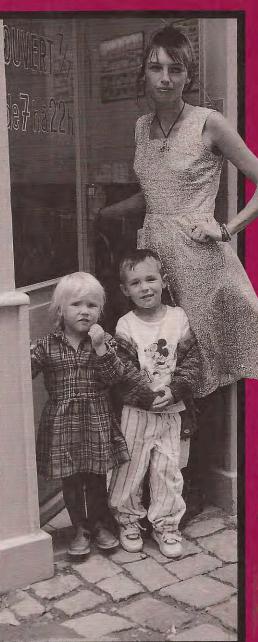# URBAN LIFE

Third Edition

Readings
in Urban
Anthropology

George Gmelch
Walter P. Zenner

The Preindustrial City

GIDEON SJOBERG

*In this pioneering study of the preindustrial city, Sjoberg seeks
to understand the characteristics of cities before they are
transformed through industrialization. Preindustrial cities
throughout the world, he claims, show certain similarities. For
one, their technology is based on the use of human and animal
power, rather than on machines; and their relationship to the
countryside differs from that of industrial cities. The prein-
dustrial city also differs from the industrial city in its lifeways.
For these people, city living does not mean participation in a
society marked by impersonalization. At the same time there is
a sharp division between the ruling elite and the rest of the
population. For a portrait of a contemporary preindustrial city,
read Waldron's article "Within the Wall and Beyond."*

In the past few decades social scientists have been conducting field
studies in a number of relatively non-Westernized cities. Their
recently acquired knowledge of North Africa and various parts of
Asia, combined with what was already learned, clearly indicates
that these cities are not like typical cities of the United States and
other highly industrialized areas but are much more like those of
medieval Europe. Such communities are termed herein
"preindustrial," for they have arisen without stimulus from that
form of production which we associate with the European industrial
revolution.

Recently Foster, in a most informative article, took cognizance
of the preindustrial city.[1] His primary emphasis was upon the
peasantry (which he calls "folk"); but he recognized this to be part
of a broader social structure which includes the preindustrial city.
He noted certain similarities between the peasantry and the city's

lower class. Likewise the present author sought to analyze the total society of which the peasantry and the preindustrial city are integral parts.[2] For want of a better term this was called "feudal." Like Redfield's folk (or "primitive") society, the feudal order is highly stable and sacred; in contrast, however, it has a complex social organization. It is characterized by highly developed state and educational and/or religious institutions and by a rigid class structure.

Thus far no one has analyzed the preindustrial city per se, especially as it differs from the industrial-urban community, although Weber, Tönnies, and a few others perceived differences between the two. Yet such a survey is needed for the understanding of urban development in so-called underdeveloped countries and, for that matter, in parts of Europe. Such is the goal of this paper. The typological analysis should also serve as a guide to future research.

Ecological Organization

Preindustrial cities depend for their existence upon food and raw materials obtained from without; for this reason they are marketing centers. And they serve as centers for handicraft manufacturing. In addition, they fulfill important political, religious, and educational functions. Some cities have become specialized; for example, Benares in India and Karbala in Iraq are best known as religious communities, and Peiping in China as a locus for political and educational activities.

The proportion of urbanites relative to the peasant population is small, in some societies about 10 percent, even though a few preindustrial cities have attained populations of one hundred thousand or more. Growth has been by slow accretion. These characteristics are due to the nonindustrial nature of the total social order. The amount of surplus food available to support an urban population has been limited by the unmechanized agriculture, transportation facilities utilizing primarily human or animal power, and inefficient methods of food preservation and storage.

The internal arrangement of the preindustrial city, in the nature of the case, is closely related to the city's economic and social structure.[3] Most streets are mere passageways for people and for animals used in transport. Buildings are low and crowded together. The congested conditions, combined with limited scientific knowledge, have fostered serious sanitation problems.

More significant is the rigid social segregation which typically has

led to the formation of "quarters" or "wards." In some cities (e.g., Fez, Morocco, and Aleppo, Syria) these were sealed off from each other by walls, whose gates were locked at night. The quarters reflect the sharp local social divisions. Thus ethnic groups live in special sections. And the occupational groupings, some being at the same time ethnic in character, typically reside apart from one another. Often a special street or sector of the city is occupied almost exclusively by members of a particular trade; cities in such divergent cultures as medieval Europe and modern Afghanistan contain streets with names like "street of the goldsmiths." Lower-class and especially "outcaste" groups live on the city's periphery, at a distance from the primary centers of activity. Social segregation, the limited transportation facilities, the modicum of residential mobility, and the cramped living quarters have encouraged the development of well-defined neighborhoods which are almost primary groups.

Despite rigid segregation the evidence suggests no real specialization of land use such as is functionally necessary in industrial-urban communities. In medieval Europe and in other areas city dwellings often serve as workshops, and religious structures are used as schools or marketing centers.[4]

Finally, the "business district" does not hold the position of dominance that it enjoys in the industrial-urban community. Thus, in the Middle East the principal mosque, or in medieval Europe the cathedral, is usually the focal point of community life. The center of Peiping is the Forbidden City.

Economic Organization

The economy of the preindustrial city diverges sharply from that of the modern industrial center. The prime difference is the absence in the former of industrialism which may be defined as that system of production in which *inanimate* sources of power are used to multiply human effort. Preindustrial cities depend for the production of goods and services upon *animate* (human or animal) sources of energy—applied either directly or indirectly through such mechanical devices as hammers, pulleys, and wheels. The industrial-urban community, on the other hand, employs inanimate generators of power such as electricity and steam which greatly enhance the productive capacity of urbanites. This basically new form of energy production, one which requires for its development and survival a special kind of institutional complex, effects striking

changes in the ecological, economic, and social organization of cities in which it has become dominant.

Other facets of the economy of the preindustrial city are associated with its particular system of production. There is little fragmentation or specialization of work. The handicraftsman participates in nearly every phase of the manufacture of an article, often carrying out the work in his own home or in a small shop nearby and, within the limits of certain guild and community regulations, maintaining direct control over conditions of work and methods of production.

In industrial cities, on the other hand, the complex division of labor requires a specialized managerial group, often extra-community in character, whose primary function is to direct and control others. And for the supervision and coordination of the activities of workers, a "factory system" has been developed, something typically lacking in preindustrial cities. (Occasionally, centralized production is found in preindustrial cities—e.g., where the state organized slaves for large-scale construction projects.) Most commercial activities, also, are conducted in preindustrial cities by individuals without a highly formalized organization; for example, the craftsman has frequently been responsible for the marketing of his own products. With a few exceptions, the preindustrial community cannot support a large group of middlemen.

The various occupations are organized into what have been termed "guilds."[5] These strive to encompass all, except the elite, who are gainfully employed in some economic activity. Guilds have existed for merchants and handicraft workers (e.g., goldsmiths and weavers) as well as for servants, entertainers, and even beggars and thieves. Typically the guilds operate only within the local community, and there are no large-scale economic organizations such as those in industrial cities which link their members to their fellows in other communities.

Guild membership and apprenticeship are prerequisites to the practice of almost any occupation, a circumstance obviously leading to monopolization. To a degree these organizations regulate the work of their members and the price of their products and services. And the guilds recruit workers into specific occupations, typically selecting them according to such particularistic criteria as kinship rather than universalistic standards.

The guilds are integrated with still other elements of the city's social structure. They perform certain religious functions; for example, in medieval European, Chinese, and Middle Eastern cities each guild had its "patron saint" and held periodic festivals in his

honor. And, by assisting members in time of trouble, the guilds serve as social security agencies.

The economic structure of the preindustrial city functions with little rationality, judged by industrial-urban standards. This is shown in the general nonstandardization of manufacturing methods as well as in the products and is even more evident in marketing. In preindustrial cities throughout the world a fixed price is rare; buyer and seller settle their bargain by haggling. (Of course, there are limits above which customers will not buy and below which merchants will not sell.) Often business is conducted in a leisurely manner, money not being the only desired end.

Furthermore, the sorting of goods according to size, weight, and quality is not common. Typical is the adulteration and spoilage of produce. And weights and measures are not standardized: variations exist not only between one city and the next but also within communities, for often different guilds employ their own systems. Within a single city there may be different kinds of currency, which, with the poorly developed accounting and credit systems, signalize a modicum of rationality in the whole of economic action in preindustrial cities.[6]

Social Organization

The economic system of the preindustrial city, based as it has been upon animate sources of power, articulates with a characteristic class structure and family, religious, educational, and governmental systems.

Of the class structure, the most striking component is a literate elite controlling and depending for its existence upon the mass of the populace, even in the traditional cities of India with their caste system. The elite is composed of individuals holding positions in the governmental, religious, and/or educational institutions of the larger society, although at times groups such as large absentee landlords have belonged to it. At the opposite pole are the masses, comprising such groups as handicraft workers whose goods and services are produced primarily for the elite's benefit.[7] Between the elite and the lower class is a rather sharp schism, but in both groups there are gradations in rank. The members of the elite belong to the "correct" families and enjoy power, property, and certain highly valued personal attributes. Their position, moreover, is legitimized by sacred writings.

Social mobility in this city is minimal; the only real threat to the elite comes from the outside—not from the city's lower classes. And

a middle class—so typical of industrial-urban communities, where it can be considered the "dominant" class—is not known in the preindustrial city. The system of production in the larger society provides goods, including food, and services in sufficient amounts to support only a small group of leisured individuals; under these conditions an urban middle class, a semileisured group, cannot arise. Nor are a middle class and extensive social mobility essential to the maintenance of the economic system.

Significant is the role of the marginal or "outcaste" groups (e.g., the Eta of Japan), which are not an integral part of the dominant social system. Typically they rank lower than the urban lower class, performing tasks considered especially degrading, such as burying the dead. Slaves, beggars, and the like are outcastes in most preindustrial cities. Even such groups as professional entertainers and itinerant merchants are often viewed as outcastes, for their rovings expose them to "foreign" ideas from which the dominant social group seeks to isolate itself. Actually many outcaste groups, including some of those mentioned above, are ethnic groups, a fact which further intensifies their isolation. (A few, like the Jews in the predominantly Muslim cities of North Africa have their own small literate religious elite which, however, enjoys no significant political power in the city as a whole.)

An assumption of many urban sociologists is that a small, unstable kinship group, notably the conjugal unit, is a necessary correlate of city life. But this premise does not hold for preindustrial cities.[8] At times sociologists and anthropologists, when generalizing about various traditional societies, have imputed to peasants typically urban kinship patterns. Actually, in these societies the ideal forms of kinship and family life are most closely approximated by members of the urban literate elite, who are best able to fulfill the exacting requirements of the sacred writings. Kinship and the ability to perpetuate one's lineage are accorded marked prestige in preindustrial cities. Children, especially sons, are highly valued, and polygamy or concubinage or adoption help to assure the attainment of large families. The pre-eminence of kinship is apparent even in those preindustrial cities where divorce is permitted. Thus, among the urban Muslims or urban Chinese divorce is not an index of disorganization; here, conjugal ties are loose and distinctly subordinate to the bonds of kinship, and each member of a dissolved conjugal unit typically is absorbed by his kin group. Marriage, a prerequisite to adult status in the preindustrial city, is entered upon at an early age and is arranged between families rather than romantically, by individuals.

The kinship and familial organization displays some rigid patterns of sex and age differentiation whose universality in preindustrial cities has generally been overlooked. A woman, especially of the upper class, ideally performs few significant functions outside the home. She is clearly subordinate to males, especially her father or husband. Recent evidence indicates that this is true even for such a city as Lhasa, Tibet, where women supposedly have had high status.[9] The isolation of women from public life has in some cases been extreme. In nineteenth-century Seoul, Korea, "respectable" women appeared on the streets only during certain hours of the night when men were supposed to stay at home.[10] Those women in preindustrial cities who evade some of the stricter requirements are members of certain marginal groups (e.g., entertainers) or of the lower class. The role of the urban lower-class woman typically resembles that of the peasant rather than the urban upper-class woman. Industrialization, by creating demands and opportunities for their employment outside the home, is causing significant changes in the status of women as well as in the whole of the kinship system in urban areas.

A formalized system of age grading is an effective mechanism of social control in preindustrial cities. Among siblings the eldest son is privileged. And children and youth are subordinate to parents and other adults. This, combined with early marriage, inhibits the development of a "youth culture." On the other hand, older persons hold considerable power and prestige, a fact contributing to the slow pace of change.

As noted above, kinship is functionally integrated with social class. It also reinforces and is reinforced by the economic organization: the occupations, through the guilds, select their members primarily on the basis of kinship, and much of the work is carried on in the home or immediate vicinity. Such conditions are not functional to the requirements of a highly industrialized society.

The kinship system in the preindustrial city also articulates with a special kind of religious system, whose formal organization reaches fullest development among members of the literate elite.[11] The city is the seat of the key religious functionaries whose actions set standards for the rest of society. The urban lower class, like the peasantry, does not possess the education or the means to maintain all the exacting norms prescribed by the sacred writings. Yet the religious system influences the city's entire social structure. (Typically, within the preindustrial city one religion is dominant; however, certain minority groups adhere to their own beliefs.) Unlike the situation in industrial cities, religious activity is not

separate from other social action but permeates family, economic, governmental, and other activities. Daily life is pervaded with religious significance. Especially important are periodic public festivals and ceremonies like Ramadan in Muslim cities. Even distinctly ethnic outcaste groups can through their own religious festivals maintain solidarity.

Magic, too, is interwoven with economic, familial, and other social activities. Divination is commonly employed for determining the "correct" action on critical occasions; for example, in traditional Japanese and Chinese cities, the selection of marriage partners. And nonscientific procedures are widely employed to treat illness among all elements of the population of the preindustrial city.

Formal education typically is restricted to the male elite, its purpose being to train individuals for positions in the governmental, educational, or religious hierarchies. The economy of preindustrial cities does not require mass literacy, nor, in fact, does the system of production provide the leisure so necessary for the acquisition of formal education. Considerable time is needed merely to learn the written language, which often is quite different from that spoken. The teacher occupies a position of honor, primarily because of the prestige of all learning and especially of knowledge of the sacred literature, and learning is traditional and characteristically based upon sacred writings.[12] Students are expected to memorize rather than evaluate and initiate, even in institutions of higher learning.

Since preindustrial cities have no agencies of mass communication, they are relatively isolated from one another. Moreover, the masses within a city are isolated from the elite. The former must rely upon verbal communication, which is formalized in special groups such as storytellers or their counterparts. Through verse and song these transmit upper-class tradition to nonliterate individuals.

The formal government of the preindustrial city is the province of the elite and is closely integrated with the educational and religious systems. It performs two principal functions: exacting tribute from the city's masses to support the activities of the elite and maintaining law and order through a "police force" (at times a branch of the army) and a court system. The police force exists primarily for the control of "outsiders," and the courts support custom and the rule of the sacred literature, a code of enacted legislation typically being absent.

In actual practice little reliance is placed upon formal machinery for regulating social life.[13] Much more significant are the informal controls exerted by the kinship, guild, and religious systems, and here, of course, personal standing is decisive. Status distinctions

are visibly correlated with personal attributes, chiefly speech, dress, and personal mannerisms which proclaim ethnic group, occupation, age, sex, and social class. In nineteenth-century Seoul, not only did the upper-class mode of dress differ considerably from that of the masses, but speech varied according to social class, the verb forms and pronouns depending upon whether the speaker ranked higher or lower or was the equal of the person being addressed.[14] Obviously, then, escape from one's role is difficult even in the street crowds. The individual is ever conscious of his specific rights and duties. All these things conserve the social order in the preindustrial city despite its heterogeneity.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper there is the assumption that certain structural elements are universal for all urban centers. This study's hypothesis is that their form in the preindustrial city is fundamentally distinct from that in the industrial-urban community. A considerable body of data not only from medieval Europe, which is somewhat atypical,[15] but from a variety of cultures supports this point of view. Emphasis has been upon the static features of preindustrial city life. But even those preindustrial cities which have undergone considerable change approach the ideal type. For one thing, social change is of such a nature that it is not usually perceived by the general populace.

Most cities of the preindustrial type have been located in Europe or Asia. Even though Athens and Rome and the large commercial centers of Europe prior to the industrial revolution displayed certain unique features, they fit the preindustrial type quite well.[16] And many traditional Latin-American cities are quite like it, although deviations exist, for, excluding pre-Columbian cities, these were affected to some degree by the industrial revolution soon after their establishment.

It is postulated that industrialization is a key variable accounting for the distinctions between preindustrial and industrial cities. The type of social structure required to develop and maintain a form of production utilizing inanimate sources of power is quite unlike that in the preindustrial city.[17] At the very least, extensive industrialization requires a rational, centralized, extra-community economic organization in which recruitment is based more upon universalism than on particularism, a class system which stresses achievement rather than ascription, a small and flexible kinship

system, a system of mass education which emphasizes universalistic rather than particularistic criteria, and mass communication. Modification in any one of these elements affects the others and induces changes in other systems such as those of religion and social control as well. Industrialization, moreover, not only requires a special kind of social structure within the urban community but provides the means necessary for its establishment.

Anthropologists will in the future devote increased attention to the study of cities throughout the world. They must therefore recognize that the particular kind of social structure found in cities in the United States is not typical of all societies. Miner's recent study of Timbuctoo,[18] which contains much excellent data, points to the need for recognition of the preindustrial city. His emphasis upon the folk-urban continuum diverted him from an equally significant problem: How does Timbuctoo differ from modern industrial cities in its ecological, economic, and social structure? Society there seems even more sacred and organized than Miner admits.[19] For example, he used divorce as an index of disorganization, but in Muslim society divorce within certain rules is justified by the sacred literature. The studies of Hsu and Fried would have considerably more significance had the authors perceived the generality of their findings. And, once the general structure of the preindustrial city is understood, the specific cultural deviations become more meaningful.

Beals notes the importance of the city as a center of acculturation.[20] But an understanding of this process is impossible without some knowledge of the preindustrial city's social structure. Although industrialization is clearly advancing throughout most of the world, the social structure of preindustrial civilizations is conservative, often resisting the introduction of numerous industrial forms. Certainly many cities of Europe (e.g., in France or Spain) are not so fully industrialized as some presume; a number of preindustrial patterns remain. The persistence of preindustrial elements is also evident in cities of North Africa and many parts of Asia; for example, in India and Japan,[21] even though great social change is currently taking place. And the Latin-American city of Mérida, which Redfield studied, had many preindustrial traits.[22] A conscious awareness of the ecological, economic, and social structure of the preindustrial city should do much to further the development of comparative urban community studies.

Notes

1 George M. Foster, "What Is Folk Culture?" *American Anthropologist*, LV (1953). 159–73.

2 Gideon Sjoberg, "Folk and 'Feudal' Societies," *American Journal of Sociology*. LVIII (1952), 231–39.

3 Sociologists have devoted almost no attention to the ecology of preindustrial centers. However, works of other social scientists do provide some valuable preliminary data. See, e.g., Marcel Clerget, *Le Caire: Étude de géographie urbaine et d'histoire économique* (2 vols.; Cairo: E. & R. Schindler, 1934); Robert E. Dickinson, *The West European City* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951); Roger Le Tourneau, *Fès: Avant le protectorat* (Casablanca: Société Marocaine de Librairie et d'Édition, 1949); Edward W. Lane, *Cairo Fifty Years Ago* (London: John Murray, 1896); J. Sauvaget, *Alep* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1941); J. Weulersse, "Antioche: Essai de géographie urbaine," *Bulletin d'études orientales*, IV (1934), 27–79; Jean Kennedy, *Here Is India* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945); and relevant articles in American geographical journals.

4 Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 27; O. H. K. Spate, *India and Pakistan* (London: Methuen & Co., 1954), p. 183.

5 For a discussion of guilds and other facets of the preindustrial city's economy see, e.g., J. S. Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928); Edward T. Williams, *China, Yesterday and Today* (5th ed.; New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1932); T'ai-ch'u Liao, "The Apprentices in Chengtu during and after the War," *Yenching Journal of Social Studies*, IV (1948), 90–106; H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), Vol. I, Part I, chap. vi; Le Tourneau, *op. cit.*; Clerget, *op. cit.*, James W. Thompson and Edgar N. Johnson, *An Introduction to Medieval Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1937), chap. xx; Sylvia L. Thrupp, "Medieval Guilds Reconsidered," *Journal of Economic History*, II (1942), 164–73.

6 For an extreme example of unstandardized currency cf. Robert Coltman, Jr., *The Chinese* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1891), p. 52. In some traditional societies (e.g., China) the state has sought to standardize economic action in the city by setting up standard systems of currency and/or weights and measures; these efforts, however, generally proved ineffective. Inconsistent policies in taxation, too, hinder the development of a "rational" economy.

7 The status of the true merchant in the preindustrial city, ideally, has been low; in medieval Europe and China many merchants were considered "outcastes." However, in some preindustrial cities a few wealthy merchants have acquired considerable power even though their role has not been highly valued. Even then most of their prestige has come through participation in religious, governmental, or educational activities, which have been highly valued (see, e.g., Ping-ti Ho, "The Salt Merchants of Yang-Chou: A Study of Commercial Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XVII [1954], 130–68).

8 For materials on the kinship system and age and sex differentiation see, e.g., Le Tourneau, *op. cit.*; Edward W. Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 3d ed. (New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1923); C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. J. H. Monahan (London: Luzac, 1931); Horace Miner, *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); Alice M. Bacon, *Japanese Girls and Women*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1902); J. S. Burgess, "Community Organization in China," *Far Eastern Survey*, XIV (1945), 371–73; Morton H. Fried, *Fabric of Chinese Society* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1953); Francis L. K. Hsu, *Under*

the Ancestors' Shadow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948); Cornelius Osgood, *The Koreans and Their Culture* (New York: Ronald Press, 1951), chap. viii; Jukichi Inouye, *Home Life in Tokyo*, 2d ed. (Tokyo: Tokyo Printing Co., 1911).

[9] Tsung-Lien Shen and Shen-Chi Liu, *Tibet and the Tibetans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953), pp. 143–44.

[10] Osgood, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[11] For information on various aspects of religious behavior see, e.g., Le Tourneau, *op. cit.*; Miner, *op. cit.*, Lane, *Manners and Customs*; Hurgronje, *op. cit.*; André Chouraqui, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952); Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese* (London: Sampson Low, 1868); John K. Shryock, *The Temples of Anking and Their Cults* (Paris: Privately printed, 1931); Derk Bodde, ed., *Annual Customs and Festivals in Peking* (Peiping: Henri Vetch, 1936); Edwin Benson, *Life in a Medieval City* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920); Hsu, *op. cit.*

[12] Le Tourneau, *op. cit.*, Part VI; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, chap. ii; Charles Bell, *The People of Tibet* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), chap. xix; O. Olufsen, *The Emir of Bokhara and His Country* (London: William Heinemann, 1911), chap. ix; Doolittle, *op. cit.*

[13] Carleton Coon, *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1951), p. 259; George W. Gilmore, *Korea from Its Capital* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1892), pp. 51–52.

[14] Osgood, *op. cit.*, chap. viii; Gilmore, *op. cit.*, chap. iv.

[15] Henri Pirenne, in *Medieval Cities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), and others have noted that European cities grew up in opposition to and were separate from the greater society. But this thesis has been overstated for medieval Europe. Most preindustrial cities are integral parts of broader social structures.

[16] Some of these cities made extensive use of water power, which possibly fostered deviations from the type.

[17] For a discussion of the institutional prerequisites of industrialization see, e.g., Bert F. Hoselitz, "Social Structure and Economic Growth," *Economia internazionale*, VI (1953), 52–77, and Marion J. Levy, "Some Sources of the Vulnerability of the Structures of Relatively Non-industrialized Societies to Those of Highly Industrialized Societies," in Bert F. Hoselitz, ed., *The Progress of Underdeveloped Areas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 114 ff.

[18] *Op. cit.*

[19] This point seems to have been perceived also by Asael T. Hansen in his review of Horace Miner's *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*, *American Journal of Sociology*, LIX (1954), 501–2.

[20] Ralph L. Beals, "Urbanism, Urbanization and Acculturation," *American Anthropologist*, LIII (1951), 1–10.

[21] See, e.g., D. R. Gadgil, *Poona: A Socio-economic Survey* (Poona: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1952), Part II; N. V. Sovani, *Social Survey of Kolhapur City* (Poona: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1951), Vol. II; Noel P. Gist, "Caste Differentials in South India," *American Sociological Review*, XIX (1954), 126–37; John Campbell Pelzel, "Social Stratification in Japanese Urban Economic Life" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Department of Social Relations, 1950).

[22] Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).

The Preindustrial City
Reflections Four Decades Later
GIDEON SJOBERG and ANDRÉE F. SJOBERG

In this short article, Gideon and Andrée Sjoberg answer criticisms made of their original model of the "preindustrial city." They begin by reviewing why the original article and subsequent book were written. They then answer particular critiques and show how recent research, such as that on Mayan cities, has, in fact, supported their original conclusions.

For a different approach to the problem of defining types and making generalizations across different cultures and periods of time, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod's article, "Territoriality and Social Organization in Islamic Cities." Whereas the Sjobergs distinguish sharply between preindustrial and industrial cities, she shows that there are also features that some preindustrial cities share with modern Western cities.

Reflecting upon one's earlier endeavors some decades later is not without pitfalls. There is the ever-present danger of indulging in mere self-justification. Nevertheless, looking back on a journal article (Sjoberg 1955) and a more fully developed book on the preindustrial city (Sjoberg 1960) affords us an opportunity to set this effort within a broader intellectual context.

This essay is a collaborative effort for several reasons. Andrée F. Sjoberg, who co-authored two chapters in the book, *The Pre-industrial City*, has, because of the nature of her teaching and research, made special efforts to keep up with the burgeoning literature on preindustrial urban life. During the decades since we carried out research for the book we have returned at frequent

intervals to intense discussion of this general topic, hardly a subject of ongoing conversation among couples.

After considering why the project was undertaken in the first instance, we shall respond to some of the criticisms that have been leveled against our formulation. We also point to new directions for research (ever mindful of the fact that the present essay provides only a general sketch of our reasoning).

The article and the book were to a considerable degree written in reaction to the existing analyses of urban centers by American sociologists and anthropologists. At the time the article was published in 1955, social scientists in the United States were relying heavily on Redfield's (1947) "The Folk Society" and Wirth's (1938) "Urbanism As a Way of Life" in their interpretation of cities worldwide and, implicitly, since the dawn of civilization. Contemporary urban life in the United States and elsewhere was often contrasted with Redfield's "folk society" (or small, nonliterate social order), or, following Wirth, American cities were taken as the standard for interpreting urban communities in diverse historical and cross-cultural settings. Although the perspectives of Redfield and Wirth have stimulated a considerable amount of useful research, they provide too narrow a foundation for an adequate understanding of urban life on a global basis prior to the scientific and industrial revolutions.[1] The impressive body of data collected during the past few decades in differing social and cultural settings has highlighted the contrasts between industrial cities and cities of the world before industrialization.[2]

Still, a number of objections have been raised to the basic conceptualization of the preindustrial city. One major criticism has been voiced by social scientists who stress the cultural distinctions among cities in diverse preindustrial civilized societies—for example, they argue that cities in China differed appreciably from those in India, and that these in turn deviated from urban communities in pre-Columbian America. One group of scholars would align themselves with the geographer Paul Wheatley (1971), whose magnificent work, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, describes how the cosmology of the ancient Chinese provided a framework for constructing their leading cities. We do not question the thesis that religious beliefs (and other cultural values) affected the spatial arrangements of preindustrial urban settlements, and we have always assumed that significant cultural variations existed. But our emphasis has been on the common structural patterns in preindustrial cities. Certainly, cultural values such as the cosmological led to distinctive spatial arrangements in different areas. Nevertheless, we can isolate shared features in the ecology of cities

in traditional societies. To cite one such pattern, the central core of preindustrial cities was inhabited by the ruling elite, whereas the lower orders settled at a greater distance from the center and toward the city's periphery. Residence at or near the city's hub, with its major religious and governmental edifices, was a prime consideration, especially so in a society characterized by limited means of transportation and communication. Ongoing interpersonal interaction among members of the ruling class was vital to the maintenance and enhancement of their power and status in the urban communities and the broader society. It must be added that lower-status occupational groups who met the immediate needs of the dominant class—household servants, merchants, craftsmen, and others—also tended to cluster in or about the city center.

Commonalities existed in spheres other than the ecological (or spatial): family structure, political and economic organization, religion, education, and the accumulation of knowledge. For example, in preindustrial cities it was the upper class that was able to realize and sustain the extended kin arrangements considered the ideal in traditional civilizations. The urban lower class and the peasantry generally found it economically and socially impossible to maintain an extended kinship group within a common household—though most aspired to this goal.

It was only within the privileged class that extreme forms of gender segregation were attainable. Upper-status women were restricted to the home and thereby excluded from public activities—in the economic, political, and educational realms. Even in the home women and men occupied separate social space (e.g., Murray and Price 1990). In the urban lower class and among ruralites women's labor was too essential for survival to permit a high degree of gender segregation.

No one, to our knowledge, has examined gender relationships specifically within the upper class in traditional cities across a broad spectrum of societies. Even the renowned anthropologist Jack Goody (1990), in his major synthesis of data on kinship systems of Eurasia, fails to consider the privileged sector in preindustrial cities. Yet the patterns adhered to by the elite served as the ideal for many urbanites and the more privileged sectors of the peasantry. Over time many such patterns spread, though in somewhat muted form, to virtually all families in the society. Gender segregation, championed by preindustrial elite males, and acceded to by adult females, found striking cultural expression in footbinding in China and purdah (veiling and other forms of seclusion) in Muslim societies. In the course of the centuries these patterns came to affect even the poorer segments of society. The norms adhered to by the

privileged class, established in the cities, set the tone for the society as a whole.

The technology of traditional civilizations and its associated knowledge systems, as well as the supporting political and economic organizations, were far more complex than anything developed in folk, or nonliterate, orders. All this made possible the construction of cities and the maintenance of a privileged ruling class and a substantial body of full-time specialists. Certainly, the literati (the educated elite) in these societies could not have produced and sustained the knowledge systems they did had they not been freed from the need to engage in the production of food and other essential goods.

However, the technology that characterized the preindustrial civilization, advanced though it was over that in preliterate orders, still was largely dependent on human and animal muscle power (to a modest extent the energy of water and wind was harnessed), and such severely limited the size of the privileged class who could be freed from basic forms of production. Not until the emergence of industrialism, in which machines came to perform the heavy labor required for human survival or otherwise deemed essential by the ruling class (e.g., pyramid building), was it possible to achieve the patterns we associate with modernity.

A second line of criticism of the preindustrial city framework is more complex and has many ramifications. We can only touch on these here. The criticism emanates from scholars who take "capitalism" as the master concept.[3] A number of social scientists contend that capitalism has shaped, or been shaped, by urban life in the West. A significant outgrowth of this emphasis on capitalism has been world-system analysis (Wallerstein 1974). Its proponents have perceived capitalism as spreading out of Europe (its core or center) to the rest of the world. Consequently, cities in the core have profited, through the accumulation of capital, at the expense of those in the periphery. However, the proponents of the world-system perspective neglect the political structures that sustain social and, especially, economic life in urban centers. Moreover, the rather narrow economism that characterizes studies of the relationship among cities in the core and the periphery blinds scholars to the social arrangements that are part and parcel of preindustrial city life (e.g., Kasaba 1991; King 1990). The central issues raised in the article and the book fall outside the purview of world-system analysis (see e.g., Chase-Dunn and Hall 1991).[4]

Somewhat in tandem with, as well as overlapping with, world-system analysis has been a heightened awareness of the considerable commerce and travel throughout Eurasia that occurred prior

to the scientific and industrial revolutions (e.g., Curtin 1984). Many of the leading preindustrial cities did maintain extensive trade and other connections, often over vast distances.

While we acknowledge the major contributions of this new scholarship, we nevertheless stand convinced that the preindustrial city framework is essential for an understanding of the nature of urban life prior to the scientific and industrial revolutions.

If we were to rework our description of the preindustrial city type, we would take greater account of the substantial trading activity referred to above. We would also incorporate aspects of the world-system perspective into our analysis. In particular we would be attentive to the fact that some leading cities in Asia today (Bombay and Calcutta come to mind) were established by European colonialists and displayed certain features that deviated from preindustrial-urban patterns (e.g., Basu 1985). Still, the early colonial cities that were creations of the Spaniards in Latin America were essentially preindustrial in their form. Spain had not yet experienced the scientific and industrial revolution, which emerged in northwestern Europe a couple of centuries after the conquest of Mexico.

The idea of the preindustrial city type will not disappear. Although we do not subscribe to any crass form of linear evolutionary theory, we do recognize that the social patterns in small nonliterate (or folk) societies have differed markedly from those in preindustrial civilized orders—most notably in cities, the centers of social power. Researchers who lump together data from nonliterate and preindustrial civilized orders overlook certain critical aspects of preindustrial city life. Thus Martin Whyte (1978) in his study of women in preindustrial orders in general, in both literate and nonliterate societies, was unable to discern the striking gender patterns of the preindustrial urban elite. We learn nothing from him about the virtual monopoly of literacy by elite males and the exclusion of women from the public sphere.

It is not surprising that a number of major scholars today rely on the distinction between preliterate and preindustrial civilized societies, and industrial ones as well, when theorizing about the social and cultural development of human beings from the past to the present. Thus, preeminent theorists such as Anthony Giddens (1985), in Britain, and Jürgen Habermas (1975), in Germany, who have been shaping the manner in which social scientists (from various disciplines) view societal and cultural arrangements, rely on distinctions among types of society. Habermas in a general sense distinguishes among preliterate, preindustrial civilized, and

industrial ("capitalist") orders, and Giddens explicitly acknowledges the contrasts between preindustrial cities and modern urban forms.[5]

Today, rethinking our original formulations, especially in light of recent findings, we would make a special effort to analyze the differences between earlier and later forms of the preindustrial city. In so doing, we could advance our analysis in a more compelling manner and more effectively demonstrate the relevance of the concept of the preindustrial city for social investigation. The inhabitants of the more developed cities were far more able to harness wind, water, and animal power than were their earlier counterparts. Coastal cities throughout Europe and Asia profited from improvements in shipbuilding and navigation. So too, large-scale construction projects such as the Colosseum, the aqueducts, and the roads leading to Rome were predicated on certain technological developments that ultimately helped to lay the basis for the scientific/industrial revolution (the latter did not invent itself).

To more fully grasp the nature of preindustrial city life, we can focus on particular cultural settings, keeping one question foremost in mind—How does the particular relate to the general? The Mayan cities are an informative case in point. At the time the article and the book were published, the idea of the Maya having created fully developed cities was largely unrecognized by, and contrary to, the conventional wisdom of social scientists. It was often assumed that even the more extensive archaeological remains that had been excavated were simply "ceremonial centers" to which people from the nearby countryside thronged periodically in order to engage in a variety of activities, mainly of a ceremonial nature. The assumption was that no permanent settlements had ever been established around the often imposing public edifices. In *The Preindustrial City* we briefly advanced the argument that the Mayan "ceremonial centers," even in the pre-Classic era, must each have been the core of true cities. We assumed, on theoretical grounds, that a privileged class (including a well-developed intellectual elite whose impressive advances in astronomy and mathematics surpassed the accomplishments of Europe at the time) could not have survived without a substantial supportive body of bureaucrats, craftsmen, merchants, and servants functioning as permanent residents of urban centers.

Now, after several decades of archaeological research, essentially all specialists on the Maya recognize that these people did develop true cities. Some urban communities, such as Tikal, were of impressive size.[6]

Although the *conquistadores* destroyed great numbers of Mayan manuscripts, the surviving *stelae*, or inscriptions on stone, are being deciphered, and their contents lend strong support to the notion of a powerful ruling class. Specialists on the Maya, however, have not yet recognized the fact that the cities rather closely fit our constructed preindustrial urban type, something that is best illustrated in the ecological patterns, with the privileged elite residing at the city's core, persons of humbler status spread farther out, and ruralites at the periphery and beyond. A systematic comparison of the Mayan cities with those in traditional societies in Eurasia would be a worthy endeavor.

A second profitable line of inquiry is to examine the great literatures of civilized orders specifically within a preindustrial city framework. This would cast additional light on the early cities and perhaps refine the preindustrial city typology. We made far too limited use of these materials in our previous work. Though primarily oriented toward religion, these literatures are, along with archaeological and linguistic data, a vital source for deciphering a variety of social arrangements in older cities. Yet it must be emphasized that they were composed by a minute segment of the urban populace: the educated male elite. These persons wrote about their own privileged world and virtually ignored the lives of ordinary people, particularly marginal groups such as non-upper class women, outcast groups, the urban poor, and ruralites in general. Little wonder that we have highly limited data on, for example, the slaves of ancient Greek cities (and elsewhere).

For data on social arrangements in traditional cities one could draw, for example, on the great literatures of earlier China, the Middle East, or Greece. But we elect to focus here briefly on the literary texts of ancient India associated with Hinduism, the dominant religious orientation of the Indian people.[7] Preindustrial urban arrangements in India, one of the world's great civilizations, have generally been overlooked. Moreover, many of the traditional patterns, particularly with respect to religion, continue to affect the lives of what is today the second most populous nation in the world.

Among the vast body of religious-philosophical texts from ancient India, the most useful for an understanding of preindustrial urban life are the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. These rank among the longest single poems in world literature. They have been seen as analogous in certain respects to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Like the Greek epics, they are in a sense encyclopedic compendia of mythology and of the deeds of heroic figures, always members of the ruling elite. At various points they provide useful hints about the life of the upper classes in the early

cities. Although much has been written about the epic poetry of India, no one, to our knowledge, has analyzed the content of these works within a preindustrial urban framework. Yet these literary creations were clearly the work of a male literati who resided in urban centers. The social patterns that can be teased out of these texts reflect the life of the privileged strata in early traditional civilized societies.

Examination of the content of the Indian epics within a preindustrial city framework reveals a number of significant social patterns. Here again gender serves as a useful point of departure. As in traditional cities everywhere, elite women were considered mere appendages of men and were excluded from participation in the public sphere of activity wherein men ruled supreme. But gender relations were more complex than they might appear on the surface. In ancient India, as in many other preindustrial civilized orders, women were viewed in highly ambiguous, even contradictory, terms. They were to be both revered and honored and feared and denigrated. In addition, they were viewed as simultaneously powerful and powerless. Elite women, whose actions were highly constrained and who were subject to rigid social and spatial segregation, even within the confines of the home, had at the same time the greatest potential among all women to enhance or undermine the social status and power of the family and the males within it. Women were especially crucial to the continuance of the lineage through the production of male children. Even highly advantaged males in the society depended for their status and power to a considerable degree on the rockbed of the supporting family, and unacceptable behavior on the part of the women seriously threatened their power and prestige. (It may be significant also that Hinduism, which personalizes the many forms of the divine that it embraces, plays out this same theme in its hierarchy of the divinities. All of the male deities are dependent on their female consorts for their very power and energy to act in the realm of human beings.) Though many of the aforementioned arrangements were perhaps more starkly illustrated in India than elsewhere, these kinds of gender patterns are typical of preindustrial urban life.

The patterns associated with the preindustrial city are significant for more than just their historical interest. The persistence today of traditional social forms in many societies of Eurasia has escaped the attention of most American social scientists, who lack personal acquaintance with the "heavy hand of tradition" associated with a preindustrial civilized past. These traditional norms continue to affect family, religious, and stratification patterns even in the face of the great transformation that has resulted from industrialization,

urbanization, and bureaucratization. The place of tradition in defining familial and gender roles has special import. In Japan, India, the Middle East, and many other areas, complex honorifics in the language, typical of preindustrial cities, continue to reinforce class, gender, and age distinctions.

Much work on preindustrial urban life remains to be done.[8] A fuller description of the details of traditional preindustrial urban arrangements would serve to clarify a host of thorny problems regarding urban centers, both past and present.

Notes

[1] That Redfield's "folk society" continues to be employed to organize research data is attested to by Edgerton (1992).

[2] The preindustrial city framework has been used in a variety of ways by researchers in a number of disciplines. For example, Simić (1983), discussing Serbian cities in the nineteenth century, observes how these closely approximated the preindustrial city type. Highly informative is the research by Dray-Novey (1993) on Imperial Beijing. On the basis of a study of the spatial order and the police in Beijing in about 1650–1850, the author criticizes the preindustrial city framework for its failure to examine the nature of formal social control. Any full-scale revision of the original work would need to take careful account of findings of this sort.

[3] To do justice to the connection between capitalism and cities requires advances in knowledge on a variety of fronts. First, we need to consider the relationship of capitalism to city life in Western Europe (e.g., Holton 1986). Unlike scholars who conceive of capitalism as the central force in history, we contend that capitalist cities in Europe prior to the scientific and industrial revolutions were far closer to the preindustrial city type than to the modern urban. Only after capitalism converged with the scientific and industrial revolutions did the modern urban form come into full bloom.

Second, we need to look closely at those cities in Western Europe, especially in Spain and Portugal, that built up vast commercial (or mercantilist) empires. If we were to pursue such a project we would chide our critics for their failure to give due attention not only to the social arrangements in preindustrial cities but also to the way in which capitalism in the urban centers of Europe was supported by powerful political structures. This was clearly the case in the expansion of the Portuguese and Spanish empires (e.g., Tracy 1990). The political stability that made possible rather extensive commercial activities is frequently brushed aside by classical economists and neo-Marxists. The champions of world-system analysis can be seriously faulted along these lines.

The case against some of the assumptions underlying world-system analysis finds support not just in European expansionism but also in the East Asian experience in the twentieth century. The case of the Japanese empire prior to World War

II documents how political control facilitated and solidified further economic expansion. In more recent decades capitalism in nations of the East Asian rim is likewise being driven by state power.

Interestingly, some East Asian scholars (both in East Asia and in Europe) have been drawing rather heavily on the work of a neglected German political economist, Friedrich List (1974), who wrote in the first half of the nineteenth century. Essentially, List challenged Adam Smith's emphasis on free trade in England after it had achieved political dominance, on the grounds that Smith's argument served the cause of the British empire. With free trade, the British could export manufactured goods and import raw materials and agricultural products. They thus gained at the expense of other nations.

The ideas associated with List, properly modified, can readily be directed against the proponents of world-system analysis, for its economism (or materialism) downgrades the role of political power. *The Preindustrial City* plays up the essentiality of political organizations in establishing economic and commercial activities. Major issues of this sort can be only briefly discussed in this essay.

4 Although Ward (1993), among others, attacks world-system analysis for ignoring gender, the book on the preindustrial city did take gender patterns into account (though these need to be considerably elaborated).

5 Giddens is one of the few major contemporary social theorists to pay special heed to the role of urban centers in shaping the nature and development of social orders.

6 Sources that survey the relevant recent research include Hammond (1988) on the Maya and Weaver (1993) on the Maya and the Aztecs.

7 Andrée F. Sjoberg (1990; 1994) has written on the broad sweep of Indian cultural history as she has sought to demonstrate the unrecognized impact of the leading minority people, the Dravidians, on the course of Indian civilization and Hinduism. In conducting her research, she has confronted firsthand the failure of leading Indologists to recognize the nature of the preindustrial city in their interpretation of the historical evidence.

8 The relationship between Eurocentrism and the preindustrial city type is a methodological problem that demands careful attention. It is not a mere artifact of what Said (1979) terms "Orientalism." In the article and the book, we did not draw, as many authors do, a marked distinction between Western and "Oriental" cities. European cities, prior to the scientific and industrial revolutions, far more closely approximated the preindustrial urban type than the modern one. The earlier cities fitted the preindustrial type quite well. Yet, just how the "West" is set apart from the "East" haunts any researcher engaged, as we are, in generalizing about urban life.

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