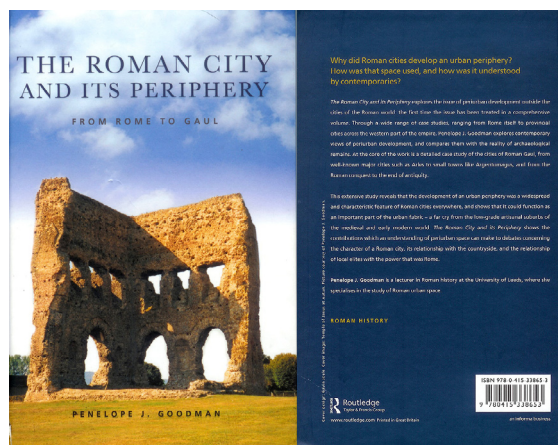




BOOK REVIEWS

Goodman, P.J. 2007. The Roman city and its periphery. From Rome to Gaul. – London/New York, Routledge

H. van Enckevort



In this book the author explores the sparsely-investigated edges of a Roman city in order to acquire insight into the nature of the society which produced it. “A city’s periphery can be taken to mean any occupation on the fringes of a city which is neither fully urban nor fully rural in character” (p. 1). In written sources this area is described as *suburbanus*, *extra urbem*, *extra moenia*, *extra murum* and *proast(e)ion*. Chapter 2 shows that the contexts of these terms in an empire-wide setting reveal much about the urban periphery in Roman thought. In legal and literary texts and visual images the urban periphery is seen as an ambiguous zone between urban and rural, a zone of exclusion, a place for military activity, and a formal zone of transition. The ideas of ‘the urban’ and ‘the periurban’ presented by the Roman elite were absorbed by the provincial elites. The periurban identity was subjective and questionable, in several cases the border between urban and periurban was clearly physical, marked by walls, rivers, cemeteries, or by the changing orientation of the major roads when they entered the

orthogonal grid. This makes it easier to investigate the archaeological evidence for periurban development outside the urban centre (chapter 3). The boundary between the periurban and the rural is more difficult to identify, especially in the case when parts of the *suburbium* were separated by open land. In general we can place the urban at one end of a continuous settlement hierarchy and the rural at the other end. The existence of the periurban is confirmed by archaeological evidence, especially the occupation that was physically bounded with the urban.

Periurban villas in texts differ from rural villas, but the architecture and functions of luxury villas in the country are not greatly different from periurban estates. Villa properties in an archaeological context are hard to fit in, belonging neither in the periurban nor in the rural, and they are found outside every Roman city. The same is true for cemeteries, so Goodman largely omits both in analysing the characteristics of the periphery of Gallo-Roman cities.

In chapters 4-6 Goodman turns from the periurban land-use in the Roman empire in general

to archaeological evidence in Gaul. Almost 60% of the Gallo-Roman administrative cities (provincial, *coloniae*- and *civitates*- capitals) during the high empire show evidence of periurban features (chapter 4). Probably this is an underestimate, and archaeological exploration in the intermediate zone between city and countryside will certainly provide future discoveries. At the bottom end of the scale most of the cities generated very little periurban development. On the top end, Vienne, Arles and Lyon, all situated along the Rhône, the main commercial route, developed an extensive urban periphery. Pressure on space, or in some cases, easier access to resources (for example potters who need clay, water and wood), played a major role in the periurban development. Sizes, political status and the vicinity of major routes between settlements (flourishing economy, trade) could encourage periurban development. Remains of industrial and/or commercial activity, domestic occupation, baths, temples and spectacle buildings (theatres, amphitheatres, circuses) are occupying the most important parts of periphery of Gallo-Roman administrative cities, but important public monuments (baths, temples, circuses and amphitheatres) found their place there, too. In several cases, even periurban nuclei developed at some distance from the urban centre.

The patterns in the placement of spectacle buildings between the Gallic provinces *Lugdunensis*, *Narbonensis*, *Aquitania* and *Belgica* shows variations. In general classical theatres were found in the urban center and classical amphitheatres in the periphery, an 'echo' of the Italian practice. In *Narbonensis*, the oldest of the Gallo-Roman provinces, no building was erected which fell outside standard Roman models. Only in *Lugdunensis* Gallo-Roman types of spectacle buildings, which were not part of the standard equipment of a city, were located in the urban periphery. In this way the communities did not compromise the sophisticated *romanitas* of the urban centre. In the other two provinces Gallic theatres and mixed spectacle edifices were almost always erected in the country.

In chapter 5 Goodman concludes that the spatial organisation of most urbanised secondary agglomerations, which lacked the administrative role, did not differ from that of the administrative centres. The spatial organisation of both the administrative centres and the second-

ary agglomerations with distinct aspirations towards *urbanitas* is part of the empire-wide model of Roman urbanism. The other secondary settlements consisted of an undifferentiated nucleus or developed a polynuclear structure. They lacked the concentrations of public buildings and an orthogonal street layout. Both were features of pre-Roman Gaul, but also developed and flourished during the high empire. An interesting phenomenon is the close association between secondary settlements and villas, probably the local residences of elite families.

In late antiquity (chapter 6) the spatial division between the centre and the urban periphery did not really differ from that in the earlier centuries, despite social, political and economic changes during this period. In almost all cases defensive walls divided the centre and the late antique periphery, which was still in use for living occupation, elite villas, cemeteries and public monuments (churches) and less for commerce and industry. The churches fulfilled the same functions as the public buildings of the high empire: religious protection, social contact, festivities, and a means of expressing status. This development illustrates the continuity in the development of the cities, even into the medieval and later times. In modern times the towns burst through their walls, by which the sharp distinction between the centre and the suburbs disappeared.

In chapter 7 Goodman offers answers to some wider questions about tensions and resolutions in Roman urbanism, the relationship between the urban centre and the country and the relationship between provincial and Rome's elites.

The author gives in her book a thorough overview of the periphery of Roman cities in Gaul and their relations with their urban centres. Her conclusions can be used in studying urban centre/periphery relations in other provinces. Probably many of the observations will be comparable, but there are also some deviating developments. For example, most of the *vici* in *Germania inferior* show no signs of *urbanitas*, like those in Gaul, but they have no pre-Roman roots like the Gallic settlements of the same kind. Both the concept of the Roman city, and the concept of the secondary settlement were imported into in this Rhine province from outside the region. Nevertheless, Goodman's book gives good insight into the spatial relations

between the urban and the periurban and the development and organisation of the urban periphery in Gaul. However, more study is needed for an overview about “the Roman city and its periphery” in the Empire. An interesting title for a parallel study would be “the Roman *castra* and its *canabae legionis*.”

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