

## CHAPTER II

### THE ANCIENT CITY

THE transition from rural to urban life is much the same in all ages. A family, clan, or industrial group forms the beginning. The members are united by racial, religious, or industrial ties. The Pilgrims of Massachusetts were not greatly different from the Greeks and Phœnicians who colonized the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

In very early days the community was united by family or religious ties. The members worshipped a common ancestor; their institutions were religious and patriarchal rather than legal, industrial, and political. Cicero describes the members of a clan as those who could trace their lineage back to a common ancestor, who could claim that their ancestors had all been freemen, and who were still in possession of their full rights. In early days even the right to use the land was enjoyed by the individual only as a member of a clan, for the land belonged to the group as a whole.

#### **The Site.**

The site of early settlements was chosen for protection. It was usually elevated, a place of refuge in case of attack. Into the stockade or walls the cattle were driven in time of danger. From these defences the settlers issued forth to the fields or to

make forays on their neighbors. Such were the hill towns of New England. Such settlements as these were not towns. They were merely agricultural groups who lived about a common centre and worked in the surrounding fields. There was no co-operation, no division of labor, no urban life. Institutions like the church and the market-place later made their appearance. In the ancient city there was a temple, a theatre, and a place for the administration of government. About these institutions the primitive life of the community centred.

Athens was located some distance from the sea for easy defence. The original settlement of Rome was on the Tiber, about fifteen miles from its mouth. Different clans occupied the seven hills, each of which had a citadel as a place of refuge for the settlers on the plains. In the Middle Ages people grouped themselves about the castle or the cathedral. They were retainers, vassals, peasants, serfs. The remains of such castles may still be seen towering high above the river Rhine. This was the origin of most European towns.

During the Middle Ages trade followed well-recognized routes along the Danube and the Rhine from Constantinople to the Atlantic Ocean, along which routes Budapest, Vienna, Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfort, Cologne, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Bruges, Ghent, Hamburg, and Bremen were established. They were trading centres. In time these towns became rich and powerful. Florence, Genoa, Pisa, and Venice became cities of importance because they

commanded the trade of the Orient. The towns of Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands ultimately became free cities. In many instances, especially in Italy, they expanded into states with tributary provinces under their dominion. They even governed distant territories. Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck still survive as qualified city states within the German Empire, and Hamburg still has possessions which are separated from the city proper by a considerable distance. These cities are the only survivals of what was at one time the prevailing city type. They are still city states owing allegiance to the empire alone.

#### **The Modern Town.**

In modern times towns follow the railroads just as they followed the caravan routes during the Middle Ages. Kansas City, Denver, Omaha, a hundred Western cities, owe their origin to the Pacific railroad systems. Towns, too, have sprung up about a particular industry. Lyons, in France, is the centre of the silk industry, Rouen and Lille, of the cotton industry, while the woollen factories are located at Rheims and the fashions at Paris. The great midland cities of England, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Coventry, and Lancaster are wool, cotton, iron, and steel centres. In America proximity to raw materials and good transportation facilities has determined the growth of Pittsburgh, Gary, Cleveland, and Birmingham, while in Germany Essen and the industrial towns of the west have grown in importance for the same reasons.

Other cities owe their origin to waterways and seaport harbors, and as nationalism widens into internationalism the seaport will become the commanding city of the country. London is to-day the capital of the commercial world because England is its clearing-house. In time this ascendancy will pass to New York, where it will in all probability permanently remain. The growth of seaport cities will increase with freer trade and the expansion of the world market. And they rather than industrial or capital cities will be the metropolises of the world.

#### **The Greek City—Athens.**

Greece produced the first great cities of Western civilization. They reached their eminence in the fifth century B. C., when they became the centres of the civilization of the world. The population of Athens was never more than 200,000, of whom 180,000 were slaves.

The city lay about a high plateau on which was erected the Acropolis. Here was the original settlement and the stronghold. Below the hill, on all sides, lay the lower city. To the north of the entrance to the Acropolis was the agora, or market-place. It was filled with booths for traders and was the place for gatherings, parades, and reviews. The market was in full swing by nine o'clock in the morning and continued until noon, when the stalls were removed and the business of the day was over.

“For anyone coming from Asia it seems as if in entering Athens he was coming into an ants’ nest. . . .

It was around the Acropolis that the houses were crowded together and the population always in activity. There wagons were passing to and fro filled with merchandise from the ports or conveying it thither. The streets and public places in which people passed their lives presented a busy and noisy scene. Women as well as men were to be seen in the streets going to the markets, the public games and meetings of corporate bodies. From the earliest hours of the day large numbers of persons might be seen bringing in vegetables, fruit and poultry and crying their wares in the streets.”<sup>1</sup>

### **The Greek Idea of the State.**

Athens, Corinth, Sparta, were more than cities. They were city states; at times powerful empires. Each city was an independent commonwealth, declaring war and making peace. It knew no outside sovereign, no state or nation of which it was a part. It made its own laws and the laws for the surrounding territory. The city was sovereign. In this it differed from the cities of to-day, which are dependent upon the state or the nation, for with us the city is a political agency of a larger community, while the ancient city imposed its will on dependent territory which it held in subjection. Athens extended its sway over the entire Ægean Sea. It became an empire. But it still remained a city state.

In area the city was about the size of an English county. “Ten men,” says Aristotle, “are too few for a city; 100,000 are too many.” According to

<sup>1</sup> *The Habitations of Man in All Ages*, chapter XVII, p. 196; E. Viollet-Le Duc.

Aristotle the state was "an association of similar persons for the attainment of the best life possible." It was a sort of partnership for mutual benefit, the benefits being the safety and comfort of the community. To be a citizen was to have an equal voice in the assembly. If the state was in danger all of the partners must defend it by military services; if it was enriched by conquest all the partners were entitled to the advantages. The promotion of the beautiful was a common concern as was the protection of the common life from violence and injustice. It was not enough for a citizen to vote and pay his taxes. He must be personally active in every civic and military function. He was soldier, judge, and member of the governing assembly, and he must perform these duties in person; he must vote his opinions and express them in the council. He could not act by proxy in either capacity. For this reason, according to the ancients, the ideal city must be limited in population. The citizen, too, must be able to attend on the duties of government frequently, for which reason the city must be limited in area, while the citizen must be endowed with leisure.

The citizen scarcely knew the meaning of personal as opposed to public rights. He was a part of his city as he was a part of his family. And the city was a growth from the family to the clan, and from the clan to the city. But in this transition the relation of the citizen remained much the same. He was still a part of the family with an added reverence for the city. Of individualism, of the sanctity of

private as opposed to public property, there was little conception. The city and the family encompassed the life of the average citizen. This is why ostracism was such a severe penalty.

### **Caste and Citizenship.**

Residents were divided into three classes. First, there were the citizens for whom the state existed. Then there were the slaves attached to their master or to the state but without voice in the government. Finally, there were the resident aliens, who were their own masters, who might be rich and respected, but who enjoyed no voice in the government. They were not eligible to public office, but they paid an annual poll-tax for the privilege of living in the city.

Citizens differed in the amount of their property. Some of them were rich and performed no labor of any kind. Others were of the trading or artisan class. But among the Greeks the ideal citizen was the man of leisure who devoted the greater part of his time to public affairs. He required slaves and laborers to free him from material concerns. Otherwise he would have no time for public duties or to train himself in physical perfection, which the Greeks considered essential to the perfect man.

Citizenship was a matter of birth. The child of a citizen was entitled to be registered in the clan during infancy. At the age of eighteen he presented himself for admission to the roll of adult citizens in one of the local divisions. Here his claims were carefully examined, and if found to be satisfactory he was admitted to full citizenship. He could then marry,

bring an action at law, and enter upon his inheritance.

His life was carefully regulated for him in order that he might become a perfect citizen. From eighteen to twenty he served in the army, after which he could adopt his own career. At the age of twenty he could attend the meetings of the assembly and have an equal vote with all the other members. Until the age of thirty it was considered bad form to speak from the platform, at least until all the seniors had spoken upon the subject. When he reached the age of thirty he was eligible to be a juryman in the law courts, and from this time on his abilities alone determined his eminence as a citizen.

Admission to citizenship was a formal affair. It had to be first proposed at a meeting of the public assembly and later ratified at another assembly. After that an inquiry might be made into the claims and character of the person before the sanction was beyond recall. For the Greeks held citizenship in high honor and they guarded it very jealously.

### **Political Equality.**

The underlying motive of Greek citizenship was equality. The equality was not of wealth but of rights and opportunities, and the state endeavored to preserve this equality by guarding against any undue power by any man or group of men. All citizens were equal before the law; they were equal to enjoy as far as possible every opportunity of legislation, of holding office, and of administering justice. There was great diversity in financial and



social standing, however, some citizens being great estate owners and others small farmers. Some were factory owners, merchants, ship owners, and shopkeepers, while others were artisans, seamen, peasants, and hucksters. The Athenian had a contempt for labor only because it interfered with his leisure time. It left no opportunity for mental and physical culture. There was no titled aristocracy and little social ostentation. The standing of the citizen depended on his social qualifications and refinement. In politics the practice has been described as "one man, one vote, and a perpetual referendum."

#### **Public Architecture a Symbol of the Greek Idea of the City.**

The Greeks took pride in their public structures, in their temples and amphitheatres. From \$30,000,000 to \$35,000,000 was spent on the Acropolis alone, while the men who erected it were content, for the most part, to live in humble homes. The cost of the Propylæa, measured by the purchasing power of money, was about \$7,500,000.

Water was drawn from distant rivers and springs by underground conduits. It was not brought into the individual homes but was carried by slaves from the public springs and fountains. The theatres belonged to the city but were leased out to private managers. On public occasions and religious festivals the theatres belonged to the people and all citizens who applied were allowed admission.

Gymnasia for physical training were scattered about. Round about them were gardens and open

spaces for athletic games. The fields were surrounded with terraces, dressing-rooms, and colonnades, where the older men gathered for discussion while the younger ones participated in the sports. Throughout the city there were colonnades under which the Athenians walked or lounged, protected from the rain and the wind. For the life of Athens was largely a leisure life devoted to politics, the arts, the drama, and philosophy.

Apart from the public buildings and gardens, there was little splendor in Athens. The streets were crowded and narrow. They were dusty and inadequately supplied with water. They were badly paved and were not kept clean or lighted at night. There was no adequate sewage system and garbage was thrown into the streets. Of municipal administration in the modern sense of the term there was no conception.

#### **The Economic Organization of the City.**

Not more than 10 per cent. of the people were free. Approximately 20,000 citizens enjoyed their leisure at the expense of 180,000 slaves, who cultivated the fields, carried on trade, and performed all the clerical and manual work. To be well and strong, to be an athlete, to know philosophy and the drama, to live upon the streets and public places, to discuss the latest oration or engage in public debate on the welfare of the city—this was the normal life of the Athenian in the most brilliant days of Hellas. No other interests were worthy of emulation. Culture, art, and physical well-being were the animat-

ing motives of life. The making of money was as inconsequential among the free Athenians as are the fine arts among us. In this respect our point of view is almost completely reversed, for the ancient Greeks lived for life. The city was the citizen's temple, the abode of his gods, the inspiration of his ambitions.

### Rome.

Rome, like Athens, was a city state. It, too, owed allegiance to no higher authority. Colonists went forth and organized other communities on the Roman model, but they always remained dependent upon the mother city.

The total circumference of Rome in the time of Nero was about twelve English miles. The population was about 750,000 and never exceeded 1,250,000.

Even as late as the end of the republic Rome was a disorderly, congested, unsanitary city. The streets were crooked, hilly, and badly paved. The Rome of Augustus "was a city grown up anyhow." The fashionable street, the Vicus Tuscus, had a pavement of only thirteen and one-half feet wide. There were some long, paved streets in the Campus Martius, but the many hills and valleys made the laying out of splendid roadways difficult. Apparently there was no attempt at an orderly plan until after the great fire in Nero's time.

Building fronts were not uniform with the street line, while the houses were tall and of irregular height. They protruded into the narrow streets and spoiled the architectural effect. Taverns, booths,

shops, and business establishments juttred out into the roadways, which were used by dealers, tradesmen, butchers. Industry was carried on in the midst of traffic, and pedestrians were compelled to get along as best they could. Horace complained of the crowding in the streets, of the turmoil which went on by day and by night. Long before day-break bakers and milkmen began to cry their wares; the workshops added to the noise; heavy wagons, beasts of burden, side by side with pedestrians, peddlers, beggars, snake-charmers, jugglers with trained animals, all were mingled together in the street life of the city. The thoroughfares were so congested that it was necessary to issue orders prohibiting carts and wagons during the day.

### **Housing.**

Only the wealthy lived in separate houses. The mass of the people dwelt in huge tenements called "islands," because they were detached from other buildings and were separated from one another by roadways. These tenements were often three or four stories high; the ground floor was occupied by shops; the upper floors by single rooms with small, irregular windows which looked out upon the street. There was little home life, and the people used their rooms almost solely for eating and sleeping.

The tenements were usually owned by capitalists, and in the early empire most of the lodgings were so cheaply constructed that a few years' rental repaid their cost. Landowners covered the lots with tenements of as many stories as possible; they cut

down the size of rooms and limited repairs just as they do to-day. The partitions were thin and offered little protection from heat and cold.

#### **Police and Health Administration.**

In the early years of the empire Rome had a police force of about 7,000 men which served as a fire brigade. The streets were badly lighted or not lighted at all. Pedestrians carried their own torches, not only for protection but because the roadways were slimy and dirty, while traffic was dangerous to life. According to all accounts the city was badly protected and was the scene of many disorders. Houses were kept closed during the day and slaves were used as night-watchers. Robberies were common. There was still danger from bandits, while the youthful noblemen did not hesitate to engage in marauding excursions at night. The city was also very unhealthy. It was terribly congested, and the network of canals, the overflowing of the Tiber, the frequent famines and plagues produced bad sanitary conditions and a high death-rate.

#### **The Public Baths.**

The bath was a centre of the life of all classes. It is estimated that there were 856 baths in the city in the fourth century, many of which were richly ornamented. The thermal baths of Nero contained 1,600 marble bath seats, while those of Caracalla and Diocletian contained almost twice as many. Here the people gathered for physical exercise, for discussion, for recreation. By bathing twice daily the Roman believed he could double the span of his life.

The baths were filled by a motley crowd; the noise was deafening. Here the philosophers came to argue; here the poets recited their verses; here politicians came to intrigue; here, too, were thieves and pickpockets. An inscription on a gaming-table of this period says: "To hunt, to bathe, to gamble, to laugh, this indeed is to live."

#### **Leisure Life in Rome.**

Life in Rome, as in Athens, was lived out-of-doors. The Forum was the centre of its activities. When a prominent citizen was buried the funeral procession passed through the Forum, where an oration was delivered from the rostrum. Public banquets and gladiatorial combats were held here, while magistrates, statesmen, and even emperors harangued the crowds on public questions. Trials were sometimes held in the Forum, where state questions were discussed and many sanguinary battles fought.

The well-to-do citizens spent their time in politics, in war, in banqueting, and at the baths.

"The public places, gardens, temples, colonnades, and monuments," says Frederic Harrison, "were perpetually thronged with citizens who knew each other by sight and name, who spent their lives in a sort of open-air club, talking politics, art, business, or scandal—criticised Aristophanes' last comic opera and Cicero's furious attack on Clodius. And in the cool of the day they gathered to see the young lads wrestle, race, leap and box, cast the javelin or the stone; and the younger warriors practised feats with their horses or with the spear and the shield.

"The habit of constant discussion and witnessing shows grew on the Greeks, as the habit of bathing

grew on the Romans, until these things became a mania to which their lives were given up. Whole rivers were brought down from the mountains in aqueducts, and ultimately in the Roman empire the city population spent a large part of their day in the public baths—buildings as big as St. Paul's Cathedral and of magnificent materials and adornment—where 5000 persons could meet and take their air-bath in what was club, playground, theatre, lecture-hall and promenade at once.”<sup>1</sup>

### Summary.

Whereas the life of the modern city is essentially industrial and commercial, the life of the ancient city was essentially military and political. The modern city is democratic, while the ancient city was organized on a caste basis. This made leisure possible. Menial labor was performed by slaves, who in the Greek cities were in the great majority. The ideal life was that of a free citizen, able to give himself to war, to politics, to philosophy, and to discussion. These were the main activities of life. And the architecture and the planning of the city reflected the interests of the citizen.

Unlike the modern city, the ancient city was paramount in the lives of the people. Individual rights in the modern sense of the term did not exist. The citizen existed for the city in which he lived and to which he dedicated his services.

The ancient city differed from the modern city politically in that it was an entity in itself. It was a city state. It owed allegiance to no higher power. It did as it chose in all things. As its boundaries widened the new territory remained subject to the city, and whatever its size the city never lost its sovereignty.

<sup>1</sup> *The Meaning of History*, pp. 227, 230.