McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

Delicate urbanism in context:

Settlement nucleation in pre-Roman Germany

The DAAD Cambridge Symposium

Edited by Simon Stoddart

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with contributions from
Ines Balzer, Manuel Fernández-Götz, Colin Haselgrove, Oliver Nakoinz, Axel G. Posluschny, Gerd Stegmaier, Anthony Snodgrass, Peter Wells, Günther Wieland, Katja Winger and Caroline von Nicolai

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Contributors

Ines Balzer
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, Via Valadier 37, 00193 Rome, Italy.

Manuel Fernández-Götz
Lecturer in Archaeology, School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, William Robertson Wing, Old Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9AG, UK.

Colin Haselgrove
School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH, UK.

Oliver Nakoinz
Johanna-Mestorf Akademie / Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, Christian-Albrechts-Universität, Leibnizstraße 3, D - 24118 Kiel, Germany.

Axel G. Posluschny
Keltenwelt am Glauberg, Am Glauberg 1, 63695 Glauburg, Germany.

Gerd Stegmaier
Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Schloss Hohentübingen, D-72070 Tübingen, Germany.

Anthony Snodgrass
Faculty of Classics, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA, UK.

Simon Stoddart
Magdalene College, Cambridge, CB3 0EU, UK.

Peter Wells
Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, 395 HHH Ctr, 301 19th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA.

Günther Wieland
Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart, Archäologische Denkmalpflege Ref. 84.1, Fachgebiet Prospektion, Dokumentation und Archäobiowissenschaften, Berliner Str. 12, 73728 Esslingen, Germany.

Katja Winger
Institut für Prähistorische Archäologie, Freie Universität Berlin, Fabeckstr. 23-25, 14195 Berlin, Germany.

Caroline von Nicolai
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie und Provinzialrömische Archäologie, Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, 80539 München, Germany.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Simon Stoddart (Cambridge)

The first millennium BC, broadly the Iron Age, was a formative period in the European history for the development of urbanism, but it is usually the Mediterranean perspective that is given emphasis. This volume draws attention to the presence of urbanism in central and western Europe, albeit of a different character to that of the Mediterranean. The pre-Roman urbanism of temperate Europe came in two short and discontinuous phases, the first in the sixth/fifth century BC and the second in the last centuries BC. It is a delicate urbanism in the sense that nucleations and agglomerations only lasted a few generations, whereas the urbanism of many Mediterranean towns and cities lasted very many generations, and in a number of cases are still in the same location today. This raises the question of why the example of urbanism from temperate Europe should be delicate. The traditional reason given is to point to a necessary stimulation from the Mediterranean, in terms of products and ideas. Urbanism was thus seen as a response to the fluctuating contact with the Mediterranean. More recent research shows that the development of urbanism in temperate Europe had its own internal logic. Increasingly the dynamic instability is understood in social and political terms, rather than attributing it to external factors such as the Mediterranean world or changes in the local physical environment.

Advances in the understanding of the different scales of the urban and rural landscape, appreciated both in quantitative and qualitative terms, often with the aid of science, are leading to new interpretations of the definition of the urban form and this volume gives both new data and new approaches from the regions that lie in modern Germany (Fig. 1.1). As alluded to by many of the authors, details and trends given here must be read alongside very broadly comparable developments in Western France in the first phase (e.g. *Vix* and *Bourges*) and both West (Western France and the Benelux countries (e.g *Mont Beuvray* and the *Titelberg*)) and East Europe (e.g *Zavist*) in the second phase. In fact, one conclusion that becomes clear, by placing the German examples in context, is how variable the definition of urbanism becomes.

The region of modern Germany has a fundamental importance in these processes. Indeed the southern regions of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria provide the two classic models for our understanding the context of Urbanism: *Fürstensitz* and *oppidum*, both distinctive forms of nucleated community. The volume has brought together some leading, mainly early career, figures from Germany who study the period to address the following questions: What makes pre-Roman urbanism in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria distinctive? Is the term urbanism indeed appropriate? What were the driving forces of production? How was identity constructed? To what extent did the development of urbanism depend on interaction with other contemporary urbanized areas? To what extent were these nucleations centres of power, or did some other form of socially constructed community underlie their formation? To what extent did ritual underwrite their formation? How stable was urbanism in this formative period? The resulting volume is a consideration of the state of play in response to these questions, where understandably some questions are more readily answered than others and new questions raised for future research.

Many of the papers presented question the established definitions of urbanism. The papers firstly air approaches from the German speaking world (Kolb 1984; Hänsel 2005) that have only very recently been more widely publicized in Anglophone literature (Fernández-Götz et al. 2014b). The papers go on to underline the cultural variability of urbanism that has been recognized for a long time (Stoddart 1999), but explore the issue to greater depth in the case of temperate Europe. Whereas many recent models have broadly

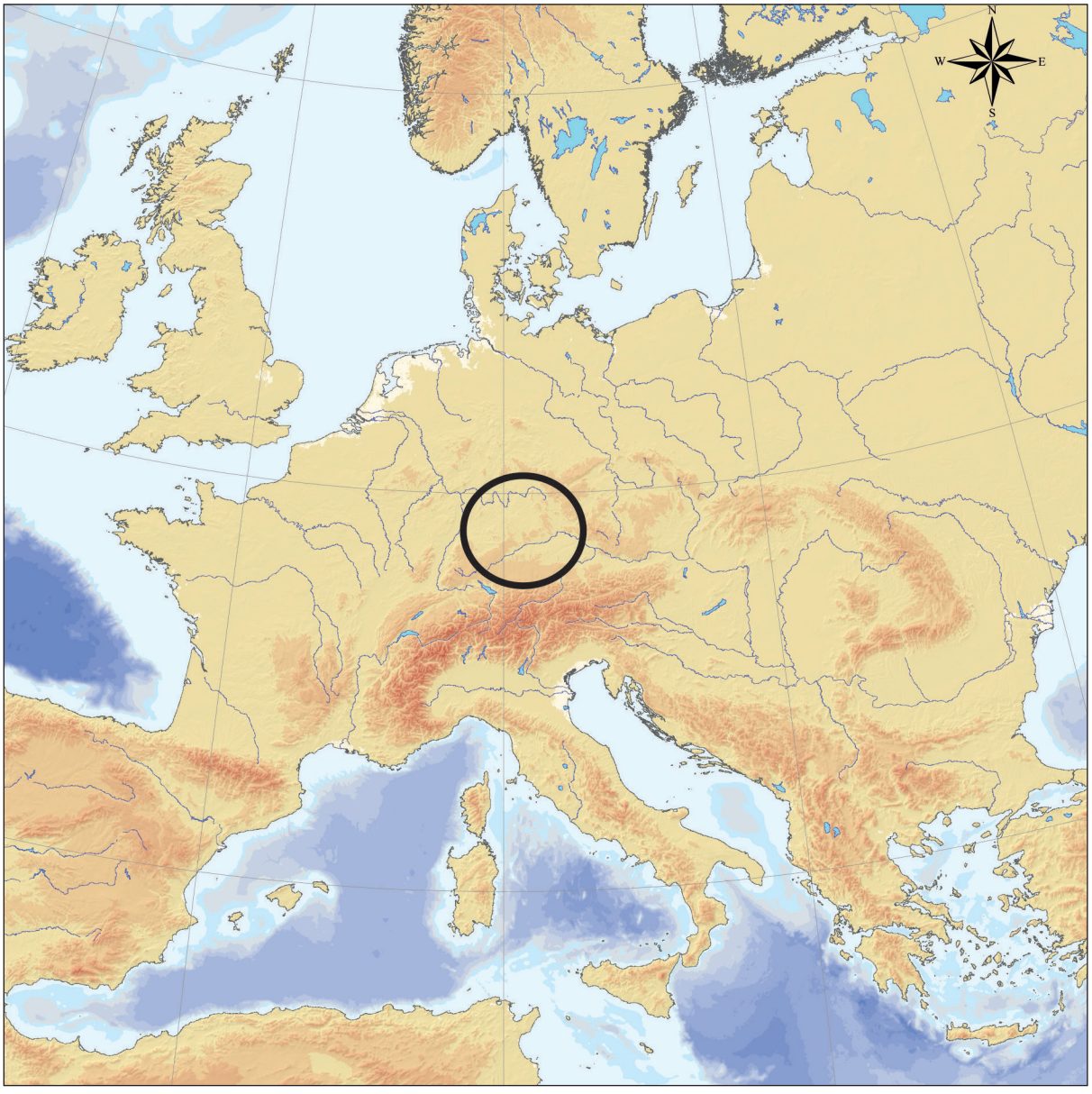

Figure 1.1. *Principal region of study.*

followed Collis (1984) in proposing that early urbanism was based on particular economic roles as originally proposed by Sjoberg (1960) and Smith (1976), many of the current authors emphasise different, more cultural, factors, such as ritual, time, place and knowledge. This approach, in many ways, recalls Wheatley's 1971 and Grimes' 1976 treatment of urbanism, where the first placed ritual at the centre of incipient urban practice and the second theatre at the centre of its ongoing success. It is important to break out of the stranglehold of sociological and functional definitions of urbanism identified by Smith (2007) and consider what is it is to think and feel urban (in the spirit of Sinclair 2010), a much more anthropological and ideological understanding of the urban concept that should be achievable even without the aid of written sources.

The volume starts with two papers which survey the two main periods of potential urbanism. Axel Posluschny examines the traditional model of *Fürstensitze* and questions the unitary approach first proposed by Kimmig (1969). In common with current scholarship, he shows the underlying variability of the main candidates for the status of *Fürstensitze* in the region of modern Germany. In addition, he

stresses probable important factors not included in Kimmig's model, including the presence of underlying ritual and the placing of such significant centres on the boundaries between political communities. His study brings together not only the regional work of the German-funded *Fürstensitze* project, where he played a substantial role, but also up-to-date work from the *Glauberg*, where he is now based. In this latter case, he proposes that the *Glauberg* developed its importance as a centre of knowledge, as much as a centre of population.

Caroline von Nicolai moves on in time to address the later, *oppida*, period of urbanism and commences by critically reviewing the criteria established to define urbanism by different scholars. In a process parallel to that of Axel Posluschny, she takes the debate away from the idealized example of the *oppidum*, *Manching*, to consider a range of other urban candidates in modern Bavaria, and, by these means, substantially enriches the debate. Bavaria appears to have a particularly high level of variability and instability compared with other more northerly and westerly regions in modern France and the borders with modern Germany. Ritual origins also appear to have been less important, with the possible exception of *Manching*.

Gerd Stegmaier builds on the analysis of this later period by showing the presence of two alternative strategies of nucleation and decentralization which, in contrast to the received view, were both practised at the same time. It is particularly apposite that the strategy of decentralization was practised in the very same region of the *Heuneburg*, where centralization had for a time operated in the first phase of the Iron Age.

Günther Wieland considers the alternative reality to the nucleation of *oppida*, by assessing the role of distinctive square enclosures or *Viereckschanzen*. He explores the changing interpretation of these structures (cf Bradley 2003), concluding that many dimensions (practical and ritual) were embedded one within another. He also emphasizes the territorial exclusivity of the *Viereckschanze* and *Oppidum* model of settlement organization, suggesting the presence of different contemporary trajectories of political organization.

Ines Balzer addresses the other dimension of urbanism generally (but not exclusively) located outside the nucleated area (contra *Manching*): the funerary. Processual models of urbanism and state formation have often stressed the close relationship between settlement complexity and social complexity measured by the burial record. Balzer points out the lack of congruence between the sectors of the living and the dead, bearing in mind the exceptional cases of the *Heuneburg* and possibly the *Glauberg*. She allows for the variable state of the archaeological record, and, supported by other authors such as Posluschny, ends by stressing the paradox that large nucleations of population were achieved, at least temporarily, without achieving visible differentiation of wealth in the funerary record on a systematic basis.

Oliver Nakoinz starts by assessing the balance between quantitative and qualitative measures of urbanism, concluding that both are required. He then turns to the specifics of a quantitative approach applied to the *Heuneburg*, including Agent Based Modelling. In common with his earlier publications, he concludes that the *Heuneburg* was a network gateway, lacking proper hierarchical structures, politically sensitive and thus vulnerable to slight perturbations in the natural environment, leading to short term cycles of nucleation and dispersal. He works towards a quantitative anthropology of network interaction that runs independently alongside the work of Boissevain (1964; 1992), as discussed below.

The Urbanism of temperate Europe has traditionally been considered in the shadow of the Mediterranean. Katya Winger elegantly turns this on its head by comparing the *Heuneburg* and *Athens*, *Manching* and *Rome* in their own terms, revealing unexpected parallelisms that deconstruct the primacy of the Classical World. The Mediterranean world has always been confident in the deployment of the term urban, because it is a concept emic to Mediterranean culture. Studies of the temperate European Iron Age have been more cautious, because the etymology of urban is external, but the balance is now redressed. However, this similarity is also built of qualitative and quantitative difference. In qualitative terms, the societies were very different, and this divergence led to a major quantitative difference, namely their delicate trajectory, which, as already mentioned, was fragile in terms of its durability.

The volume closes with some reflections from Manuel Fernández-Götz, Colin Haselgrove, Anthony Snodgrass and Peter Wells. These scholars were chosen to reflect different points on the intellectual compass and, at the risk of following a Greek model, appear in alphabetical order. Manuel Fernández-Götz, the younger scholar, combines a German, Spanish and recently Scottish heritage. Colin Haselgrove has a perspective from the West. Anthony Snodgrass brings (as he explicitly states) a southern Mediterranean viewpoint into the equation. Peter Wells, while a very experienced fieldworker and scholar of German urbanism, also introduces a transatlantic Anglo-Saxon dimension.

Manuel Fernández-Götz chooses to deconstruct the primacy of the Mediterranean, emphasizing its parallel development, while pointing out the heterogeneity of urbanism on a broader global basis. He also

usefully emphasizes the variability of nucleation, a point stressed by Roland Fletcher in the many levels of density of the urban form (Fletcher 2007; 2009; 2012). As he indicates, one function of apparent open space may, however, have been for the temporary assembly, a delicately articulated nucleation in itself, of large numbers of the community for special collective practices that forged a deeper identity of their urban life.

Colin Haselgrove emphasizes diversity of terminology and pattern, elucidated by taking a sufficiently broad contextual approach to the study of urbanism, although, like many scholars of temperate Europe, he worries about making direct comparisons with the Mediterranean. He notes that some of this context, namely the regional dimension, is lacking in comparison with other regions of Europe, such as England, France, and one can also add Italy and Greece, where developer funding or systematic survey have added the 'rural' dimension in sufficient quantity to allow big data (e.g Bradley et al. 2015; Palmisano et al. 2017) to override the standard sampling problems of archaeology. Context also entails placing urbanism in comparison with contemporary developments which show the importance of unenclosed agglomerations and polyfocal nucleations.

Anthony Snodgrass develops the issue of the Mediterranean comparison, by pointing out that the narrow definition of urbanism from that historical source can no longer hold ground. He continues by looking at the historical trajectory of urbanism, distinguishing those zones which already had urban life when the Romans later incorporated the landscape and those that did not. History is thus brought back into the study of urbanism.

Peter Wells concludes the review of the papers in the volume by developing four themes – ritual, design, communication, and interregional integration – where the centrality of Germany within the continent of Europe allows the modern region to play a major role. In his treatment of ritual, he emphasizes the institutionalization of ritual which might have provided a cohesive focus of the newly agglomerated societies. In his reference to design, he raises the question that new concepts of design, detectable in material culture, may have accompanied the new social and political formations that were embedded in changing forms of urbanism. In a parallel raising of issues, his mention of communication penetrates the matter of how more closely nucleated communities were able to interconnect, particularly since writing (at least in its Mediterranean form) was not visibly present. Finally, he echoes the words of many of the contributors by stressing that the pre-Roman German experience of urbanism can only be fully understood by a broad inter-regional comparison, that demonstrates the interlinked diversity of the urban form.

These papers take the study of temperate European urbanism many strides forward into a proper comparative framework that elucidates deeper characteristics of what it is to be urban.

One feature that still needs further analysis is the characterization of the society of the period. The identity of the communities involved was very probably situational rather than hierarchical (Carr and Stoddart 2002: 328). One way forward is to draw on ethnographic comparisons such as those offered by Mary Helms (1998) for the definition of aristocrats. For her the key elements are: Exceptional access to and identification with contexts of the cosmological, sources and origins; Detailing and recording the nature of time; Extending cosmographical contacts and acquisitional activities; Long distance travel; Trade; craft production incorporating the encouragement of development of the creative arts, especially as they relate to regalia and ceremonials; Incorporation of affines; services; Marriage; Political ideological generosity. All these elements are very different from a traditional definition of urbanism, but interconnect readily with many of the features identified in first millennium BC society in the current geographical region of Germany. Aristocracy was thus an unstable living practice that needed constant *living* reinforcement, carrying in life an influence that could not necessarily be transferred between generations. This may explain two key interconnected features of the social formula of the period: the lack of a consistently conspicuous funerary record (and a record which when conspicuous was already robbed and contested in antiquity) and the diverse site biographies of the relatively short lived agglomerations or nucleations of population (that themselves suffered archaeologically visible reversals) (cf Fernández-Götz & Ralston 2017). These factors also explain the degree of ritual iconoclasm (if not too modernist a term) that is visible at *Vix-les Herbues* in France and the *Glauberg* in Germany.

Dynamic cycles of centralization and decentralization took place in both the Mediterranean and in temperate Europe (Stoddart 2010; 2016), but, whereas in the Mediterranean, the city centre frequently remained as a fixed point in the landscape, in temperate Europe, the urban centre was much more unstable (Collis 2010; Eller et al. 2012; Fernández-Götz 2014e; Krausse 2008; Salač 2012; Augier & Krausz 2012). The contrast in territorial size proposed by Collis (2014), which emerges out of a simple contrast with the Greek *polis*, is less clear once the variability of other Mediterranean urbanism from Italy is included in the discussion (Stoddart 2016). The well-researched sites of Germany, like the

Heuneburg and *Manching*, where detailed inference can be drawn do not maintain their coherence for more than a few generations. This points, amongst other factors, to social and political structures which were radically different from those of the Mediterranean, where many cities maintained their political coherence for periods in excess of half a millennium, sometimes even elastically reconstituting themselves when deeply threatened by external forces. Ordered succession to political power was much more deeply rooted in some (but not all) Mediterranean urban structures. Some of these political successions were also mirrored by powerful social genealogies (particularly in Etruria and Latium) that contributed to the offices that gave structure to the continuity of the urban form. Some of this information is derived from the written records of the Mediterranean, but other information is embedded in the genealogies of tomb groups. Comparable research on the descent groups of the temperate Iron Age of central Europe, as developed by Bettina Arnold (2002; 2011) and presented here by Ines Balzer, registers the apparently shorter life cycle of political power in these temperate urban communities of pre-Roman Germany. A strict mirroring of political power in the burial record has long since been rejected as a processual rule by archaeologists, but the deployment of materialized memories by Mediterranean urban societies in their cemeteries does contrast with all but the exceptional examples in the record of the cemeteries of the urbanized societies of temperate Europe.

At a broader level the question remains what underlies the difference between delicate and robust urbanism? Axel Posluschny in this volume contrasts the term network with hierarchy. Crumley (1993; Crumley and Marquardt 1988) contrasts the term heterarchy with hierarchy. Even in the relatively modernist times of Horatio Nelson a special term, *interest*, covered the organization of preferment within a complex organization, the British Navy (Sugden 2004). Even in the present day, the stability of complex financial structures is affected by the formation of small-scale social networks (Tett 2010). Helms (1998) and Axel Posluschny in this volume emphasise knowledge and cosmology as key variables of political and social control, rather than the perhaps modernist concept of religion. There is also material evidence of dispersed power in the form of open agglomerations (such as *Bourges* and *Lyons* (Ralston 2010; Fernández-Götz & Ralston 2017), polyfocal settlement and the much discussed *viereckschanzen*. All these elements suggest that the political hold on power, the concretization of succession (Goody 1966; Stoddart in press), was not as institutionalized as was the case in at least some parts of the Mediterranean world.

The way forward is to develop explanatory frameworks which are both quantitative (e.g. Nakoinz this volume) and qualitative (e.g Winger this volume), such as presented by Axel Posluschny in this volume. The qualitative anthropology of Boissevain (1964; 1992), Helms and Goody can inform on the range of means by which ritual, networks and successions of power were orchestrated in societies ungoverned by the political inheritance of Greece and Rome. The quantitative methods of the sciences (e.g. Styring et al. 2017) can help address causal mechanisms, such as climate, carrying capacity and the stress of scale. However, the case can be made that instability was inherent in the social fabric, and thus detectable in their places of agglomeration, without resource to external factors, be they the availability of Mediterranean exchange products or the slight changes in climate or environment.

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Notes

1. urbane: 'classical Latin urbānus (adjective) of, belonging to, or connected with the city (esp. Rome), living in the city, exercising authority, control, supervision, etc., in or over a city, having the style of the city, elegant and sophisticated, (of speakers or writers) polished or elegant in style, smart, witty, (of attitude or demeanour) having a townsman's assurance, free from embarrassment, (noun) city-dweller.' Oxford English Dictionary