro-regions. Of course, our study-region was anything but a closed system and variable growth was dictated both by the unequal relations between the regions that constitute the study-area and their place and role in the global economic superstructure.

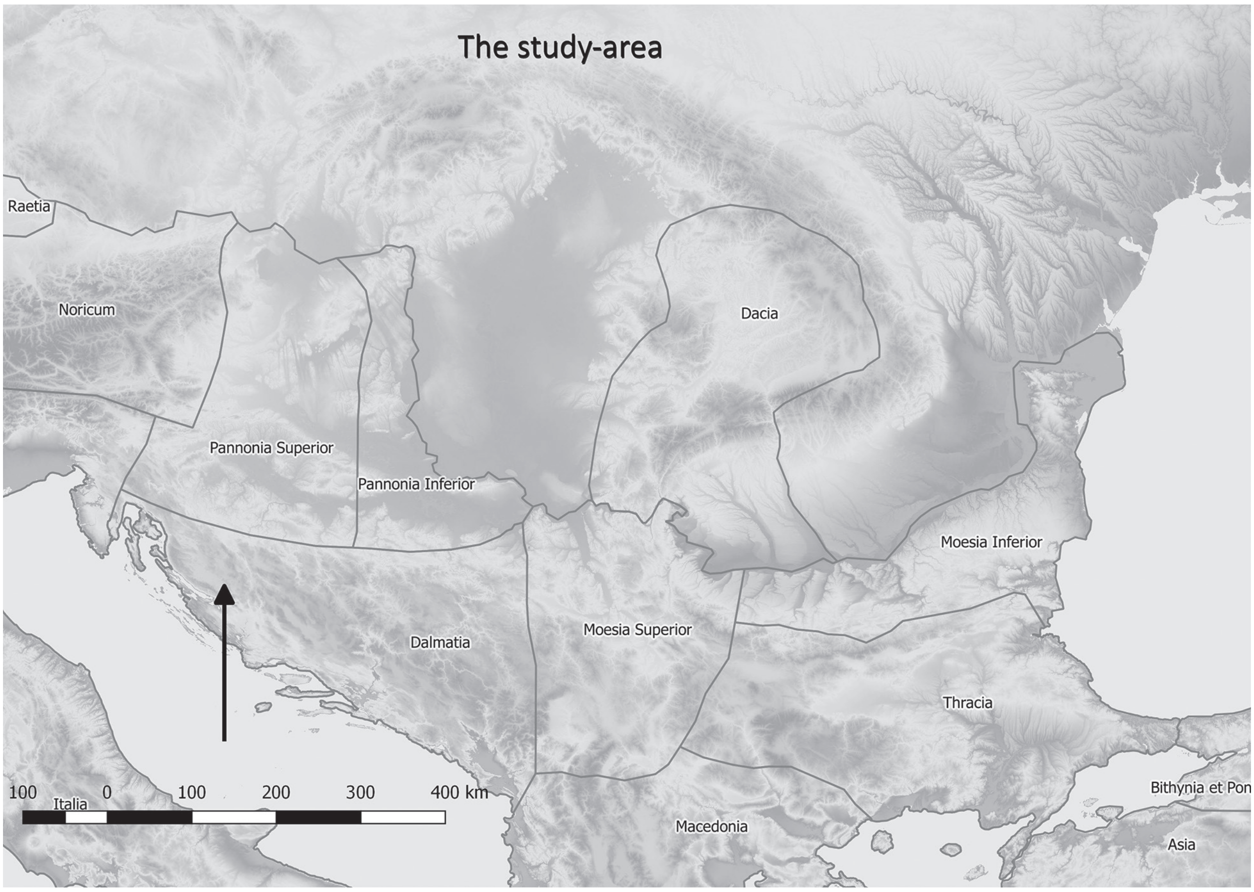
This study focus has also dictated that plenty of attention is paid to the spatial aspect of the urban

9 Vapnarsky 1969, 584-595; Johnson 1980, 234-247.

10 Tacoma 2006, 38; Hanson 2016, 7.

11 Finley 1977, 305-327, Abrams, Wrigley eds 1978; Rich, Wallace-Hadrill eds 1991.

12 Lo Cascio 2009, 87-106; Wilson 2011, 161-195; Hanson 2016, 100-103



Map I 1: The study-region.

systems under study. Hence the spatial dimension has invariably been kept in sight, regardless of whether the qualitative or quantitative properties of the system were being considered. The aim was to observe the distribution patterns of the various settlement categories, but we were equally interested in studying the general orientation of the urban network and its position in relation to the main power centres in the Mediterranean.[13] Existing studies dealing with the spatial arrangements of the different settlement categories or the place of the urban system in the wider urban network are relatively few.[14] The following study will hopefully demonstrate that the spatial dimension should be brought into the picture if the aim is to gain a better understanding of the urban system.

The geographical and temporal scopes of the study

The limits of the study-region have only been partly drawn along the ancient political and administrative boundaries. It includes the entire Balkan Peninsula, with the exception of those parts that belong to modern Greece and Turkey, the two Pannonian provinces and Dacia, in its limits after the Hadrianic retreat (Map I_1). The small parts of modern Slovenia that belonged to Noricum have been omitted from the study-area, but the parts of Italy X that spread into Slovenia and Croatia are included. The study-area also encompasses the northern halves of Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace. The Greek colonies on the northern Pontic coast have been excluded from the analysis, although Roman troops were garrisoned there and they maintained close economic relations with the rest of the Pontic towns. Additional ambiguities arose about the precise limits of the Empire in the regions of Wallachia to the east of the Olt and in Banat, both in modern Romania but, even if the Roman army did have a permanent control of these strategically important corridors, they were neither urbanized nor did they host large garrison sites.

The limits of the study-area were chiefly determined by practical considerations, namely: the accessibility of the relevant literature and the language of the publications. With the exception of modern Romania and Albania, most of the study-area belongs to the ex-Yugoslav countries and Bulgaria. Thanks to this circumstance, a command of one or two south Slavic

[13] Hanson 2016, 46-47.
[14] Hanson 2011, 229-275, Hanson 2016.

languages would have been sufficient to gather the data for a very large segment of the study-area. On the other hand, the addition of the Greek and Turkish parts of Thrace and Macedonia would have demanded a mastery of two languages that do not only differ greatly from each other, but are also quite different from the rest of the Balkan languages. It would have also prolonged the whole process of data-acquisition, because archaeological publications from these countries are hard to come by in the university libraries of the Slavic speaking countries. This is equaly true of the Ukrainian and Russian literature that pertains to the Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea coast.

This choice may have facilitated the gathering of data, but it surely complicated the interpretation of the results, especially because of the inclusion of regions with a Hellenistic urban tradition in a study-area that was predominantly Latin. It is not easy to predict what effects this disregard for the ancient political and administrative divisions might have on our final analyses. Following the authentic administrative arrangements is certainly the better alternative, because they usually respected the existing ethnic or socio-economic divisions in the Ancient World or at least roughly reflected the perspectives and notions of the ancients. However, the provincial divisions during the High Empire were primarily a result of strategic and military considerations dating back to the time of the conquest and these did not always coincide with the earlier political divisions. The history of the modifications of the provincial boundaries indicates that they often disregarded the regionalizing tendencies in the area. We can point to two examples from the northern and southern margins of our study-region. Although formally part of Italy X, geographically Emona remained closely attached to the Balkan Peninsula and Pannonia. Indeed, Ptolemy regarded it as a Pannonian city and, even after modern scholarship determined its true place in the administrative divisions of the Early Empire, it has continued to be seen as a Pannonian city.[15] Scupi, on the southern edge of our study-region, occupied a similarly ambiguous location. Despite the fact that administratively it belonged to Upper Moesia and the close involvement of its elites in the central parts of the Balkan Peninsula, culturally and economically it gravitated towards Macedonia and the Aegean.[16] This tendency was codified in Late Antiquity with the creation of the province of Dardania, carved out from the southern half of Upper Moesia. Regional entities were formed and dissolved by the fluctuating socio-economic relations and these were not always channelled within the static administrative boundaries. Nonetheless, accepting the transient nature of the administrative divisions in Antiquity does not absolve us from the problem of system partitioning. Certain parts of the study-region – the Northern Adriatic or Upper Macedonia – comprise small segments of much wider urban systems and it is impossible to make sense of the urban geography of these areas if they are studied in isolation. This is not an insurmountable obstacle to the study of the chronology of the towns or their distribution in relation to agricultural resources, but it is pointless to study the urban hierarchy in areas that were parts of larger territorial units. Therefore, when examining the urban hierarchies in these parts of the study-region it will be neccessery to look at the data for the towns in the neighbouring study-regions – where available – or leave them out of the analysis.

By any standard this is a vast study-region. It occupies an area of over 400, 000 square kilometers, composed of a number of contrasting geographical zones. The geographical survey by the British Naval Intelligence in the early 20th century recognized at least forty distinct physical micro-regions, only in the territories of former Yugoslavia and Albania.[17] The study-region is much larger, extending from the Adriatic coast to the Carpathian range and from the foothills of the Julian Alps to the Aegean Basin. This evokes the picture of the striking contrasts between the karst uplands in Herzegovina and Montenegro and the alluvial plains along the big Pannonian rivers. Communication between the coastal zone and the interior was difficult, particularly across the Dinaric Alps, in the western half of the peninsula. Throughout the Balkan Peninsula and Dacia, the geomorphology has preconditioned easier movement along the longitudinal rather than along the latitudinal axis. Both the internal fragmentation and the ill-defined outer limits undermine the integrity of the study-area.

Does it make any sense to treat this huge area as a single analytical unit? In all likelihood, the Balkan and Danube provinces never became closely integrated enough to form a compact territorial block within the Roman Empire. The modern political fragmentation in the region pretty much reflects the same geographical constant. Precisely for this reason, it was decided to present the survey results by provinces. The rank-size analysis was likewise carried out by individual provinces. It made little sense to amalgamate the graphs of the individual provinces, because the area in question was never conceived of as an integral regional unit.[18] Even the customs zones - the largest fiscal units of the Empire – did not encompass the integral study-area, as Macedonia, Italy X and Dacia did not belong to

15 Šašel-Kos 2003, 11-19.
16 Mócsy 1970.
17 The Naval Intelligence Division 1944a, 1945.
18 Cf. Scheidel 2007, 38-86, referring to the urban system of the Roman Empire.

the Illyrian *portorium*, whereas Noricum and until the Severan period, Raetia, did.[19]

However, regardless of the disparate conditions and developments in the different corners of the study-region, it was deemed necessary to look at the area as a whole, if only as a convenient way of summarizing the results for the individual provinces. The closing sections of each chapter discuss the spatial distribution of the various quantitative and qualitative settlement categories in the study-region. This has led to the definition of distinct urban belts or zones that often transgressed the formal administrative boundaries. Focusing exclusively on the individual provinces, it is easy to lose sight of the global tendencies in the area. Such a step not only precludes all attempts to grasp the developments in the wider region, but it can also lead to misinterpretation of the evidence pertaining to the individual provinces. In the end, unless the area is looked at as a whole, it will be impossible to follow the goal underpinning this study and observe the horizontal stratification of the urban system.

Initially this was conceived of as a synchronic study, the primary aim being to achieve an understanding of the overall structure of the settlement network of the study-region in the period before the political crisis and structural reforms of the 3rd century. The initial assumption was that the urban network reached the highest level of complexity or at least still maintained a highly developed structure in most provinces of the Empire in the first decades of the 3rd century or about two generations after the end of the Antonine plague. This approach is both theoretically informed – the aim was to 'capture the urban system at its height' and pragmatic, generally speaking the early 3rd century is the phase best-represented in the archaeological record.

While the idea that the system reached its apogee at the time of the Severan dynasty is probably valid from a global perspective, there were considerable regional differences. Even if we limit the observation to our study-area, the divergences between the constituent regions are paramount. A superficial skimming of the sources will reveal that the regional developments in the area were far from synchronous. The Adriatic and Ionian coasts and Macedonia were incorporated into the Empire 150 years prior to the conquest of the interior of the Peninsula. By the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the process of urbanization - or rather the re-organization of the existent pre-Roman urban systems - on the coast and in the south were nearly completed, while in the interior it only began with the Flavians. In Dacia, this process did not begin before the second quarter of the 2nd century. Meanwhile, for the towns of coastal Dalmatia, the early 3rd century is usually seen as a period of decline or at least the beginning of their disintegration; for the towns of Pannonia, it was an era of prosperity, marked by the last wave of rebuilding and urban investment.[20] It is highly likely that for the towns of the Balkan interior, the zenith was reached only after the end of the High Empire, somewhere between the late third and the middle of the 4th century.[21]

This weakness, probably inherent in any study that adopts a very broad spatial scope, is unlikely to undermine our analysis in any fundamental way. The goal is to study the towns in a given region, the top-tier and skeleton of the settlement pattern. Once established, the urban geography of a certain area tends to change very slowly and only as a part of major transformations in the socio-economic and physical environment.[22] Even if the perceived late second-early third-century decline in coastal Dalmatia is accepted as a matter of fact, it is unlikely that the waning glory of these towns automatically cancelled their importance and function as administrative, religious and economic centres. Evidence of new constructions or lavish burials might be missing, but the towns probably retained much of their former appearance. Public buildings were repaired, even though their original function was changed.[23]

More to the point, the chronological resolution provided by the archaeological evidence - at least for our study-region - is such that a perfectly synchronic or diachronic approach is nearly impossible to achieve. Finer chronology, operating with intervals of half a century is available only in exceptional cases. These pertain to isolated buildings, hardly representative of the integral settlements and potentially misleading. Most commonly, the phases observed in the archaeological record span periods of one century or more and even these are limited to a relatively small percentage of the best researched sites. In the great majority of the cases, only the approximate time of the foundation and the abandonment of the towns can be established. Regardless of whether a synchronic or diachronic approach is adopted, the chances are that our tables and maps will not be really synchronous.

The history of urban construction in the study-region was not favorably inclined towards the preservation of the early phases of the Roman towns. Estimates of size that refer to the towns' built-up areas in the Severan period are a tiny minority. We have only glimpses of the topography and appearance of Salona or Sirmium in

19 De Laet 1949.

20 Alföldy 1965, Wilkes, 1969; Mócsy 1974.

21 Bintliff 1997, 1-38.

22 Cf. the small number of abandoned towns in Hanson 2016, 48.

23 Marin 2003, 11-65; argues that by the middle or the end of the 2nd century, the *Augusteum* in the colony of Narona was usurped by members of the local elite.

the first two centuries AD. In both cases, construction in the Late Roman period has almost completely obliterated the remains of the preceding urban phases.[24] The surviving fragments of the pre-fourth-century archaeology of these towns are too few to allow a full reconstruction of the Early Roman chronology. At the most, they hint at the minimum extent of the towns at the time of the High Empire. For now and for the near future, it will be illusory to seek a finer chronological resolution.

Even though the High Empire remains the main focus of the present study, it will be useful to look briefly at the situation during the period immediately preceding the Roman conquest and in Late Antiquity. We cannot afford to collect data for these periods systematically, but a study of the published settlement maps already provides us with a number of important insights. This might help in clarifying two important issues: what proportion of the settlement network was inherited from the pre-Roman period and the general direction of the changes brought about by the political and socio-economic transformations during the Late Empire.

Defining the data-set

All studies of urban systems make explicit use of criteria to define their data-sets. Studies of Late Medieval and Modern urban geographies normally use population size thresholds of 5000 and 10,000 to draw the divide between the urban and rural sectors.[25] This approach is not readily applicable to earlier periods; not simply because of the absence of census data, but also because of the smaller size of the ancient settlements with an autonomous status.[26] One characteristic of our study-region is that functional size or centrality did not always translate into large settlement-size or monumentalization. In some cases, secondary agglomerations and even autonomous towns were no different from the average rural settlement in terms of size and appearance. Consequently, using population size thresholds as criteria for the attribution of urban status is likely to lead to an incomplete settlement map and to serious underestimates of the urban density in certain parts of the study-region. Following the juridical status of the settlements will provide only a slightly more accurate picture. The great intercity distances in certain parts of the study-area, alongside the scattered written evidence, suggest that town-like secondary agglomerations were an important, albeit barely visible element of the settlement network. We have therefore adopted a more flexible approach, including in the analysis all agglomerations larger than five ha and featuring stone architecture and all settlements and communities known to have developed local institutions. But this tactic does not cancel out the fact that the size of the built-up area was not always a correlation of the settlement's centrality and, at the same time, it increases the chances of including ordinary rural settlements in the analysis.[27]

There is no middle-ground between these two options, although they are not mutually exclusive. The choice is either to work with a visibly shrunken urban network or run the risk of including rural settlements on the urban map. We find the latter scenario far less detrimental to the final results of this study. Whichever approach is adopted, it is questionable that it will be possible to reconstruct the integral settlement network, let alone modify its properties by the unconsidered addition of rural agglomerations. A handful of overwhelmingly rural settlements infiltrating the data-set are unlikely to have a major effect on the final interpretation, but the complete omission of the most predominant category in the settlement network – the secondary agglomerations - would surely lead to erroneous conclusions. For practical reasons, no attempt will be made to provide a full reconstruction of the settlement network in the study-area, but we shall try to extrapolate the approximate number of town-like secondary agglomerations that are likely to have existed during our study-period. We can only hope that our lists include most of the autonomous and a representative sample of the far more numerous non-autonomous settlements that are likely to have fulfilled various 'town-like' central-place functions.

This fuzziness of the limits of the data-set is a symptom of the conceptual difficulties surrounding the urban-rural divide. In ancient Rome, as in most complex societies of the Old World, there was an acute awareness of the differences between the urban and rural sectors. These were sometimes conceived of as two separate realms, set in opposition to each other. While urbanity epitomized the civilized way of life and higher values, the countryside stood for barbarity and untamed instincts. Alternatively, the former was identified with moral decay and vice, laziness and profligacy, while the latter with virtue, authentic values and productivity. The fact that this distinction was recognized by the ancients should have made it relatively easy to draw a line between these two settlement categories. Yet this differentiation is chiefly ideological; the sharp contrast projected between these two realms merely serves to conceal the intricate connections between town and countryside, connections that were difficult to recognize and incorporate into the value-system of the dominant classes.[28]

[24] Salona: Mardešić 2006, 81-90; Sirmium: Mirković 2004, 145-156.
[25] De Vries 1984, 21-22; Bairoch 1988.
[26] Scheidel 2007, 80; Bagnall 2009, 107-112; De Ligt 2012, 199-202.
[27] De Ligt 2016, 32, insisting on the distinction between the urban and settlement systems.
[28] Wallace-Hadrill 1991, 241-272.

Not only were town and country inseparable from an economic point of view, the category of official urban settlements was itself incongruent in the eyes of the ancient authors. Pausanias' oft-quoted account of ancient Panopeus offers a good illustration of the lack of correlation between the settlement's centrality and its size noted in the opening paragraph of this section.[29] But the differences between the individual self-governing towns are for the greater part pertinent to the differential developments among the settlements that belong in this category. For our present purposes, far more significant is the observation that urban functions can be appropriated by settlements that lack an official urban status. In these cases, neither the urban label - the juridical status - nor the urban functions are bound to certain size and formal settlement categories. Therein lies the principal difficulty of defining the urban and rural categories. Notionally the difference is one of scale and essence, but in practice there is a gradual transition rather than an insurmountable barrier between these two categories.[30] Empirical research is unnecessary to prove that certain functions qualified as urban in theory – market exchange, crafts, local institutions – are frequently encountered among communities whose size, physical appearance and agrarian focus place them unequivocally in the rural sector. Nor is the occupation in the agrarian sector an exclusive feature of the non-urban settlements.[31] The divide between the agrarian and non-agrarian sector is not co-terminous with the urban/rural divide. This was not the case in the Early Modern period and still less so in Antiquity, when land was the principal source of wealth.[32]

These observations imply that outside the category of self-governing towns, it is impossible to establish clear-cut criteria to distinguish between the urban and rural settlements in Antiquity. If we are to understand the organization of economic life outside the areas gravitating towards the autonomous towns, a widening of the set of parameters that define urbanity is required. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings, it is useful to devise a consistent terminology for the various categories of settlements that will be included in the analysis. The labels town and urban will be applied exclusively to the central places in the self-governing communities, while the settlement categories that display certain urban features or are involved in non-agrarian economies – ports of call, road-stations, mining colonies, garrison settlements – but lack an official urban status will be called secondary, town-like or non-agrarian agglomerations.

[29] Pausanias X 4.1; after Finley 1977, 305.
[30] See Hanson 2016, 18-19, for a brief summary of the scholarly opinions.
[31] Whittaker 1995, 9-26; Lo Cascio 2009, 87-91.
[32] Abrams 1978, 9-33.

When discussing the chronology of settlements and their agricultural territories, we shall look briefly at the category of rural settlements, both isolated *villae* and farmsteads and rural agglomerations. The accent shall be placed on their chronology and spacing. The purpose of this excursion will be to compare the developments in the urban and rural sectors and to examine the patterns of exploitation in the countryside. Needless to say, the data from the Balkan countryside is extremely scant and of dubious accuracy, but it will still provide an important insight into the creation and workings of the urban segment of the settlement network.

The studies of urbanization in the study-region

That the present study has no precedents is hardly a surprise in view of the novelty of the approach and the large size and heterogeneity of the study-area.[33] In fact, similarly designed studies are lacking even for the individual provinces. This circumstance hints at the likelihood that it has been conceptual as much as logistical limitations that set the contours of urban studies in our study-region. The traditional approaches to ancient urbanism are still predominant in national scholarships and, so far, no attempts have been made to study the integral urban systems. The studies of ancient urbanization, especially in the field of Classical Archaeology, have most commonly focused on the material aspects of urbanization, the histories of individual towns and the reconstruction of the historical geographies. As a result, nearly all of the existing regional monographs are essentially catalogues of the towns mentioned in the historical sources or known from archaeological research. Of course, this does not mean that the towns have been entirely under-theorized by the scholars who have worked in this region. The emergence and nature of the ancient towns have been important topics in the historiography of nearly all Balkan countries, at times giving rise to lively debates[34]. However, for the greater part, these have been theoretical schemes, occasionally supported by circumstantial evidence. They have not been the result of a systematic study of the geographical properties of the network, nor have they relied on a large body of archaeological or written evidence. The town has been seen in isolation from the rest of the urban and settlement network. When a comparison has been made between individual or groups of towns, the chief purpose was to look for formal and stylistic similarities. From this perspective, micro-locations of

[33] For an alternative approach, see Diers 2018.
[34] See, for example, the debate between Cabanes and Papazoglou on the political institutions and nature of the Epirote or Macedonian towns: Papazoglou 1986a, 438-448; Cabanes 1988, 480-487; or the debates between Albanian and Yugoslav scholars concerning the emergence of the towns in the eastern Adriatic: Benac ed. 1975. Nankov 2015, 399-411, provides a brief summary of the approaches to urbanism in Bulgarian scholarship.

the the settlements are crucial to the understanding of the urban layout and topography, but have few implications for their economic orientation.

The town has had nonetheless a prominent role in most archaeological and historical monographs on the Roman provinces in the Balkan Peninsula and on the Danube. In their pioneering syntheses of the political and socio-economic developments in Dalmatia, Moesia Superior and the Pannonian provinces, both Wilkes and Mócsy dedicate separate sections to urbanism.[35] The paths to urbanization lay at the heart of the debates over the romanization of Dacia or the administration of Thrace.[36] In all of these studies, the town is primarily perceived as a vehicle for the dispersion of Roman law and culture. In other words, the process of urbanization is equated with the romanization of a given area. This approach is certainly not out of place. In this study, it shall be argued that one of the principal roles of the Roman town in the study-region was local administration and the collection of taxes. Yet, it is striking that only exceptionally has the town been related to the organization of economic life in the provinces, although this connection is implied in most studies of the economy. The sustainability of urbanism has likewise rarely been the focus of the discussion, despite the fact that most scholars have been aware of the differential developments within the individual provinces. Similarly, only one or two studies of the town-country relationship can be cited, although the view that the chief asset of the urban aristocracy was land property is widely accepted.[37]

There are only a few exceptions to this general trend. These scholarly efforts cannot be readily used as models for the present study, but they are extremely valuable in highlighting certain aspects of the urban system that are marginalized in the traditional approach. We are referring to the study of the road and urban network of Roman Pannonia, carried out several decades ago by the geographer Andrew Burghardt.[38] It stands apart from the typical treatise on Roman urbanization in the area because of its accent on the integral network of self-governing towns in Pannonia and its spatial aspects. On the basis of the distribution of the autonomous towns and their chronology, the author conceptualizes the evolution of the road and urban network in the northern half of the Pannonian provinces. The network is broken down into nodes and connecting segments, each being assigned to a particular phase in the evolution of the system. It is therefore possible to differentiate between primary and secondary axes in the road-network, towns that functioned as bases for expansion, central communication nodes and primary objectives. Some of these concepts appear rather ill-defined – the author himself admits that one town could perform more than one role in the evolution of the urban network – but the study is nonetheless exemplary of the potential of spatial analysis.

Neither the individual towns nor the urban systems have fallen within the focus of the research done by Slobodan Dušanić.[39] This scholar has devoted much of his career to the study of Roman mining in the Balkan Peninsula and would therefore seem to have little to offer to our study of the urban systems. However, the studies of urbanism and the organization of mining under the High Empire converge on at least two major points. The mining areas belonged to the governmental sector of the economy and, consequently they represented a mechanism of control and exploitation alternative - although not exclusive of - to the municipalization of the tribal territories. The number and extent of these governmental districts help us understand the apparent gaps in the urban network of the peninsula. At the same time, there is a fair amount of evidence to suggest that the autonomous towns were instrumental in the exploitation of the mining regions. In most of the cases, the mining contractors were recruited from among the members of the urban aristocracy. Although the land in the mining districts belonged to the imperial patrimony, it formed a part of the economic base of some of the largest towns in our study-area.

The sources

As already mentioned, these studies can only provide us with general directions for further research. We have had to look elsewhere for potential models for the present study. These are hard to come by in the fields of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History.[40] Inspiration was mostly drawn from studies of the urban systems of later historical periods, but these approaches had to be modified before they could be applied to the truncated body of data available for the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire.[41]

Obviously the first step was to compile lists of autonomous towns and major agglomerated settlements for all provinces and regions that belong to our study-area. This soon proved to be a challenging task in itself. Most of the autonomous towns have produced

[35] Wilkes 1969, Mócsy 1974.
[36] Ardevan 1998; Hanson, Haynes eds 2004; Gerov ed. 1980; Velkov ed. 1980; Tačeva ed. 2004;
[37] I refer to the surveys in the hinterlands of Dyrrhachium and Apollonia, both published only as preliminary reports: Davis *et al.* 1988-2002; Davis *et al.* 2003, 41-119; see also the results of the Neothermal Dalmatia regional project, Chapman, Shiel, Batović eds 1996 or the British campaign at Nicopolis ad Istrum and its territory, Poulter ed. 1995, Poulter 2000, 346-358.
[38] Burghardt 1979, 1-20.
[39] Dušanić 1977a, 52-94; Dušanić 1989, 148-156.
[40] See fn. 2.
[41] Russel 1958, 1-152; Garner 1968, 303-360; De Vries 1984.

monumental remains and have been identified with a particular archaeological site. However, a small number of official towns and the great majority of the secondary agglomerations are yet to be located. The meagre material remains from these settlements have either been lost or are impossible to distinguish from those of average rural settlements. It is therefore necessary to combine historical and archaeological data to arrive at a satisfactory reconstruction of the regional settlement network. Obviously, settlements known only from the historical sources are of limited value, as they cannot be subjected to most of the analytical procedures applied in this study. Nevertheless, the bare facts of their existence are indispensable, especially to the study of the administrative divisions in the provinces or approximating the number of secondary agglomerations.

Because the primary goal was to study the chronology and quantitative properties of the urban system, the bulk of the research was focused on the archaeological publications.[42] Probably the most arduous segment of this research was the collection and study of the relevant literature scattered across dozens of journals and hundreds of monographs and conference proceedings. We were particularly hampered by the fragmented political map of the study-area, encompassing partly or fully no less than 12 modern countries. These are essentially 12 national archaeologies, whose agendas rarely coincide. Predictably, the result was a highly incongruent body of published material. While certain towns and corners of the study-area have been the subject of systematic research for over a century, others have attracted little more than a brief traveller's note. The intensity of research was chiefly determined by the accessibility and attraction of the archaeological site, but quite often the biases are systematic, dictated by the different historiographical agendas in the region.[43]

In nearly all countries that constitute our study-area, there is a relatively long-standing tradition of research in the fields of Classical Archaeology and, especially, Ancient History. In most of the cases the historical and epigraphic sources pertaining to the territories of the individual countries had been systematized and edited by the second half of the last century.[44] This study was also greatly helped by various older monographs on the towns in certain regions and provinces, the earliest of which were published at roughly the same time.[45] These monographs offer ready lists of autonomous towns and major garrison settlements, together with the relevant historical references and the known histories of the individual towns. At that time, systematic archaeological research was only beginning to spread in most of the modern countries in our study-area, with the exception of modern-day Austria, Hungary, Slovenia and parts of Croatia and Romania. Nonetheless, Archaeology quickly followed suit, so that most of our study-area is covered by the *Tabula Imperii Romani* series, even if the entries for the individual sites are too brief and indeterminate.[46] By the beginning of this century, the first archaeological monographs on the towns of individual provinces have begun to appear in the provinces with the longest-standing history of research. The three volumes on the towns of Noricum and Pannonia are exemplary of this strand of studies and they present an invaluable source for the northern half of our study-area.[47]

Unfortunately, there is a lack of volumes of similar quality for the towns in the other provinces. The archaeological research on the individual towns lags behind the research carried out in Roman Pannonia. In some provinces there are autonomous towns, *municipia* or *poleis*, that have been the subject of neither systematic excavations nor modern surveys. Nonetheless, by the end of the last or the beginning of this century, for nearly all countries that belong to our study-area there appeared an archaeological monograph that covers the period of Roman antiquity and includes exhaustive sections on the urban settlements.[48]

The past one or two decades have seen the publications of a number of atlases and gazetteers of the ancient world, most of which are in digital form and freely accessible. Worhty of particular note are the Digital Atlas of the Greek and Roman World or the Pleiades data-base, preceded by the Barrington Atlas.[49] These compendia are especially useful because they provide rough co-ordinates for each entry in the data-base, while the digital format offers a clear overview of the spatial distribution of the individual entries. The downside of these atlases is that they place a great variety of features on the same map. Hence towns, minor sites and settlements, quarries, mines, geographical features and even uncertain labels taken from the ancient sources are often lumped together. It requires a great effort to purge these maps of non-residential sites and toponyms, before they can be used as source material. Many of the co-ordinates, even for towns whose locations are well

[42] For a full bibliography of the Danube and adjacent regions see Wilkes 2005, 124-225.
[43] Up until the 1990s, archaeologists in Albania and Romania were particularly interested in the periods preceding the Roman conquest, often at the expense of the studies of the Roman period, Bejko, Hodges eds 2006; Oltean 2007.
[44] Daicoviciu 1943; Mócsy 1959, Gerov 1997, 3-84, 211-314; Wilkes 1969; Papazoglou ed. 1999.
[45] Papazoglou 1988a; Velkov ed. 1979; Mirković 1968; Tudor 1978.
[46] Tudor ed. 1965; Daicoviciu, Condurachi eds 1969; Soproni ed. 1968; Šašel ed. 1976; Oliva ed. 1986.
[47] Šašel-Kos, Scherrer eds 2002-2004.
[48] Lengyel, Radan eds 1980; Branga 1980; Islami *et al.* 1985; Tačeva 1987, Bojanovski 1988, Suceveanu, Barnea 1991; Mikulčić 1999; Mirković 2007.
[49] Talbert ed. 2000; https://darmc.harvard.edu/; https://pleiades.stoa.org/

established in the literature, are incorrect. Likewise, the data for the status, character or the chronology of the individual sites are often problematic. Despite all their disadvantages, these gazetteers represent a solid base for all future studies of the urban and settlement network in the area.

Equally useful are the Heidelberg and Clauss-Slaby online epigraphic databases.[50] Together with the corpora of inscriptions found on the territory of the modern countries, they are an indispensable source for the study of the civic institutions, public buildings and, above all, for the reconstruction of the urban territories.

Nevertheless, the bulk of the information for the archaeology of the individual towns and especially, the secondary agglomerations and rural settlements has come from monographs and papers published in archaeological periodicals. This was certainly not the easiest way of obtaining the relevant data, but it promised a more detailed and critical insight into the archaeology of the individual settlements and micro-regions than simply acquiring the information given in the site-gazetteers and compendia mentioned in the preceding paragraphs.[51] For a number of sites and regions, the information had to be gathered from brief, preliminary reports. Full publications are unavailable and it is unlikely that they will appear in the near future.

The sheer size and heterogeneity of the study-area simply precludes a full and up-to-date coverage of all towns and major agglomerations that have received scholarly attention. We are aware that certain details have been missed or misinterpreted, while others have been deliberately ignored, even though the published materials provide accurate information. The data are almost entirely taken from publications and, unless available in published form, they do not take into account the results of on-going research projects. It is certain that regional experts will have a lot to add and correct in our data-set. It would be an illusion to strive for data purged of all inaccuracies and uncertainties, especially when dealing with such a far-flung study-area and with a subject-matter that in many aspects remains poorly researched. In the closing section to this chapter and the opening sections of the following chapters, we shall explain the measures taken in response to the ambiguities inherent in the archaeological record. Throughout this study comfort has been taken in the belief that the potential inaccuracies relating to individual towns are unlikely to have a major effect on the wider regional patterns.

[50] http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/home; http://www.manfredclauss.de/

[51] Cf. Hanson 2016.

The study outline

The present study will focus on a few basic parameters of the settlement network. These include the chronology and genesis of the settlements, the size of their built-up areas, their agricultural and administrative territories. This relatively narrow choice was dictated by the highly variable degree of research on the individual towns and settlements. It was a necessary prerequisite if we were to achieve a coherent coverage of the entire urban system. The data needed to account for these parameters consisted essentially of the settlement's founding date and abandonment, its location and size-estimate. In fact, even the last information was in some cases derived from the settlement's micro-location, alongside the reconstruction of the agricultural and administrative territories. This approach guaranteed a more or less even coverage of all corners of our study-area, including the most isolated and poorly researched towns and micro-regions. Obviously, the other aspects of the settlements under scrutiny – layout and topography, population structure or local institutions – are equally relevant, but for the great majority of the settlements in our study-area, these data are unavailable.[52]

The settlements' founding dates or sizes seem to be the first things one wants to learn when commencing archaeological research at a given site. Yet, we were often surprised to discover how little was known about these basic parameters. The margin of error was particularly great for the quantitative parameters for the size of settlements and their territorial extents. It was therefore necessary to work with size-ranges rather than with specific figures and we also felt compelled to insert a category of uncertain settlements when discussing the settlements' chronology and genesis.[53] Unquestionably this approach safeguarded against the acceptance of erroneous size-estimates, but it complicated the interpretation of the results. Unless the margin of error was inconsequentially small, it necessitated separate discussions of the minimum and maximum estimates, the conservative and optimistic scenarios.

The data collected for each of the parameters included in this study require critical consideration. The method of data-collection and the limitation of the data-set are discussed in greater detail at the beginning of every chapter. There, we also turn to the relevance of these data. At this point, only the study-parameters are listed as an introduction to the outline of the study.

[52] The data collected for these aspects of the urban settlements are stored in the data-base of the 'Empire of 2000 Cities' project, but they are not systematically discussed in the present study. The data-base will become publicly available after the completion of the project.

[53] Cf. Hansen 2006.

Chapter Two presents the chronology of the settlements that were included in this study. The basic distinction is between the settlements founded prior to and after the Roman conquest. This examination will not only help us establish the horizontal stratigraphy of the urban system, but will also shed light on the consequences of the conquest for the existing settlement patterns in the study-area. The nature of the changes initiated by the incorporation of the region will already contain hints of the possible roles of the constituent sub-units in the political economy of the High Empire. In certain areas, most of the existing settlement network was retained, in others, entirely new networks were created. The relevance of the settlements' chronology will be ubiquitous throughout this study. As we shall see, the settlements' micro-locations, territorial size and built-up area were often closely related to their founding dates.

In Chapter Three we discuss the genesis of the newly-founded segment of the settlement network. The chief dividing line for the settlements founded after the conquest lies between the garrison and civilian settlements. In this chapter we shall attempt to establish the respective extents of the military and civilian sectors. This ratio will indicate the original considerations that determined the layout of the newly founded segment of the settlement network. A further distinction shall be made between the autonomous towns and subordinate central places. Discussing the latter category of settlements, we briefly revisit the question of the outer limits of the data-set. As explained in this chapter, the goal is not to draw the elusive line that separates the urban and rural sectors, but to study the distribution of urban functions across different formal and quantitative categories. A mention has already been made of the fact that most of the subordinate central places were formally and demographically indistinct from the ordinary villages. Fully aware that it is impossible to identify every potential secondary agglomeration in the study-area, we nonetheless try to project their approximate number.

The categorizations introduced in Chapters Two and Three have an important spatial aspect. The closing sections of both chapters will focus on the distribution of the individual chronological or formal categories. It is of particular importance to check if these categories are evenly spread or tend to cluster in certain corners of the study-area. These maps will provide us with an additional indication of the degree of integration in the urban system. They will point to the zones of old and new settlements, the military and civilian sector and the empty spots on the settlement map.

The variable size of the settlements is the subject of Chapter Four. It has to be acknowledged that the settlement system of the High Empire had a formal hierarchy that was not reflected consistently in the settlement size-distributions. In this chapter we shall study the distribution of the settlements by size-range and correlate the emergent size-categories to the formal settlement categories and their chronology. In line with the principal focus of this study, particular attention will be devoted to the differential growth of the settlements, both within and across the various settlement categories. For the study of the size-distributions we shall rely chiefly on the technique known as Rank-size analysis.[54] Although by their nature, the rank-size graphs order the settlements along a continuum, the clustering of the individual points can indicate distinct size-categories. Finally, we shall look at the graphs for the individual provinces and the study-area as a whole in relation to the general types of rank-size distributions and their socio-economic implications.

Chapter Five is a survey of the settlements' micro-locations. The basic premise of this analysis is that the siting of the settlement was determined chiefly by the strategic and economic considerations of its founders. These are implicated in the position of the settlement in relation to the natural resources. The most viable non-descriptive way of analysing the settlements' micro-locations was to estimate the amount of arable land available within the area enclosed by a set-catchment radius. Obviously, this index does not give much idea about the specific economies of the individual settlements, but it should differentiate between the settlements whose primary concern was agricultural production and those focused on other types of resources. Having estimated the size of the settlements, this examination will detect those settlements that outgrew their immediate surroundings by a greater margin. These settlements are more likely to have featured a stronger non-agricultural sector and depended on an agricultural base that extended beyond their immediate hinterlands. To determine which settlements were too large for the agricultural potential of their surroundings, we have devised a simple method of projecting the local urbanization rates in the settlement territories.

The simplest solution to the problem of the oversized settlements was to assign them large administrative territories, extending their agricultural territories and providing them with a larger tax pool. In order to account for this factor, Chapter Six is dedicated to the study of the territorial extents of the autonomous towns. In this chapter we shall present the reader with the lists of autonomous towns and state-run districts in the provinces in our study-area. The territorial reconstructions are based on Thiessen polygons in

[54] Berry 1961, 573-574; Garner 1968, 303-360; for applications in archaeology see Johnson 1980, 234; Savage 1997, 233-244.

combination with the distribution of the epigraphic material and the physical geography. In addition to correlating the settlement's size and rank with their territorial extents, we shall try to estimate the respective shares of the autonomous and governmental sectors in the administration of the provinces. This will represent an important contribution to the study of the economic geography of the study-region. The autonomous and state-run districts coincide with the areas that were primarily tax-exporting and those exploited for their natural resources or man-power. These arrangements had a profound impact on the differential developments in the individual Balkan provinces.

Because of the outline of the study – each parameter being analysed separately for every individual province – it is not readily digestible as a whole. Throughout this work, heavy emphasis will be placed on explaining the relevance of the individual parameters and the methods for their study and critical interpretation. In the concluding chapter, we shall try to improve the congruence of this study by presenting a concise overview of the evolution of the urban network and highlight its specifics. This section will distil the main points of the research, drawing the attention to the close interplay between the basic parameters of the settlement network.

A thought on agency

The underlining approach of this study acknowledges the plurality of forces that shaped the settlement systems. Hence, we shall attempt to delineate a number of relevant factors: the chronology and genesis of the settlements – the historical context of their foundation -, the physical geography and population density, the settlement topography and the potential role of the settlements studied in the administration and exploitation of the study-region. The risk of drifting into determinism is large when interpreting causal relations, unless the complexity of historical reality is born in mind. Indubitably, there is nothing wrong in recognizing the plurality of factors, but this fact makes it easier to lose sight of the parts of the puzzle that are possibly missing. Virtually all of the factors singled out in the present study can be qualified as 'objective' or, at least, unrelated to the dominant ideology of the time-period studied or the mechanisms of entitlement and denial. One might think that the latter aspect should have been a fundamental theme in a study that seeks to understand the patterns of differential developments in the study-region. In view of the importance attributed to the juridical status of the settlements in the final analysis, this omission looms even larger. What were the possible effects of the often whimsical and unjust interventions of the central government in the spread of privileges and obligations on the structure and rationale of the urban system? Was not the distribution of settlement size and its supposed correlates – wealth and prosperity – at least partly dependent on the subjective views and inclinations of those in power? Closely related to this neglected factor is the propensity of the Roman authorities to openly support and stimulate urbanization. Were not the expectations of active participation and conspicuous consumption in the public sphere – deeply encoded in the cultural matrix of Classical Rome – one of the crucial factors of urban growth in the territories of the Roman colonies, the most Romanized segments of the study-region? Is it sensible to ignore or underappreciate these factors in a study devoted to urban systems and urbanization?

Whether the focus is on the evolution of a historical phenomenon or its properties at a given point of time, the issue of agency – the concerns and inclinations of the conscious actors that participate in the historical reality studied -[55] is inevitably vested into the integral picture. Therefore, the pressing question is not whether the factor of agency is accounted for – it has to be -, but the place it is assigned in the explanation of the patterns ensuing from the analysis. The truth is, one of the main conclusions of this study is that the great majority of the urban and urban-like settlements were newly founded and formed a part of a minimalist imperialist strategy: control of key traffic-nodes and strategic natural resources, arable land, pastures and minerals. This does not necessarily imply that the Romans followed a consistent strategy of urbanization. Most likely they did not, but the lack of a rational, long-term plan cannot question the relevance of the patterns observed or the genuine concern of the authorities to secure the borders of the Empire and the flow of taxes and resources. It is oversimplified to think of motives and designs of historical agents as the ultimate determinants. Agency, whether that of individuals or Empires, is always shaped by a long series of exogenous and endogenous factors that are often far more tangible to the Archaeologist or Ancient Historian than the intents and actions of individuals or groups. In tune with this view, in the present study, the agency of the Roman conquerors shall be inevitably pushed into the background, as an impersonal but all-pervasive driving force. This is not to say that agency shall be thrown out of the picture. Quite on the contrary, much effort shall be devoted to project the differences between the settlement patterns in the pre- and post-Roman periods onto the variable geostrategic interest of the Romans and the Ancient and Medieval monarchies. Our expectations are that the genesis and composition of the urban system will reflect, among other things, the strategic and administrative concerns of the town-

[55] Definitions of agency abound in the theoretical literature, see, Dobres and Robb eds 2000; and this is not a minor problem with this concept.

founders. The question of centrally-planned versus spontaneous development shall be one of the central topics in Chapter III. In the end, it is absurd to discuss historical processes or events without referring – explicitly or implicitly - to conscious agents.

But the problem might lay elsewhere. It is possible that too much emphasis is placed on the impersonal side of the agency of Roman authorities, not in the sense that it was all-powerful and unfailing, but that it disregards some of the mechanisms by which Emperors and governors intervened in the affairs of individual towns and communities. Would have not this unpredictable practice erased much of the rationale of the urban system? It is a well-known fact that, under the Roman Empire, individual communities could hope to upgrade their juridical status or protect their autonomy by petitioning the provincial governor or the Roman Emperor.[56] In theory, this should have placed the towns and communities that could afford to approach the authorities – had an influential patron in Rome or enough money to hire a solicitor – in a more favourable position than the neighbouring towns and communities. Could not this selective access to the good will of the authorities have been one of the chief causes of differential developments among the towns and settlements in the study-region? This is by all means a reasonable supposition, but it leaves us disarmed in our quest to understand or at least model the structure and functioning of the urban systems. We may merely acknowledge the possibility that, for example, some of the small towns had acquired or retained their status mostly thanks to their connections in Rome but, in the absence of positive evidence, the explanation that these towns managed to survive while others failed because of their location in the regional road-network or higher agricultural productivity of their territories is equally convincing. Because much of the data used in this study is strictly speaking geographical, it is unsurprising that the accent shall be put on systemic factors rather than on individual acts and decisions. We would not like to underestimate the importance of idiosyncratic factors in the evolution of the urban network, but they are intractable from the corpus of evidence brought together for the purposes of this study. More to the point, it is sensible to assume that the Emperor's intention or favour could not always override the factors of economic geography. In this study, a far greater importance shall be assigned to the conscious decision of most Emperors to support the growth and sustainability of certain segments of the urban network than the possible motives of individual Emperors. If the aim is to look into the examples of urban growth propelled solely by the arbitrary allotment of privileges, it is best to consider the cases in which urban size was incommensurate to the range and volume of local economic activities (see Chapter V). In view of the nature of the evidence, the possibility that it was decisions of individual Emperors that shaped the urban hierarchy cannot overwhelm the observation that certain categories of towns and settlements were consistently bigger and better represented in the archaeological and historical record than others.

56 Eck 2000, 195-213.