

**Urban Network Evolutions**  
**UrbNet lecture series at the Danish Institute in Athens**  
**Spring and autumn 2017**

Although the term *globalisation* is a fairly recent articulation in the public debate, characterising the ease with which information and ideas travel across borders, the practice of exchanging products and world views has been a trait of human interaction for thousands of years.

Archaeological evidence suggests that even in ancient times, curiosity led people on long journeys into foreign territory in the search for prosperity. In the course of these explorations, new contact situations occurred, triggering a series of economic, social, cultural and religious practices being shared and adopted – often modified to fit the local contexts. The exchange of values and behaviour among individuals and groups thus allowed new and dynamic urban networks to be formed.

Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet), Aarhus University, presents the lecture series *Urban Network Evolutions* at the Danish Institute in Athens in spring 2017, focusing on the development of urban networks and the way in which urban encounters catalysed societal and cultural changes. During a total of six lectures, the subject of urbanism will be elucidated with reference to different geographical contexts: the Middle East, Africa and Northern Europe – as well as different types of evidence/finds: ceramics, metal and water management. Finally, perspectives will be offered on a new approach to the topic: High-Definition Archaeology.

21st of March 2017

1. *Anomalocivitas: On urban evolutions*

Professor Søren M. Sindbæk

**Abstract:** The archaeology of urbanism has developed with reference to particular emblematic examples: cities of the Bronze-age Near East, the Mediterranean of the classical period, and the Northern Europe high-medieval cities are key points of reference. Urbanism, in this light, has been regarded as nearly synonymous with social complexity and with civilisation. In recent years, a more globally oriented historical and archaeological research has exposed urbanity as a phenomenon that varies widely across time and space, sometimes in surprising ways. Like the palaeontological record abounds in creatures, which defy evolutionary hindsight – such as the famous Cambrian arthropod Anomalocaris, the past is full of extraordinary and surprising urban societies – ‘anomalocivitates’. With a point of departure in archaeological research history, this lecture asks how an increasing body of archaeological evidence can be used to inform more appropriate models. It outlines a vision of urbanism guided by the theory of complex systems: as a cultural attractor through which the practices and routines in different societal trajectories converge on homologous patterns.

16th of May 2017

2. *A new Macedonia? Redefining urban development in Hellenistic North Syria*

Assistant professor Michael Blömer

**Abstract:** Hellenistic North Syria is conceived of as a region shaped by newly founded cities, but our knowledge about the development of urbanism and urban biographies in this region is surprisingly limited. Most studies that aim at giving integrated accounts of urban development rely very much on information gathered from literary sources and draw heavily on analogies and circumstantial evidence. The master narrative developed along these lines is that North Syria has been profoundly transformed by the Seleucid kings, most notably by king Seleucus I, who triggered a large scale urbanisation project that revitalized a largely depopulated region. However, the results of recent archaeological research suggest that the urban landscape of Pre-Hellenistic North Syria was more diverse than previously acknowledged. While some of the North Syrian cities can indeed be regarded as new and dis-embedded foundations, it now seems that most of them developed along individual trajectories rather than reflecting a royal strategy.

6th of June 2017

3. *Bars, coins and scrap: Seaborne connections and urbanising metals*

Assistant professor Thomas Birch

**Abstract:** Metals play an important role in forming distant connections and developing settlements. They often travel along seaborne networks destined for constructing new buildings, monetary circulation and everyday items life. The lecture brings together three different case studies to highlight the catalysing nature of metals and how intimately they are associated with urbanism. The first case study reviews the movement of silver in the western Mediterranean during classical antiquity, necessary for coinage and flourishing cities. The second case study reconstructs the journey of ‘voyage iron’ and other metal ingots from early modern Europe, placing them in their global context. The third study reveals the importance of recycling metals in Iceland during the Viking period, a land with no native metal production other than iron. This disparate assortment of examples aims to highlight the importance of metals in forming maritime networks and shaping urban life.

12th of September 2017

4. *On urban network evolutions: The case of the Decapolis city Gerasa in Jordan*

Professor Rubina Raja

**Abstract:** This lecture will focus on giving an overview of new research undertaken in the well-known Roman to early Islamic-period city Gerasa/Jerash located in modern northern Jordan. The work undertaken by the *Danish-German Jerash Northwest Quarter Project* since 2011 has given priority to understanding one specific area of the city, the highest point within the walled city, prominently located overlooking the Roman-period Artemision. This quarter, comprising approximately 4 hectares of land, has been investigated in order to understand the development of the city within the already known areas and determine whether looking at areas outside of the so-called centre of the city might give insight into urban development processes. The project has yielded fruitful results, including new evidence for the street

layout, domestic housing, water management in the periods from the 1st century AD into the mid-8th century AD, when a devastating earthquake hit the region, and activity in the Northwest Quarter came of a halt.

3rd of October 2017

5. *Water and urban resilience: Geoarchaeology of African early towns*

Assistant professor Federica Sulas

**Abstract:** The interplay between water and societies is a long-standing topic of archaeology, particularly within research on the rise and demise of past civilisations from the hydraulic engineering of Minoan cities to the water supply networks of early Roman towns. In Africa, water-stress and climate change have long been linked to the development of early urbanism. Previous studies have emphasised a linear, causal relation between rainfall patterns and urban dynamics: increased rainfall sustaining urban growth, prolonged low or failing rains leading to the collapse and abandonment. However, there is now increasing evidence that past urban societies developed different solutions to access, manage and deal with multiple forms of water. Drawing from recent and ongoing research, this lecture will employ a high-definition approach to discuss urban water systems at three early towns (1st–2nd mill. AD): Aksum in the northern Ethiopia, Uguja Ukuu on Zanzibar Island, and Great Zimbabwe on the Zimbabwe Plateau. These examples offer different trajectories of urban development in regions associated with chronic water stress in the past and today. By combining environmental proxies and archaeological records, the lecture will discuss the role of water in urban resilience and its relevance to contemporary debates on sustainable water systems.

7th of November 2017

*Public space and urban networks in the ancient world - Hellenistic and Roman Messene as a case study*

Assistant Professor Christopher Dickenson

**Abstract:** In Hellenistic and Roman times the appearance of the public spaces of Greek cities changed dramatically becoming increasingly monumental and more specialized in function. Modern scholars have been keen to interpret these changes as the result of broader political developments and, in particular, the influence of kings and emperors. There is thus a recognition that cities changed because they were part of a larger system, yet the mechanism by which that change occurred has been explained in rather simplistic top-down terms. There is little room in this vision for local agency, divergent uses of public space by diverse groups within the urban community, or for more complex connections to urban settlements that weren't top down. In this lecture I will make the case for a new way of approaching ancient public space that accounts for one of its key characteristics — and a potential source of tension: that ancient public space was at once intensely local, as somewhere that members of the local population interacted with each other on a daily place, and at the same time was where urban populations were most directly plugged into influences from the larger urban

network of which they were a part. The lecture will focus on a case study for which the archaeological evidence is particularly rich for the Hellenistic and Roman period, Messene in the southwest Peloponnese.