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Cities in Africa before 1900. Historiography and Research Perspectives

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Les villes en Afrique avant 1900. Bilan historiographique et perspectives de recherche

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Résumés

English Français
What new issues arise several decades after the first academic studies? What are the answers and what sources are mobilized? This special issue proposes a historiographical review of research conducted on cities, taking into account the most recent methodological reflections on the issue of the relationship between the urban territory and the exercise of power before the 20th century, focussing on its material and symbolic aspects. Case studies in the Maghreb, West Africa's forest and Sahelian regions and East Africa examine these stakes.

Quels nouveaux questionnements émergent plusieurs décennies après les premières études académiques ? Quelles sont les réponses apportées et quelles sources sont mobilisées ? Ce numéro thématique propose un bilan historiographique des recherches menées sur les villes, tout en s'inscrivant dans les réflexions méthodologiques les plus récentes autour de la question des relations entre le territoire urbain et l'exercice du pouvoir avant le XXe siècle, à travers ses aspects matériels et symboliques. Des études de cas au Maghreb, en Afrique occidentale forestière et sahélienne et en l'Afrique de l'Est abordent ces enjeux.

Texte intégral

1   This special issue was initiated on the occasion of a panel organized during the 7th European Conference on African Studies in Basel in 2017.[1] The unifying theme of this conference was "Urban Africa – Urban Africans. New Encounters of the Urban and the Rural." A small number of panels and papers focused on cities and their relationships with rural spaces prior to the 20th century. As is often the case in these international meetings, which take up different eras, geographical regions, themes, and academic disciplines, the 20th and 21st centuries largely dominated the exchanges. This observation – which testifies to the "presentism" that continues to characterize African Studies as a whole[2] – raises a number of questions. Would there still be a stake in demonstrating the presence of cities in Africa over the long term? If a historiographical field has now been established on the presence of cities prior to 1900, it is clear that this still lags behind in comparison to studies of the later period.[3] Since the 1930s, and again, in the 1950s and at the end of the 1980s, archaeologists and historians of Africa have wondered about the definition of cities and long-term urbanization processes. At a time when the number of Africans living in cities exceeds those living in the countryside, knowledge of the continent's urban past is currently of interest beyond academic circles. This knowledge is being disseminated through exhibitions, history magazines, and works of synthesis.[4]

2   What new questions are now emerging, several decades after the first academic studies? What responses are people offering, and what sources are they mobilizing? This special issue offers a historiographical review of the research carried out on cities, while engaging with the most recent methodological reflections on the relationship between urban territory and the exercise of power before the 20th century, via its material and symbolic aspects.

3   Long before the development of contemporary metropolises and capitals, the African continent experienced various urban formations, with extremely variable temporalities, limits, and operating modes. The first sites developed thanks to metallurgy and mixed agriculture. This variety of urban formations is now well studied: the cities of Egypt and Nubia along the Nile Valley in Antiquity; the Phoenician city-states, such as Carthage, on the shores of the Mediterranean; Aksum in the Horn of Africa (1st-7th centuries); Awdaghust and Azougi in Mauritania; the medieval West African cities of Djenné-Djenno, Gao, Koumbi Saleh, Ifè, and Old Oyo in Yorubaland (15th-19th centuries); Mbanza Kongo in Central Africa; Bigo and Ntusi near the Great Lakes; Kilwa, Shanga, and Songo Mnara on the Swahili Coast, as well as Great Zimbabwe (13th-15th centuries), to name just a few of the better-known examples. Collectively comprehending such different urban phenomena as the capitals of empires, the large cities of kingdoms, and city-states is the challenge of this issue of *Afriques*, which seeks above all to move beyond the question of typologies so as to offer a more problematized study approach. The multiple dimensions of cities are studied in their specific contexts, which are made up of continuities and ruptures. Moreover, the investigation of cities cannot be envisaged without adopting a broad approach, one that takes into account the relationships with other urban entities, insofar as their origins and their development are often the fruit of political, social, and economic rivalries and competitions. Indeed, as Odile Goerg emphasizes, "the city is made not only of earth or stones, but also of practices, gestures, and strategies."[5]

4   This special issue examines, through a plurality of written, oral, archaeological, and visual sources, the places where political power was embodied and the material and symbolic strategies that were adopted to stage – or contest – the legitimacy and the continuity of order in the cities. Four very different spaces, from the Maghreb to the Sahel, from the forest zone of West Africa to East Africa, are examined. While one of the articles is rooted in the "African Middle Ages," the other three focus on the 19th century. The 19th century has its own specific aspects in terms of urban phenomena, which merit researchers' attention just as much as the development of cities in more ancient eras. Furthermore, it is essential to specify that, while this chronological range reflects the current dynamism of work on these periods, our aim is not to suggest that there has been an intensification of urban phenomena throughout history. The shape, structure, and history of these African cities are not linear. Periods of urbanization have been succeeded by periods of deurbanization during which regional urban networks broke up and then often reconstituted themselves on other bases. This was probably the case in the wake of the second plague pandemic.[6] Urban sites, such as Old Oyo, were abandoned by their populations during political crises, yet remained alive in people's memories and in the actions of the territories they came to dominate. Some cities were subject to major demographic accidents before being reborn on the same site as before, as recent research by the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project has shown in Ilé-Ifè, thereby creating complex urban palimpsests whose historical interpretation is tricky.[7] Others may have been relocated, as evidenced by the passage from Djenné-Djenno to the present-day town of Djenné, or Oyo's displacement from the site of Old Oyo to the site of Ago.[8] Phenomena of political refoundation have also been attested to, for example with the city-state of Witu in the Swahili hinterland.[9] Finally, cities were literally wiped off the map by political decisions, such as Savi after the Dahomey's conquest of Hueda in 1727.[10] This urban dynamic reflects various historical trajectories, which are themselves reflected in infrastructures adapted to the challenges encountered by urban populations. We can thus mention the diversity of enclosures which were erected around many African cities at certain moments in their history, and which, in addition to their defensive role, were monuments of prestige, vessels of power, and means of controlling populations and extracting fiscal resources. Since the early 2000s, archaeologists across the continent have called for the systematic study of enclosures as sources of urban history. Such studies are still underway, but preliminary results highlight that the presence of enclosures around centers of power, large and small, is an indicator of political fragmentation rather than an essential feature of urban reality.[11] Many major urban centers, such as those of the Akan region in the Atlantic era, for example, never had monumental enclosures. In contrast, the smaller communities that occupied the same area in present-day southern Ghana between the middle of the first millennium and the 14th century left traces of settlement sites surrounded by ditches and embankments that are still visible in the landscape.[12]

Colonial Myths and Discourses

5   The first studies of "ancient" cities were often carried out in colonial situations and as part of regional surveys by administrators with a keen interest in history and, from the 1930s onward, by archaeologists as well. Their origins were generally considered to be the result of external influences, Arab or European, as numerous studies assert. Djenné-Djenno and Timbuktu, in medieval western Sudan, were said to have been created by North African Arab merchants to control the outlets for trans-Saharan trade. Likewise, on the eastern coast, traders from the Arabian Peninsula and Persia are said to have founded Swahili cities and to have married African women to foster prosperous economic

exchanges in the Indian Ocean region. All over the continent, diffusionist readings denying any local initiative have long served to explain the development of cities there.

6   When research into the continent's own ancient past first emerged in the era of independence movements, cities received renewed attention. In a context where theses that were often tinged with nationalism flourished, it was a question of combating a triple cliché: Africans were said to have been rural by nature; modern cities were said to have been a product of colonization and therefore the fruit of recent history; and contemporary urban life was said to in fact cause social malaise. Faced with a colonial ideology narrating a past devoid of "progress," it was necessary to develop a scientific counter-discourse in which the history of African cities played a decisive role.[13] Before archaeologists and historians, it was first economists, political scientists, sociologists, and geographers who took an interest in cities from a long-term perspective, and leading up to colonial times. Georges Balandier was a pioneer with his book *Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires* (1955), as were Jean Dresch for West Africa and Akin Mabogunje for Nigeria.[14] Subsequently, the first continent-wide syntheses, based on regional monographs, were produced by Anglophone researchers. In 1959, Basil Davidson's *Lost Cities of Africa* intended to rehabilitate the "ancient" cities – and by this means to celebrate the splendors of the "African civilization" in general – through a blend of literary, archaeological, historical, and anthropological literature.[15] In a classic manner, his book successively approaches the different regions of the continent that have known urban forms. Seventeen years later, Richard Hull proposed a thematically organized synthesis, stressing that "towns and cities should be defined not simply by size, though it is an important factor, nor by the proportion of people engaged in industrial pursuits," but that "it is equally important that we define cities or towns by the functions they perform, their capacity for assimilation, and their ability to transmit a new cultural synthesis."[16] Despite the limits of this work, with its diffusionist tendencies rejecting the local origins of certain architectural forms, this way of considering cities was a landmark in the emerging field of studies on the continent's urban past.

7   The image of an entirely rural Africa, a continent devoid of endogenous urban cultures and whose ruins were fantasy,[17] was swept away by decades of archaeological and historical investigations. This attention paid to the continent's urban past has, in turn, raised questions: according to some, it is in part the expression of a preconceived attitude seeking to find cities everywhere, while in reality the continent as a whole would have been, despite everything, only slightly urbanized until relatively recent times.[18] We can certainly ask ourselves whether, and to what extent, the propensity to seek out the urban element in the African past falls within what Finn Fuglestad called, in 1992, the "Trevor-Roper Trap."[19] In wanting to combat the Eurocentric discourses that emerged within the framework of colonialism – discourses like that of the British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, who, in the 1960s, argued that there was no history in Africa, that is to say, no "purposive movement," but just "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe"[20] – Africanist historiography itself would have too often espoused a concept of history based on a European model. In other words, it would have retained an "imperialist" tendency aimed at assimilating and annexing the African past to a fundamentally Eurocentric order of historical knowledge. This tendency would have resulted in a propensity to overly focus on characteristics which, according to intrinsically Western criteria, would demonstrate the historicity of the past of African societies: writing, states, empires. To this list, one could easily add another theme: the "city." Through their architectural remnants, cities make it possible to render the past visible and tangible as history, associate memories with places, and celebrate the splendors of national or simply "African" heritages. It is therefore hardly surprising that cities – and not villages or nomadic settlements – play a predominant role when it comes to portraying the "Wonders of the African World" or even the "Great Civilizations of

Africa," to borrow the titles of two documentary series produced by the US television network PBS in 1999 and 2017, and edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr.[21] At a time when the stereotype of an "African village" is increasingly being replaced by the image of an "Africa of megalopolises," one can also wonder if the renewal of scholarly interest in the history of African cities before the twentieth century does not, to a certain extent, stem from a teleological tendency aimed at rediscovering in the past the elements which would have led to our present. Would studies devoted to African urban history, therefore, be guilty of bowing to the "idol of the origins?"[22]

8   Effectively, in some regions and for prolonged periods of time, human presence has produced forms of land use characterized by weak urbanization. Let us consider, for example, the Sahara (although urban forms existed there near water points), forest areas in equatorial Africa, or specific regions in the southwest of the continent where socio-economic organizations based on hunting-gathering or pastoralism have long persisted. Of course, the study of cities should not fall into glorifying narratives, nor should it obscure the fact that non-urban societies with very different social realities and spatial configurations were also present. But the observation, fundamentally banal, that the density of urban networks was not homogeneous across the continent, should not induce a description of Africa as a whole as a part of the world where cities were exceptional phenomena.[23] On the contrary, the need to deconstruct the theoretical assumptions that continue to blur our gaze when we deal with urban settlements in African history remains topical, as does the need to redouble efforts to empirically identify the traces of this past. The latter sometimes poses considerable methodological challenges to researchers, on account of the nature of the sources and reduced archaeological visibility due to the use of perishable construction materials. Far from diminishing the specificity of African cities by imposing Western categories – homogenizing and falsely universal – on them, the study of the urban past in Africa offers, on the contrary, the possibility of grasping cities by rightly paying attention to their logics and languages.[24]

A Time of Theoretical Challenges

9   Starting in the 1980s, the major question posed by researchers has been that of the specificity or uniqueness of these cities. The challenge has also been to place their development within a broader perspective, i.e., on a global scale. What is a city? There have been many theoretical debates responding to this question. Classical definitions listed a series of criteria: a stratified society, a dense population, the ruling power's appropriation of food surplus, monumental public architecture, the practice of writing, the development of sciences such as mathematics and astronomy, the concentration of a plurality of administrative and economic functions, etc.[25] Drawn from the observation of the development of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia and Greece up to the industrial metropolises of the West, these criteria were used to erect supposedly universal models. But very few sites in Africa met this long list of criteria – even if some came close, such as Great Zimbabwe, the center of an urban complex built of solid and perishable materials, whose impressive ruins had once inspired theories rejecting their African origins.[26] These definitions were called into question, as they reflected more of a static and Eurocentric approach to cities on the one hand and the emergence of a centralized state associated with urbanity on the other. Indeed, in some parts of Africa, state control did not necessarily pass through the cities, but through other means, such as monasteries in Ethiopia.[27]

10   Different theoretical perspectives have been developed. In the Francophone world, pioneering work was carried out at the end of the 1980s by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, who was interested in the morphological and structural data on cities. Questioning

Western theorizations of an African urban model, she campaigned for the history of the continent's cities to become part of universal history.[28] The question of the periodization of urbanization was also at the heart of her work. Although critiques have been leveled at it, particularly in terms of mitigating the continent's specificities,[29] Coquery-Vidrovitch's contribution highlighted the absence of a single "model" and the coexistence of a diversity of cities.

11   Among Anglo-Saxon researchers, a change of focus has been favored: the question "what are cities?" has tended to be neglected in favor of "what are cities doing?" From the 1980s onward, the contribution of archaeology has been instrumental in considering outside influences on the founding of cities in a different manner. The excavations by Susan and Roderick McIntosh in the Inner Niger Delta bear witness to this.[30] The research carried out in Djenné-Djenno led them to reject the theory of an Arab founding linked to trans-Saharan trade. Their hypothesis became that of a grouping of urban sites that interacted with one another and had economic and social functions in relation to a vast hinterland. They also describe how the layout of a large population can be achieved through a corporative organization, and how this does not necessarily require an economic or political hierarchy. Regarding the importance of the hinterlands, archaeologists specializing in the East African coast have all made the same observation: "Any reflection on the urban character of Swahili towns must include an examination of the countryside and village communities."[31] These studies can be seen as extensions of the Weberian perspective associating urban planning with the interdependence between the rural and the urban. This so-called "functionalist" model has also been criticized, on the one hand because it only pays attention to hierarchical formations and leaves aside urban entities of different types; and on the other hand, because it downplays the existence and role of negotiations and protests in cities, and disregards their heterogeneous internal composition.

12   From the 1980s onward, the perception of cities in Africa has become more complex, and has freed itself from rigid theoretical frameworks. Their diversity has become the postulate of the most recent studies, as shown by the collective work edited by David Anderson and Richard Rathbone in 1999. For them, there is no such thing as a homogeneous African urban history with a single paradigm that would explain the continent's urbanization, the growth of its cities, their development, or their decline. They also call for going further in understanding the uniqueness of these urban experiences: "some [towns] were highly visible, with clearly demarcated boundaries, such as the walled cities of Sahelian West Africa or the stockaded villages found in parts of East Africa, whilst others amounted to little more than a 'heap of huts' – clusters of scattered settlements interspersed with tracts of cultivation and pastures."[32] The plurality of African cities before 1900 is now an established principle, and African cities are no longer marginalized or theorized according to external models. As proof, these cities are finally integrating broader perspectives derived from global history, and are being discussed on equal terms with other cities.[33] The image of a rural Africa that only included, here and there, a few small urban islands that formed city-societies has now dissolved. When, in the 1970s, Robert Hull regretted the lack of interest on the part of historians in this ancient urban past, thirty years later, Bill Freund indicated that he had brought together many excellent syntheses to realize his own.[34] This research field appears relatively well surveyed today, even if it remains less explored than that of contemporary cities.

Games of Scale and Juxtaposition of Sources

13   If urban phenomena have been the subject of renewed theoretical approaches, the ways of studying them have also evolved thanks to increasingly complex methodological approaches. The monograph has long been a privileged framework for analysis, and continues to be one, and is often based on the tools of a single discipline. However, it is clear that today it is important to move across different scales and diversify one's sources in order to comprehensively understand urban entities and their multiple political, economic, social, and cultural facets.[35] Indeed, current research on cities, from all time periods, now favors the juxtaposition of sources – when possible – with archaeological, historical, anthropological, and literary data. Interdisciplinarity also makes it possible to compensate, partially, for the shortcomings or silences of sources on certain questions or during the period under study. The articles in this thematic issue offer rich demonstrations. Studying Sijilmāsa, Thomas Soubira notes that the texts of the medieval and early modern period allow us to understand the water resources of the oasis environment, urban hydraulic developments, and agricultural practices. But he specifies that this is second-hand data, as the authors did not visit the city in person. Thus, field archaeology allows us to gain a more in-depth understanding of the methods of collecting, conveying, storing, and using "clean" water. Akanmu Adebayo's article on the city of Iwo shows the value of combining oral traditions and written sources, even if these are fragmentary or few in number. This juxtaposition of sources is also beneficial when we look into daily urban practices, whether those of the elites or other social groups, craftspeople, slaves, or newcomers.[36] Therefore, the articles presented here hone in on the sites where political power was embodied through a plurality of sources that allow us to glimpse the transformations of the city, an elevated place of permanent appropriation that continuously absorbs and adapts elements from the outside.

14   The juxtaposition of various sources makes it possible to carry out games of scale that are useful for understanding local, regional, and global phenomena. The latter provide access to the functioning of urban centers and their relationship with rural areas.[37] Furthermore, an analysis at the intersection of the scale of streets and compounds, where the daily lives of communities takes place, and the scale of interregional exchanges makes it possible to bring to light the local agencies involved in the management and organization of cities. Therefore, one can reflect on the local political authorities and the elites who capitalize on multi-scale economic, social, and political forces.[38] While the articles in this issue of *Afriques* favor case studies, they do not neglect broader considerations. They bring the city under study into dialogue with other urban entities, villages, regions, and land and sea areas where alliances and competitions come into play.

Spaces, Material Cultures, Scenographies

15   The relationship between the urban territory and the exercise of power, a theme at the heart of this special issue, allows for a transverse approach to many facets of the functioning of cities before 1900, through material and symbolic aspects. Although the study of monumental architecture can spontaneously appear as a relevant angle of analysis,[39] it would be reductive to limit ourselves to that aspect. Moreover, rather than considering this materiality from the angle of the capacity of powers to accumulate resources and to use generally servile labor,[40] the articles in this special issue examine the places of representations of power as spaces of long-term legitimation and contestation.

16   In cities, political powers seek to exercise regulatory functions over social interactions, economic transactions, and also religious and cultural life. They often play a decisive role in shaping them in material and symbolic terms and use them as a scene of representation to assert their legitimacy. To this end, political powers deploy multiple architectural interventions, visual representations, languages, and ritual and even ceremonial practices

that Georges Balandier has described as "theatrocracy."[41] These expressions of politics are also testimonies to modes of perceiving and to the impressions of the actors of the city, inhabitants or visitors, traces which still need to be grasped and probed today. Dense and permanent settlements of heterogeneous groups and individuals, cities are now seen as places where opposing forces are expressed with competing groups and as arenas of contestation where heterogeneous social practices are asserted.[42]

17   Among the multiple functions of urban centers, it is necessary – in this respect – to highlight their role at the crossroads of commercial networks: a role that is, above all, regional, but also long-distance. Indeed, it should be noted that, in sub-Saharan Africa, these "trading-post cities" were frequently found on the edges of distinct ecological zones, sometimes marked by different transport systems, between which they provided economic mediation: along the Niger bend (a transition zone between the Sahara of camels and the Sahel of horses, mules, and river canoes); between the Sahel and the tropical forest zone (where a climate conducive to the tsetse fly made animal trypanosomiasis endemic and therefore prevented the breeding of beasts of burden, making human carriers the only available means of land transport); on the Swahili coast, a genuine interface between the savannas of the hinterland and the world of the Indian Ocean (where the monsoons had favored – from the first millennium of our era onward – the formation of a navigation system between South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa); in the Horn of Africa; and – starting in the 15th century, when Iberian navigation opened up new maritime routes and thus catalyzed the integration of the Atlantic space[43] – the coasts of West and Central Africa, the junction of the ocean (and therefore the European subcontinent and the Americas) and the sub-Saharan forest zone. The cities located in these liminal regions have sometimes functioned as broker-states that succeeded in establishing themselves as guarantors of sufficiently stable institutional frameworks to allow the development of trade between distant spaces, even though they were not unified from a political point of view.[44]

18   If cities, by virtue of their role in facilitating connections, were traversed by commodities from other places, part of the goods was also intended to remain in place to be consumed, hoarded, exhibited, and transformed. These goods entered into gift economies – between equals, as well as between patrons and clients –, fueled local transactions – commercial or otherwise –, and were sometimes the object of sumptuary standards that sought to restrict their use. Exogenous goods were integrated into specific urban contexts, often undergoing redefinitions regarding the uses and cultural meanings attributed to them. In turn, they contributed to enriching or even transforming the material culture of the cities. The ruling class, which manifested itself in its ability to channel the commercial trajectories of goods and to assert itself as an institutional interlocutor vis-à-vis merchants, derived economic income from them, but also symbolic income. Rulers used, often in a completely emphatic way, goods from other places to stage their own splendor and cosmopolitan influence, to renew the links with ancestral spirits or demonstrate their membership to a monotheistic religion, to consolidate relations of fidelity, or even to show off their capacity – whether conceived according to an ideology that falls within the paradigm of "sacred kingship" or not[45] – to promote the prosperity of the population. In this sense, power in the city was not only materialized through stationary constructions, but also through the control and deployment of moving objects.[46] As with the study of architectural styles, where the old diffusionist paradigm has been replaced by greater attention paid to intercultural mixings,[47] attention is now focused primarily on African societies' capacity to creatively appropriate exogenous contributions and rework them in dialogue with regional traditions.

19   This issue of *Afriques* examines the places where political power represented itself (royal courts, religious buildings, public areas, markets, etc.), as well as the strategies (material and symbolic) adopted to stage – or contest – the continuity of the order. In fact,

these urban contexts have been constantly beset by economic and migratory dynamics that have tended to catalyze potentially destabilizing transformation processes. The Iwo authorities, which had to deal with populations originating from Old Oyo and the presence of a community of merchants from the east coast in Tabora, East Africa, are well-known examples. Urban materiality can be seen as a space where the social ambitions of residents, whether long-established ones or newcomers, are expressed and where their social ideals, desires, and frustrations are crystallized. As for symbolic strategies, they can be embodied through the staging of the prestige of power or its purity, particularly by Islam, as shown in the article by Stephanie Zehnle on the second emir of Sokoto's promotion of a new model of a Muslim city on his territory.

20   Urban landscapes are understood here as spaces whose layered semantics result from conflicts and negotiations between a plurality of social groups and institutional actors. The city is this particular kind of palimpsest, which is therefore regularly rewritten spatially, visually, symbolically, and materially. The city is a process, a movement, a constant invention.

Presentation of the Articles

Les villes étudiées dans ce dossier

21   The article by **Thomas Soubira** focuses on the site of Sijilmāsa, in the oasis of Tāfīlālt on the pre-Saharan margins of present-day Morocco. Founded in the middle of the 8th century, Sijilmāsa was an independent Kharijite emirate and a major site of medieval trans-Saharan trade, especially between the 12th and 14th centuries. The author offers a new reflection on the collection and management of water in a city in a desert and oasis environment, where the search for water required a very significant hydraulic effort. Due to the extreme environmental conditions and the remoteness of other urban centers and power, it was necessary to ensure the inhabitants' daily access to water and food resources, which required carrying out major hydraulic works. Historical sources and archaeological data are used to study the oasis's hydraulic functioning and agrarian practices. The written sources show that water investments were an integral part of the apparatus of Islamic powers in the urban context. Archaeology allows us to go further in understanding the methods of collecting, storing, and managing wastewater. T. Soubira's article initiates a reflection on the morphology of Sijilmāsa: it is thus necessary to rethink the image of a city contained within a large enclosure, and instead to conceive of a polynuclear city which

developed in a vast area, between the 8th and 15th centuries, around a central tell. Several urban groups occupied different parts of the site. Moreover, it appears that the investment in hydraulic installations was considerable, both from a technical point of view and in terms of the materials used and the labor required for their installation, management, and maintenance. Future investigations would allow us to determine whether the hydraulics in Sijilmāsa constituted a social marker of the various urban powers. The Franco-Moroccan mission, in which the author took part, was in fact restricted to an "elite" zone, which appears to have been the seat of power in the city, and which resembles the citadels of Islamic cities. Excavations of more "popular" hydraulic infrastructure could allow for comparisons with the area already investigated.

22   The contribution by **Akanmu G. Adebayo** concerns the Yoruba cultural area, well known for having witnessed the birth of many entities whose urban character has often been underlined in historiography, notably through the concept of the city-state. The study takes place in the dual context of a regional conflict that led to large movements of refugees, which in turn favored the spread of Islam in the region. New cities emerged, while others fell apart, with governance methods being redefined. Iwo, a city located in present-day Nigeria, had the distinction of remaining neutral during this crisis, but the city was impacted by the influx of refugees and by the adoption of Islam, which transformed its architecture and its administrative and political structures. To retrace the history of Iwo in the 19th century, the author brings together printed sources, particularly those of missionaries, Nigerian archives, and many oral traditions, which he painstakingly collected between 1978 and 2018. To face the massive influx of civilians, soldiers, and routed leaders, Iwo elites had to make concessions. The new arrivals, especially those feared by the Iwo authorities, were allowed to settle in separate villages, which, by welcoming migrants, became distinct neighborhoods. One district remained reserved exclusively for Iwo's royal lineage, where the power of the king was embodied in the palace, gardens, ancestral tombs, and even around an open courtyard for public ceremonies and festivals. In the 19th century, the construction of a mosque next to the palace reinforced the legitimacy of the king, who succeeded in harnessing a new source of power. Therefore, the urban landscape of Iwo has undergone significant transformations, both by the construction of new structures (Quranic schools) and by the installation of new inhabitants (including people of modest means, slaves, etc.), which involved a spatial expansion of the city.

23   Is Tabora the "Paris of East Africa" or a "cluster of scattered villages?" Referring to the representations of two European travelers, **Karin Pallaver** is interested in Tabora, which was established in the 1840s in the interior of present-day Tanzania. Questioning the city's definition in the region, the author shows that the urban structure characterized by the amalgamation of different villages was a widespread formation, and stresses that various urban experiences existed, on account of their different structures and operating modes. In effect, the development of Tabora, whose origins are the subject of conflicts of memory, is the result of a local process of urbanization, which is explained by environmental, economic, and political factors and which was marked by the presence of a community of traders from the Swahili coast. Before the 19th century, the region of Tabora was inserted into trade networks in which the Nyamwezi porters played a key role. The subsequent boom in the slave, ivory, and firearms trades had major consequences on the development of the city. To illustrate these transformations, K. Pallaver juxtaposes visual sources, making it possible to understand the spatial organization (maps, drawings by European travelers, photographs) with European and Swahili textual sources, some of which were composed from oral sources. In Tabora, the local power (*mtemi*) competed with the merchant community from the coast, while also sharing common interests. This was manifested in particular by competition for access to imported goods, the construction of buildings linked to power, and even the local sovereign's selection. Thus, the means of

access to the throne were transformed, passing from a hereditary and matrilineal system to the designation of men with experience of the caravan journey between the interior and the coast, and who were able to make this trade prosper thanks to their personal networks. Another figure gained prominence and changed the political face of the city: the governor (*wali*) of Zanzibar, spokesperson for the Arab community in Tabora, who over time became a leading advisor. The *mtemi* and the *wali* lived close to each other and, despite tensions, negotiated their political and trade cooperation. When one received arms, gunpowder, and clothing imported from the coast, the other sought to control the ivory trade. Beyond these elites, the population of Tabora was also made up of many slaves, employed in agriculture or as domestic servants, artisans, and free people who came seeking work opportunities.

24   **Stephanie Zehnle** examines the theoretical debates and town planning practices in the Sokoto Empire in the 19th century, particularly under the impetus of the second sultan, Muhammad Bello, for whom mankind was "urban by nature." The sources she mobilizes combine geographical representations and maps of Sokoto, produced by scholars from the empire at the request of European travelers, the travel diaries of European explorers, and 19th-century texts in Arabic and Hausa. Before the Sokoto jihad in 1804, the region already knew urban forms: Hausa cities (*gari*) could have almost 20,000 inhabitants with extremely varied origins. For most Hausa rulers, urbanity was already associated with the manifestation of power over a territory. Sokoto relied on these pre-existing entities to develop new urban forms. First, the capital was enlarged around 1818, and new districts were integrated into the city walls. Several elements – the rectangular walls, and the layout of the palace and of the mosque with very simple décor – show that an attempt was made to integrate both the sacred geography of Islam and the Fulani and Hausa traditions. In times of war, the Sokoto Empire also developed a new category of city: the border town (*ribāt*), in reference to the temporary war camps during the early days of Islam's expansion in Arabia, Persia, and North Africa. Sultan Bello was a central figure in the promotion of these cities, because they responded to strategic, religious, and moral challenges. To strengthen the borders of the empire, Bello encouraged the displacement of populations from the center to the peripheries. The soldiers were the first affected, with the granting of land, a house, and slaves resulting in their adopting a sedentary lifestyle. Through this military strategy, Bello also intended to found a model of a city specific to the sultanate, to reduce the "savagery" of non-urban spaces. If the former jihadists were able to be persuaded to join these cities, it was less easy to motivate free civilians or political leaders to join, because they perceived this forced displacement as a sanction coming from the ruling power. Under Bello's reign, the empire became Islamized, urbanized, and militarized, making Sokoto a model of a Muslim city that the *ribāt* were supposed to copy.

Perspectives

25   The "ancient" city in Africa is a multifaceted and dynamic reality that never ceases to surprise us. A strong idea of our special issue is that the supposed absence of urban formations is often the result of an invisibilization caused by the lack of, or the erroneous interpretation of, written sources, archaeological remains, and ideological *a priori* assumptions. Indeed, we are suggesting that, over the long run, the urban fact was a reality much more widely explored by African societies than is commonly accepted. The differences that exist from one region of the continent to another can be expressed not in terms of the presence or absence of the city, but rather in terms of the intensity of the urban reality over the long term, on a continuum ranging from sparsely urbanized regions to others that were entirely structured by cities. Rather than seeing the city as an anomaly

in Africa before 1900, it seems to us that in the future, researchers' attention will be focused on elucidating the factors that explain the historical and geographical differentials at the origin of this gradation of the intensity of urbanization. This quest begins today, in this special issue which explores the African cities of the interior, and at the same time exposes their heterogeneity, their prevalence, and their relevance, to better understand the history of the continent over the long term. This is the starting point for a new urban history of cities in Africa, with the ambition to recognize the diversity, the urban hierarchies, and the intensifying factors of the urban reality in remarkably varied environments and contexts. It is also advisable to pursue research that is not only focused on ruins or monumentality. The outskirts, the suburbs, and the hinterlands are all spaces that allow for a shift of focus and an understanding of the dynamics taking place in cities.

26   In these times when archaeologists occupy a growing place in the writing of the history of the periods preceding the last third of the 19th century in Africa,[48] the coming decades will probably see the urban question approached from the points of view of its spatiality and its materiality, two underlying themes of this special issue. Inscribed in space and time, the city is indeed not only an object of politics and power subject to discourse, but above all a material projection of the political economy of a society and of what Paul Sinclair has called the "urban mind," that is to say the deep and unique cognitive link that the inhabitants of a place have with the urban reality.[49] What about the sense of urbanity, that is to say the recognition of certain values, ways of life, and symbols associated with the city, however modest? The diversity of urban minds, each rooted in particular historical realities, makes it difficult to recognize the urban reality of others. If this reality has not always been recognized and remains poorly understood in Africa, it is because it has never been monolithic. The urban reality there is a complex and evolving bundle, which partly escapes the conceptual frameworks in which reflections on the city have been developed since the 19th century. By revisiting the heuristic tools inherited from the colonial era and thinking about the city in its own terms based on its material and memory traces, we will come to better understand the multiple drives of the urban mind as it may have manifested in Africa and elsewhere. Thinking about the "ancient" city promises to be a rewarding activity in future studies of Africa's past.

27   Each city captured at a particular moment in its history reflects, through its horizontal, vertical, performative, and material unfolding, a singular perception of a social and political ideal often carried by an elite. This ideal is both espoused and contested by the rest of the social body, made up of the majority of men, women, and children, free and captive, who weave urban networks, who practice the city, and who register their routines and their emotions on its walls, in its courtyards, and on its routes. When its inscription into the landscape endures, the city becomes a layered document which constantly integrates, masks, interprets, and manages in the present the cumulative effect of past urban minds. If the city is such a document, then urban networks and their territories form an equally layered landscape, an involuntary archive that has largely been ignored. Beyond the city, there are other landscapes, urban and rural, as well as regional ones, which, in their entirety, are layered, and which will have to be brought to light by archaeology.

28   Recognizing the city, however, is no easy task for the archaeologist, who is sometimes caught in conceptual ways to define the city that do not always find a legible archaeological signature.[50] For example, while the presence of enclosures seems to be a good indicator of urbanity, it is not an obligatory criterion. Enclosures are a solution to specific constraints which require that measures be put in place to protect, manifest, and control wealth in the city. They are a reflection of regional insecurity, of specific ways of waging war, and of an elite keen to control its population, often with the aim of taxing it. Enclosures are, therefore, a particular type of infrastructure that responds to a series of risks recognized by urban elites. It is useful to broaden the scope of the investigations to other types of

infrastructure by questioning the categories of risks to which they intend to provide solutions. The example of the management of water resources in Sijilmāsa addressed by Thomas Soubira in this special issue is a perfect illustration of this. Recognizing the city by the infrastructures in which it invests – in order to reduce the particular risks to which the city is subject – is an approach that is well suited to archaeological research, because the infrastructures, by definition, are material. The management of hydrological risk is a question of the future for the study of cities in Africa. Whether it is access to water resources in arid areas, or excessive rains in the humid tropical zones, water is a source of risk for the city and its inhabitants. A community that invests in complex infrastructures to transport, control, regulate, and divert water is a community that is using its urban mind. Other risks, social and environmental, have been able to generate complex responses that resulted in the establishment of infrastructures whose material traces can still be found. It will be the role of archaeologists to continue inventorying these infrastructures and the risks they averted, and through this, to broaden our recognition of the urban reality and its history in Africa.

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DOI : 10.1017/ahsse.2020.7

Notes

1 We would like to thank the six participants who this double panel brought together, as well as the audience that was present, with whom we had insightful exchanges. Our thanks also go to Anaïs Wion and Thomas Vernet for their proofreading of this introduction.

2 R. REID, 2011.

3 For a historiographical overview, see, among others: O. GOERG, 2003; L. FOURCHARD, 2004; J.L. VELLUT, 2007; O. GOERG, X. HUETZ DE LEMPS, 2012.

4 P. BOILLEY, J.-P. CHRÉTIEN, 2010; F.X. FAUVELLE, 2014; Exhibition at the Quai Branly Museum: "L'Afrique des routes" ("African Routes"), 2017. Although cities are not the starting point for these

initiatives, they are nevertheless one of the essential entry points for considering the ancient history of the continent.

5 O. Goerg, 2006, p. 12.

6 G. Chouin, 2018a.

7 G. Chouin, 2018b.

8 S. Goddard, 1971.

9 C. Coret, 2017.

10 K. Kelly, 1995; N. Norman, 2007.

11 G. Connah, G., 1999; S. Pradines, 2001; A.A. Usman, 2004; J. Aymeric Nsangou, 2018 and 2019; G. Chouin, O.B. Lasisi, 2019.

12 J.K. Thornton, 1999; G. Chouin; C.R. DeCorse, 2010.

13 See the works of Richard Pankhurst for the case of Ethiopia.

14 G. Balandier, 1955; J. Dresch, 1950; A.L. Mabogunje, 1968.

15 B. Davidson, 1959.

16 R.W. Hull, 1976, p. xiv.

17 P. Masonen, 2000.

18 C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2006, pp. 1087, 1091.

19 F. Fuglestad, 1992.

20 H. Trevor-Roper, 1965, pp. 9-11.

21 H. L. Gates, 1999, 2017.

22 M. Bloch, 1949, chap. I, 4.

23 After all, if we adopt a continental observation scale, we can notice that in medieval and modern Eurasia there were vast regions – from the forests of Siberia to the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, and through the region of the steppes and the arid zones of Central Asia – where the degree of urbanization was relatively low; without, however, qualifying Eurasia as a whole as a continent with a low level of urbanization.

24 On the conceptualization of the urban reality in the languages of West Africa, see G. Chouin, forthcoming, for the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the article by Stephanie Zehnle in the present issue for the Western Sahel.

25 A. LaViolette, J. Fleisher, 2005, p. 328. On the development of urban history, see: B. Lepetit, 1996.

26 I. Pikirayi, 2013, p. 920.

27 M.-L. Derat, 2003.

28 C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1988, 1993.

29 J.-P. Chrétien, 2004.

30 R.J. McIntosh, S.K. McIntosh, 1993.

31 J.B. Fleisher, A. LaViolette, 1999; T. Vernet, 2004.

32 D. Anderson, R. Rathbone, 1999, p. 1.

33 M.H. Hansen, 2000; P. Clark, 2013.

34 B. Freund, 2007.

35 H. Holder, A.-M. Peatrick, 2004; O. Goerg, 2006, p. 10; F.-X Fauvelle, B. Hirsch, L. Bruxelles, C Mesfin, A Chekroun, D. Ayenatchew, 2006.

36 G.L. Cowgill, 2004, p. 528.

37 A. Burton, 2002.

38 J.C. Monroe, 2018.

39 On this aspect in African cities in the 20th and 21st centuries, see: N. Greani, 2017.

40 R. Hull, 1976, p. 112.

41 G. Balandier, 2006, p. 19.

42 J. Glassman, 1995; T. Vernet, 2004; J.C. Monroe, 2018, p. 393.

43 J.K. Thornton, 1998; R. Law, 2004, 2011; G. Chouin, 2017; T. Green, 2019.

44 Here, we are taking up the term "broker-kingdom" (*royaume courtier*) proposed by F.-X Fauvelle, 2018, and extending it to non-monarchical societies.

45 The concept of "sacred kingship," or even "divine kingship" (J.G. Frazer, 1906-1915), underlines the role of metaphysical mediation played by the monarch between his people and the transcendent powers, dispensing fertility and prosperity. For more recent analyses, see L. De Heusch, 1997, J.-P. Warnier, 2009; D. Graeber, M. Sahlins, 2018.

46 R.L. Pouwels, 1987; E. Akyeampong, 1996; S.P. Blier, 1998; J. Prestholdt, 2008; R. Zaugg, 2018.

47 P. Mark, 2002; A. Teriba, 2017; S. Wynne-Jones, A. LaViolette, 2018.

48 R. Reid, 2011.

49 P. Sinclair, 2010.

50 See the analyses of the Kindoki site: B.-O. Clist et al., 2015.

Table des illustrations

	Titre	Les villes étudiées dans ce dossier
	Crédits	© FNSP - Sciences Po, Atelier de cartographie, 2019.
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/afriques/docannexe/image/3088/img-1.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 1000k

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