THE CREATION OF THE CITY OF MAN

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"The biblical God is the city's *conditor* because
he created the conditions that made it possible,
conditions which must continue to govern this
human efflorescence that is the city, precisely if
we want it to remain human."

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1. THE ANCIENT PERCEPTION

1.1. The Mesopotamian view

In the early periods of urban life, there was a considerable amount
of reflection on the origins of the city as an institution, but there
was practically no documentary information available. What we
see is an idealization of assumed events, a projection back into a
mythical past of the reality of the city as people perceived it at
their point in time.

A major window onto the Mesopotamian perception of
the city is found in the *Enūma elīš*, the so-called Poem of Cre-
ation. What emerges is the primacy of the city as an institutional
entity. It is a chronological priority, because the city is created by

Marduk before the humans who are to inhabit it. It is a constitu-
tive priority as well, because the city as created might exist as an
entity in itself, a container that has a raison d'être independently
of its content, i.e., the human beings who are to be its citizens.
Within a cosmic mythological landscape, the heavens and the
constellations are created first (*Enūma elīš* v 1–46), followed by
the great waters (v 47–62). The next step is the creation of the
city, seen as Marduk's residence and as the place where all the
gods can have their "homes" and celebrate their festivals:

> 117 Marduk opened his mouth to speak
> 118 addressing the gods his fathers:
> 119 "Above the waters of the deep, the emerald abode, . . .
> 122 I will build a house that may serve as a splendid
>   residence for me. . . .
> 129 I shall call its name 'Babylon,' the 'Home of the
>   Great Gods'
> 130 within it we will hold a festival."

Marduk makes plans to create man, with the specific
purpose to provide religious service within the temples, to pro-
vide for the gods' welfare:

> 5 "I will bring together blood and will fashion a skeleton
> 6 with which to give consistence to a human creature
>   (*lullū*) who will in turn acquire the status of a civilized
>   man (*amēlu*).[1]
> 7 I will create the civilized human (*lullū amēlu*)
> 8 responsible for religious service, so that the gods may rest."

There is an interesting dichotomy in the way in which
actions are announced and then carried out. Marduk says "*I* will
build a house" (122) and "*I* will bring together blood" and "*I*
will create the human man" (5, 7), but in fact he does not do any
of that. It is left for another god, Ea, to create mankind (33) and
for the class of higher gods, the Anunnaki, to actually build the
city of Babylon (59–64). Marduk appears thus as if one degree
removed from the sphere of the other gods: he wills a thing into

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1. The text says literally: "I will cause a *lullū* to stand up, his name will
indeed be *am lu*." But to "cause to stand up" means in effect to constitute into
being, and "to give a name" means to establish the nature of something.

existence, but he leaves it for the others to carry out the task. It is the same with the creation of the city and of mankind: they come into existence in order to facilitate the life of the gods. What matters is the institution: the gods as a social group, the city as the receptacle that makes religion possible.

The wording of the creation of man by Ea is interesting:

33 From his blood (of the slain god) he fashioned the
    civilized human kind (*amēlūtum*)
34 imposing the service of the gods and thus setting the
    gods free.

The word for "civilized human kind" (*amēlūtum*) is an abstract in Akkadian, just as in English. It derives from the noun *amēlum*, which refers specifically to a civilized human being, as distinct from a barbarian. The proper humans are the ones who live in cities, and there is a specific reason that is implied for this in the *Enūma elīš*: they must be able to serve the gods in their temples, which are found only in cities, not outside of them. We may say that a human (*lullū*) is not properly a man until he lives in the city, at which point he becomes an *amēlu*. Hence the curious composite *lullū amēlu* ("civilized human") which means, precisely, a human creature that has become city bound.

This is brought out forcefully in the first tablet of the epic of Gilgamesh, where Enkidu is created directly by the mother goddess from clay (i.e., he is not born from normal parents), and as such he lives at first as a plain human creature (a *lullū*, Gilg. I 185, 192). He then goes through a complex naturalization process, as a result of which "he turned into a man" (*awīliš iwē*, Gilg. P 108[2]).

The contrast between the civilized human or *amēlu* and a "barbarian" is also brought out by the view that the Mesopotamians have of the Amorites. Of them it is said, disparagingly, that they do not know the city and do not know a house (because they live in tents), and also that they do not bend their knee in properly established religious rites and have no burials. They are not qualified as *lullū*, but it is said that they are "a ravaging people, with canine instincts, like wolves."

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2. This passage occurs only in the Old Babylonian version of Gilgamesh, and in this dialect the form of the word for "civilized man" is slightly different: *awīlum* instead of *amēlu*.

The central point that is of interest to us, then, is that the Mesopotamian city is created as an institutional entity that confers dignity on the people who live in it. The *amēlu* is such as a result of living in the city; he is "civilized" in the etymological sense of the word. The full human status is achieved not as a result of the physical act of creation, not at the moment when the "biological" man is brought into existence. It is achieved, rather, when this physical creature is inserted into the fabric of the city: humanization is taking place only then, at the moment when a man becomes, properly, a "civilized human."

There are a few instances in Mesopotamian literature that suggest a reflection on civilized life somewhat at variance with the prevalence of the system over the person. I will mention only one. A central theme in the epic of Gilgamesh is, precisely, the nature of civilization, as is seen already in the beginning episode I just mentioned about Enkidu. The last episode shows us Gilgamesh who meets the one man who has escaped death and who lives now in a state of blessed immortality. What is significant for our purposes is that this man does not live in isolation, because his wife lives with him and plays an important role in the story, as per the words of the god Enlil:

> 203 "In the past, Ut-napishti was of human kind (*amēlūtum*)
> 204 now Ut-napishti and his woman have become just like
>   us gods:
> 205 Ut-napishti will settle far away, at the mouth of the rivers"

This couple emerges as if a specular image of the human couple in Genesis. It is specular not only because Ut-napishti and his "woman" have indeed become like gods (in Gn 3:5 this is instead the deceptive serpent's promise), but more importantly because the Mesopotamian couple is not at the origin of the human community. It is rather as if at the end of history, a sublimation that has escaped the system.

1.2. The biblical view

In contrast with the Mesopotamian view, the biblical notion of creation places the individual first. The dimension of community derives from the interaction of these individuals, specifically a man

and a woman. It is they who create the community, rather than having a preset organism, the city, within which the individuals are then encased. Thus, the notion of a creation of the city is essentially Mesopotamian, not just because it comes first, in the chronological scheme of mythology, but especially because it is at a higher structural level than the individual person. The contrast with the biblical world view is enlightening on both counts.

The perspective on divine initiative sets the tone. Marduk arrives secondarily at the creation of Babylon, first because it comes after a fight that threatens his own existence, but especially because the city is a remedy to a pre-existing situation: the need of a venue that provides something to the gods. This signals a certain distance between the "creator" and his product, a distance that is even heightened by the fact that Marduk is not involved directly in the creation process: he announces it, but the execution, of both the city and the individual human beings, is left to other gods. The contrast with the biblical narrative is clear. Here there is a direct divine initiative that is not spurred by any other event, but rather arises out of nowhere and without any particular justification. Just as significantly, the nature of divine agency requires no intermediaries, and there is not even a suspicion of a divine diminishment as a result of God's direct involvement in carrying out his plan. While Marduk's position is strengthened by his distance from what he creates, the biblical God's very immediate closeness to his creatures seems to heighten, paradoxically, his distance from them: what emerges is that the closeness is all the more precious precisely because of the unfathomable distance out of which the fact of creation erupts.

The perception of the nature of the target, i.e., the object of creation, is as important as that of the nature of the agent. In the first case, the stress is on the institution in all its impersonality. We have seen this take shape in four distinct ways: 1) the priority of the city over the person, 2) the abstract qualification of mankind (*amēlūtum*) as the issue of the creative act, 3) the creation of religion as a system based in the urban context, and 4) the fact that there is a two-stage process from a biological to a cultural entity (*lullū* to *amēlu*). Here again the contrast with the biblical perception is striking.

1) In the biblical narrative, not only is the city not created as such by God, but in fact, it comes later in time and is

entirely a human product. It is not culture that defines man, but the opposite, man who defines culture. The city as the highest crystallization of this culture, and its political dimension as a territorial state, is fashioned very late in the political consciousness of ancient Israel, and the construction of the temple in Jerusalem emerges in a wholly reverse order vis-à-vis the creation of Babylon as a temple city: this one is created by Marduk as the paramount object of his creation project, whereas the biblical God even resists the idea that a temple should be built for him. In this light, we could read the account in 2 Samuel 7 (and 1 Chr 17) as counteracting the Babylonian account in the *Enūma elīš*.

2) It could never be said of the biblical God that he created "mankind." The personal dimension is dominant, not only because the first two individuals are named (however emblematic the names may be in their meaning), but especially because they have a story, and a very rich one at that. It is the story of their reciprocal interaction, and the story of their interaction with the creator, with whom they speak in a personal way. The narratives are extensive and engaging: they define the characters with a vitality that certainly contributed to the impact that the figures of the "progenitors" have had over centuries of Jewish and Christian imagination, an impact that one can hardly imagine if the story of Genesis were about "mankind" as a non-descript and generic entity.

3) Nor can it be said that the biblical God creates "religion." That is the case in Mesopotamia, where Marduk establishes religion as a support system for himself and the other gods. They need the service of the temple as set up in the city: in this perspective, human beings are the servants who perform rituals to make up for a deficiency. This is not the "religion" envisaged in the Bible, where man and woman are not created as needed servants, a notion that remains extraneous even in the complex of rigorous regulations of the "law" as laid out especially in Leviticus. The constitutive dimension of the "law" remains that of helping humans in relating to God, not in providing a service without which God would be at a loss.

4) The first two humans emerge from the start as, precisely, fully human. Far from being biological specimens in search of further definition, they are presented as whole human beings. Not that they exclude the growth and evolution of culture; far

from it. But they are agents of culture in the same way that all subsequent individuals of their species will be. This is the biblical view: the human consortium extends in time back to its beginnings, vertically, just as it includes horizontally the most diverse human experiences at any given moment in time. "Humanity" is set in motion not as an abstract entity, but as embodied in individuals who are responsible from the beginning for its concrete actualization in history.

These factors were an essential constitutive element of the biblical ethos of creation which runs deep throughout the cultural development of ancient Israel. This was obviously unimaginable in Mesopotamia, where the distance of the creator deity and the impersonality of the target of creation made it impossible to view the world in a state of constant dependence on the one who had set it in motion. Or rather: the Mesopotamian creation ethos is implicit in the fact that the institution rules our lives, and our being firmly embedded in it reminds us at all times of our dependence on it. It is a dependence on creation via the city that has been created first, but it differs sharply from the biblical view because it does not presuppose a live agent, unpredictable and free. The Mesopotamian creation ethos points to a system; the biblical creation ethos points to a person.

2. BEFORE THE CITY

2.1. Upstream perception: tensionality and control

Both the Mesopotamian and the biblical perceptions of the city were extrapolated from the reality of the city as the people knew it at their respective times. They had no knowledge of any kind of the historical processes that in fact brought the reality in which they lived into existence. So the stories about origins are an idealization of their thought about the conditions they knew from their experience at the time. The description of origins is in fact a retrojection of the then current situation. This is of course of great interest as a window into their experience, and since this experience has contributed to shaping our own, it tells us much about the origins of our own perception. If it is not a story about

the origins of their perception, it is a story about the origins of
ours today.

In fact, we now know what they did not. The story of
the creation of the city of man can now be traced in ways that
were unimaginable until a short while ago. And we must reach
behind the crystallization that had taken place in the early his-
torical periods, which we have just seen, in order to deepen our
understanding of the origins and therefore of the nature of the
city as we live it today. We will look at three major moments,
which are extremely revealing in spite of their great remoteness
in time. 1) The first goes back to about 60,000 years ago, when
articulate language and logical thought erupted as a wholly new
way to handle the world of human perception. 2) Around 6000
BC, there was a climax in a process that defined the ability to
regulate food production by farming and, at the same time, by
domesticating certain animal species, in particular sheep and
goats. This went hand in hand with the establishment of perma-
nent settlements, which were physically at the center of this pro-
duction chain. 3) By 3000 BC, the breaking down of the barrier
of face–to–face association made it possible for a geometric in-
crease not so much of the demographic consistency of the group,
as rather of the complexities of the social, political, economic,
and cultural dimension of the human group. It was, indeed, the
birth of the city.

Two main points need stressing at this juncture. They
are relevant for the larger concerns of our ideal symposium in this
issue of *Communio* because they speak directly to the impact that
the urban construct still has on humans: its constitutive elements
as we live them today are firmly rooted in these early beginnings,
and can be more easily discerned precisely because we can align
them along the historical trajectory that leads directly to us.

The first is that these three stages tell us about a progres-
sive coalescing of the tensional factors that hold a human group
together. There is an ability in humans to bond as a group on the
basis of factors that transcend the contingent, the here and now.
This is in fact present already with the hominins who vastly ante-
date the temporal frame we are considering now, but it is within
this frame that it becomes more and more apparent. "Tensional-
ity" means that members of the group tend toward each other in
ways that are not restricted to the physical dimension, and which

therefore can be denied and averted. The awareness of belonging together depends on hidden filaments that are not mechanically imposed on the individual, however heavy their weight may actually be.

Related to this notion of tensionality is that of control. Precisely because the "filaments" are, we may say, discretionary, it is possible to exercise a form of control over them that is not possible when bonding factors are physically determined, as we see happening for instance within a beehive. A given bee cannot exercise any degree of control upon the "social" organism to which it belongs, cannot alter it, cannot take "personal" advantage from it, cannot modify it at will. Such degrees of control are instead the hallmark of human communities, with the earliest cities documenting the most dramatic jump, one that more than justifies the term of urban "revolution."

We saw that the earliest historiographies could not record this process because they had no insight whatsoever on the documentary basis we now know so well. But it seems inescapable that there should have been some degree of awareness of these processes as they were taking place in the pre-urban period, even though they could not of course come to be crystallized in any sort of systemic reflection. We can attribute this degree of awareness in particular to the leadership: only so could it steer the process in a direction that was to its own advantage, but that, at the same time, would nurture the success of the whole process.

It is in this light that we can now look at the process that led to the creation of the city of man.

2.2. 60,000 BC: The conceptual transfiguration of reality

The question of the origin of language is highly debated, but it does not concern us here. I agree with the position that sees it as a rapid, or even sudden transformation, but the argument I am developing here would stand even if this process had been slow and gradual. What matters for this argument is that language was from the beginning coterminous with two fundamental dimensions: one, there came into existence a categorization system that could fragment reality into perceived component parts, and, two,

these parts could be rearranged according to patterns that did not necessarily match those given in nature.

I have called this a "transcendental" revolution. The categorization system provided a verbal/conceptual overlay on reality that endowed the process of referentiality with a wholly new power: one could refer to elements in nature not only without having them physically present, but also by breaking down an entity into component parts that were referentially distinct: a forest, a tree, a branch, a leaf.

If this referential process tells us about the ability to designate individual elements, even more revolutionary was the ability to link them logically and thus to reshape their organization. One could link elements that were not contiguous in either space or time: the first documented case, the earliest example of which dates back to about 40,000 years ago, is the lunar calendar, where the waxing and waning of the moon is represented graphically, implying that one could refer to twenty-nine different variants of the moon without ever having them contiguous to each other in the sky. There was, in other words, an understanding of the process as evidenced through a cycle. The cycle is indeed in nature, but its reification in words and in a syntactical arrangement transcends any contingent observation.

A core mental construct that had already characterized the pre-linguistic era of hominin development was the sense of structure. It is documented through the level of spatial competence that even the simplest lithic tools require to be produced and reproduced, in quantities, with variations which may be "-etically" conspicuous, but which fall within the same "-emic" coherence. With language and logical thought the sense of structure makes a quantum leap forward. The lunar calendar gives evidence of this, and so do the impressive cave paintings, the earliest of which date back to slightly later than the earliest lunar calendar.

2.3. 6000 BC: Systemic controls over nature

Without such a conceptual reorganization of the world, agriculture would not have been possible. The link between the seed and the plant can only be objectified if one has the correspond-

ing word/concept for each, and the ability to establish a logical link between them. The discovery of such new competence extended, beyond the botanical, to the biological and the chemical sphere, as represented by the domestication of animals and the production of pottery. The change, occurring as it did over a relatively short period of time, is called the agricultural or Neolithic revolution. It is the marked beginning of man's wholesale manipulation of nature, which leads ultimately to present-day ecological concerns. The "humanization" of Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh may contain a reflection of this, as well as the Genesis account of Adam's banishment from a world of innocence, which was characterized by food gathering, to a world where the tilling of the soil is conceived of as a curse.

The returns were incalculable, and a number of points are especially relevant for us here.

The first is that bringing these processes to a successful issue provided a strong validation of the conceptual procedures that had preceded them, and thus it induced a strong sense of confidence in the very ability to redefine reality. Having conceptualized nature, humans could now reshape the very workings of nature. And this was systemic, not casual or anecdotal. It is this aspect, the development of a *systemic* approach to controls, that is particularly significant. It required on the one hand deliberate planning, and thus some degree of consciousness of what the process entailed. On the other, it fostered the development of a *tradition*, whereby the handing down of articulate knowledge served to define the process and the actors. This would have entailed a major realignment of mental structures: for, how could one look at the world in the same way as before, now that the world was beginning to show very visibly such a new imprint of human activities capable of transforming the physical reality from within?

This in turn altered the relationship to the landscape, with which wholly new ties came to be established. By "conquering" the environment, humans came to "belong" to it, through a relationship of strong mutual dependence. People "settled down" not only in the sense that they now began to build houses, i.e., physical structures within which to live, structures that were tied to a given terrain and its climate and potentials. They also settled down in the sense that this physical setting became a "territory,"

their territory. They clustered in manmade structures where the physical agglomeration of individual houses, the villages, provided a visual confirmation of the coherence of the human group that inhabited them.

In contrast with the Paleolithic period, there developed a strong cultural dynamism, created by both centrifugal and centripetal forces. Centrifugal—because the human groups tended to break away from each other and to develop more localized or regional cultures. Centripetal—because these more diversified human groups tended at the same time to look for one another, and to constitute a network of relationships, enriching themselves through their own diversity. The social "alterity" that was largely missing in the earlier nonsedentary setting began now to take shape. Territoriality enhanced group identity, within and without the group—within because stability was adding the familiarity with a certain type of built environment that helped define the group, and without because physically distinctive clusters of traits can be associated with the "other" as much as with the "self."

3. 4000 BC: THE URBAN REVOLUTION

3.1. The role of function

Out of this there developed a wholly new dimension in personal interaction, so new in fact that it came to serve in many ways as a surrogate for the proper personal aspects of human relationships—function. I consider this to be a major springboard that catapulted human social clustering into the domain of the city and the state. The concept of function arose, I submit, within the long time span that bridged the period we have just reviewed, from the beginning of articulate speech and from the discovery of more complex tools down to the agricultural revolution. It arose as certain aspects of human interaction acquired an existence of their own, independent of the subjects of such interaction.

It may help our understanding of the notion of function if we relate it to that of service. This can be seen as a systemic mechanism for catering to the needs of diverse people within the

group. The systemic aspect is fundamental because it implies that a specific service is presupposed as essential for the very existence of the social group as, precisely, a system, whether or not one knows the person who can provide the service. In other words, one expects the group as such to be endowed with the results of the various types of service; there is in effect a layering of presuppositions, since services come to presuppose other services in a nested sort of progression. One expects a potter, even if one does not know him personally; and one can relate to him within the larger framework of available services, meaning that a potter exists inasmuch as he, in turn, can depend on a smith, a mason, a scribe, and so on. The service is the operation, the function is the slot that makes this operation possible within a balanced system of reciprocal relationships.

Thus, rather than relying on occasional moments or circumstantial services, there developed the perception that human interaction was permanently served by specific functional slots. These existed regardless of who filled them, to some extent even regardless of whether or not they were filled. For instance, a potter's workshop would supply clients with pots out of a stock that was expected to be there, regardless of who the potter was, and even regardless of whether any potter was there or not.

Clearly, then, functional slots were not perceived in isolation but as subsets of a larger system that came to regulate more and more the very subsistence of the group and of the individuals within it. This began a marked process of depersonalization in human interaction, because one could perfectly well relate to a function bypassing the person. Obviously the function had to be filled by a person, but the dynamics of the interaction between the function holder and his interlocutor did not depend on the personal quality of either.

This depersonalization of the individual in favor of his functional role reached its highest, or lowest, level with the introduction of slavery, which goes hand in hand with the beginning of cities and of civilization. There may well have been cases of oppression of one individual by another at any given time in prehistory. But it would have depended on specific individual traits (such as weakness versus strength), and not on a systemic application of the principle of the functional overlay, which applied across the board: it was the system that could force a man

into slavery, not the quality of a given individual. Slavery is in-
deed the most extreme system of systemic functionalization of a
human being.

3.2. What is a city?

The functional dimension may thus be considered as the prima-
ry marker of a city. In the light of what we have seen, a defini-
tion of "city" that would subsume both ancient and modern en-
tities would stress the notion of *group solidarity based on a network
of systemic presuppositions of broadly tensional, territorially contiguous,
impersonal human functions*: (1) there is a *network* of functions that
spreads across the social group: they are not found as a whole in
any single human being, and each functional slot presupposes
the others (not every human being is a potter, but every potter
presupposes a smith, etc.); (2) the functions are s*ystemic* because
they are presupposed, in their particularity, as part of the larger
network within which only they can exist (seeing the skyline
of a city tells a visitor that that is a system where he will find a
potter); (3) they are *tensional* in the sense that they hold together
in balance a widely scattered human group (I may not know the
person of the potter, but I know that within this group there
will be sufficient potters to justify competition, though not so
many to make their individual survival impossible); (4) they are
contiguous to the extent that they are to be found side by side
within the same physical settlement (the potter's workshop is
part of the mental map of any inhabitant of the city); (5) and
they are *impersonal* because they are not based on the personality
of their carriers (the potter will sell his wares to customers he
does not know).
        Such a definition effectively subsumes ancient and mod-
ern models. Just as significantly, it distinguishes sharply the city
from the villages. It is not paradoxical to say that a city at the
dawn of the urban revolution is closer to our industrial cities than
it is to the villages of the pre-urban era. And it is just as important
to stress the difference between such villages and a village of the
urban era: the latter is in fact part of the urban network, since it
depends on the urban functional network and it operates with
urban categories. We may call it "para-urban" because even the

smallest hamlet depends on the technical, economic, legal, and political system that is centered in the city.

The result of the long process that had led to the establishment of the city was to prove irreversible. This was because of the interlocking relationship between the functional system we have just seen and demographic growth, to which we must now turn our attention.

3.3. Breaking the barrier of face-to-face association

Archaeologically, the sharp break characterized by the urban revolution is documented by a cluster of elements of material culture that appear together in the fourth millennium, including large-scale settlements, monumental architecture, metallurgical production, and written texts. All of this gives clear evidence of a major and relatively sudden increase in the size of human settlements: it shows a coordination of the available space according to a hierarchy of architectural, and functional, levels, with nonrandom clustering of types of buildings. Very meaningful is the explicit demarcation of the human settlement by means of a highly marked perimeter in the form of city walls: they define the edge of solidarity of a well-defined human group. Demographic growth is, in other words, both the cause and the effect of the urban revolution: the city entails a large number of individuals, and a large number of individuals need an urban setting to be able to function as a group.

But what does "large" exactly mean in our context? It is generally assumed that a fairly large early city could house about 20,000 individuals within its walls: a large number, yes, but not in comparison to our cities, or even major cities of the ancient world. So, why is such a relatively small demographic density sufficient to claim that it was the signal of an epochal revolution? The reason can be found in an even smaller number. A threshold of about 3,000 individuals is sufficient to prevent individuals within the group from knowing each other personally. And yet these individuals hold together *as if they knew each other*. We know the answer to this apparent conundrum: the individuals know each other *through the function* they hold. They know without knowing: that is the paradox of the city. To be "pre-urban"

means essentially to be unable to relate to individuals that are not known personally, on a face-to-face basis. And this was acceptable as long as the group was "small." Which means, obviously, that we have the answer to our question as to what does "large" mean: it is the limit or the barrier beyond which personal contacts are insufficient to maintain group cohesion. In this perspective, anything above 3,000 individuals is a city.

The new mental structures that this entailed were momentous. The notion of tensionality which I have invoked earlier becomes clear in its import: individuals are now linked to each other through the overarching framework that makes it possible for them to "function." There is a solidarity in the group that transcends personal acquaintance. Reciprocal trust is inferred from knowing that one is embedded in the same system as the other, it is not necessarily derived from previous personal knowledge of the reliability of the other.

3.4. *The socio-economic dimension*

A number of factors were built into this wholly new construct, and became operative from the very beginning. The common thread is the ever-wider application of the sense of structure that, we have seen (2.2), was determinant for hominin and then human progress. If it is possible to perceive and exploit the overarching scheme of the functional framework, it is on account of its inner structure, which is human made and thus open to human controls.

1) Managerial coordination: since at least the time of the beginning of language and logical thought, humans had learned to refer to data through the new verbal/conceptual overlay that had become possible. This gave them the power to control data referentially, i.e., without having the data physically present. The functional organization of society had the same effect, at the nth power. And it gave an advantage to those who could better see the larger picture: they could plan and manage, on the basis of their knowledge of the framework, its functional slots and the way they related to each other. This made planning possible on a large scale, and it also created a system for delegating authority by earmarking intermediate slots as levels of interaction. Writing

was the tool that added immense power to this whole enterprise (see below, 3.6).

2) Professional differentiation and social stratification: We have already seen how craft specialization was an inherent factor of differentiation: a potter would not be a smith or a scribe, but each would presuppose the other. The more complex the crafts, the greater was the divide among them, and this had two important consequences. First, there was an accumulation of culture, because each profession resulted in a class by itself, within which the craft could be taught and handed down. Second, given the complexity of the mechanisms that characterized each profession, the level of opacity grew immeasurably, the case of writing being the most illustrious example. Along with differentiation went stratification, meaning that wealth and status grew to degrees that were unimaginable only a few centuries earlier.

3) Legal formalization of relationships: Whereas, within a society based on face-to-face association, human relationships were regulated by simple shared principles, the new urban framework required the establishment of a juridical system to which one could have objective recourse. This introduced also a distinction between the private and the public sphere, which was unnecessary in a pre-urban setting.

4) Industrialization of production: I use the term to refer to the segmentation of procurement, production, and marketing of goods. Five major side effects are in evidence. 1) No single segment can control the entire process. Hence effective control over the process is in the hands of a few who do have the oversight and who control the flow from one segment to the other. These are individuals who have technical and/or coercive skills and mechanisms at their disposal, such as merchants or political leaders. Clearly, this was a major springboard for the accumulation of individual power and wealth. 2) Any individual within any given segment (especially at the lower levels) can be replaced with relative ease, as the skills are limited to that segment and can be taught through repetition. This, too, makes the personal role less and less unique, and the overarching system correlatively more important. 3) The concept of long-term investment develops. This presupposes a market for goods produced over a longer period of time or obtained from greater distances, and the ability to assess its needs and anticipate its response. 4) Analogously, the

concept of interest develops: the use of goods is supposed to produce profit to the one who makes the good available. This presupposes the understanding that timely availability of goods is in itself a good to be paid for—another very abstract perception that rests ultimately on the ability to segment time sequences. 5) Industrial food production made it possible to create a food surplus, since a segment of the human group could produce enough food to maintain themselves and to provide for the rest of the group.

3.5. The political dimension

There is a strong political correlative to the phenomenon of urbanization (etymologically, urbanism and politics are related), for the beginning of cities may be considered coterminous with the beginning of the state. For our purposes, a working definition of the early state may include three points: 1) the systemic articulation of power throughout the social group, 2) supported by a capillary system of public administration, and 3) resting on institutional permanence. In other words, power is exercised through a complex system that articulates degrees of control through permanently recognized mechanisms. For example, the king knows he can count on a specified number of individuals to perform an assigned task (say, dredging a canal) even though he does not know personally any of these individuals, nor does he have to apply any particular pressure for them to do so, nor does he have to initiate any personal contact with them. The potential of coercive force is implicit, but needs to be used only as an exception, which is why power is truly articulated through institutions, not necessarily enforced through physical constraint. Such a coordination of factors is presupposed as a permanent set of conditions, which is not altered by the specific personal destiny affecting the individuals who make it work.

Leadership played a fundamental role. The coordination of the new social and technological dimensions that had come to characterize the human group favored the growth of a determined leadership that would provide a sense of direction for the needs of the group and exploit the presuppositions present in the phenomenon. Such leadership would articulate the practical and ideological themes that were to serve as goals for the activity of

the group; it would devise the managerial procedures that were to implement them; and it would take responsibility (and credit) for the outcome. In the early periods, leadership is synonymous with kingship, which also dates back to the urban revolution: the king was the apex of the social group, symbolizing its solidarity and providing the thrust that kept the momentum going.

Leadership was a factor that played into the hands of the few, so that rapidly the divergence between powerful and powerless, wealthy and poor, became a veritable chasm—amply documented in the archaeological record (from monumental architecture to grave goods) and later in the literary record, with idealized figures like Gilgamesh (described in a poem composed presumably for the benefit of the king in the first place, but possibly known and enjoyed beyond the circle of the royal court as well). On the other hand, the king emerged also as an alternative to the progressive and inexorable process of functionalization of human relationships. It became a cliché of political propaganda that the king should be the father, the shepherd, the advocate of the poor, etc. But all clichés are a window into the reality that gives rise to the very cliché. A father figure was needed, whether or not any individual king could, or would wish to, fulfill that role. Functionalization was perceived as a harsh reality, even if the perception was not articulated in our terms. And the king, at the same time that he was profiting from that reality, needed to make it not so much tolerable as desirable. Loyalty to him as a person was a benefit—even though hardly any one among his subjects ever even saw him personally. Vicariously, his subjects related to him as a person. So, ironically, the very device that aimed at compensating for the impersonal dimension of the royal function and of the entire system on which it rests, itself became a function! The symbolic view of the king as father, shepherd, advocate was just that, a symbol, resting on a function projected and assumed, whether or not fulfilled.

The other aspect that characterized the birth of the state in Mesopotamia was the development of a bureaucratic apparatus that provided the backbone for the implementation of the royal directives. A key factor for an efficient exercise of power in the new urban context was the ability to communicate across functional boundaries within the social organism; the functional slots within the state were to be in functional contact with each other

to allow for an effective operation of the system. This meant in practice two things—bureaucracy and writing.

1) Delegation of authority was developed to a formal degree, so that rank could both correspond to an explicit, specific, and recognizable level of manpower, and prevent personal presumptions beyond the assigned level. 2) Development of an impersonal communication system kept the flow of information unhampered by personal intervention or limitations. Such was the humus from which writing originated (3.6). As a tool in the workings of the social organism, writing is essentially an impersonal link among functional slots; only as a byproduct did written texts come to embody truly personal utterances of the human spirit, all the way up to poetry, and thus to mold eventually the channels for human self-expression. It is in this light that we should now look at writing more closely.

3.6. *The cultural dimension*

It is a consensus that the beginning of history should coincide with the beginning of writing. Given the amount of information that written texts provide, this claim is justified: the quality of information for the "historical" periods is of a specificity that is wholly lacking for pre-"history." This reasoning operates on the *historiographic* level: *our* way of learning about the past is different as a result of writing. In other words, if we look at writing as a tool of information, we can say that with it historiography does indeed change. But was there a change in history as well? What did writing introduce that is unique on the *historical* level? How did *their* way of life change as a result of it?

The first part of the answer deals with the intellectual dimension of this invention. Clearly, writing could not have come into being without language, which it extended, as it were, beyond the limit of the speaker/auditor relationship. Thus writing can in fact be defined as the passive extrasomatic extension of verbal and logical brain functions. In this respect, it is parallel to manual tools, which are the extrasomatic extension of muscular power: just as tools identify humans as human, *qua* toolmaker, from the earliest time in prehistory, so writing identifies civilized humans as such from the beginning of urbanization. It is a *passive*

extension, because a written text requires a reader to re-activate those functions. But it provides a perspective and distancing from the process that is not possible when a speaker requires an auditor. In turn this allows for a degree of focusing and centering that is also not possible with a purely oral communication: with the latter, one could memorize and recite Gilgamesh from beginning to end (some three thousand verses), but one could not analyze it, i.e., one could not isolate segments and compare them with each other. Writing was the perfect mechanism for that increase in the degree of control over reality that the urban system had institutionalized.

Just as clearly, writing could not have come into existence except within an urban context. It matches perfectly the various aspects that we have been describing, in a number of different ways. It crystallized the segmentation of reality into finite controllable units for which verbal and logical categories had been introduced: thus tallies and lists provided a visible structure that organizes data into a pre-ordained scheme. It consolidated the impersonal dimension by giving a physical embodiment, in its graphic version, to the functional slots within the system. It gave new form to behavioral routines by translating them into the graphic medium: thus a group of workmen acquired a special status by being represented as a written list of names. Its supporting profession, the scribal class, could survive and prosper because it was providing a service to the larger community: the city, in other words, provided a "market" without which writing itself could not exist.

4. THE MODERN PERCEPTION

4.1. Fractures and continuities

I have sketched the factual dimension of the primigenial city as we know it through archaeology. It conditioned the development of civilization for the six millennia that followed, down to our own day. We can now briefly return to the ideology that developed around the city as a historical fact. We are heirs to our past even when we break away from it. In fact, this is the hallmark of

human history, namely, that our species grows by experimenting, which entails shedding and keeping. By way of contrast, a spider web today is like a spider web of a very remote past: there was no shedding, only keeping. Which points to the difference between tradition and transfer.

A transfer implies the mechanical transmission of a structure, where the receptive agent is not free to interpret and adapt. The structure is repeated as transmitted, with adaptations that do not affect the structure and in any case do not stem from deliberate attempts to improve it. There is no possibility to make mistakes, or rather, a mistake would be a failed structure in principle. Thus spiders have never in a million years (literally) experimented with their web making, nor is a beached whale searching for new territories.

A tradition, by contrast, is only and properly human. It implies the handing down of a structure that is then appropriated as such by an interpretive agent: hence the inherent dimension of change within continuity, and the inherent possibility of enhancements or mistakes. The receptive agent has to assent to the structure in order to make it his own, and in so doing there is an inevitable process of adaptation and change, i. e., of experimentation in freedom.

The history of the human community is built on a sequence of such fractures and continuities, the fractures as centrifugal forces, the continuities as centripetal. The biblical narrative of the history of Israel presents us with one such major centrifugal fracture. It countered the profound depersonalization process that the urban revolution had effected: bringing back, in its narrative of origins, the human community to the intimacy of the human couple, was a major statement. It claimed that the *personal couple* is at the core of the city, not vice-versa. Institutionally, this was effected in a variety of different ways throughout the centuries.

The goal of this paper was to focus on the beginnings of the city, and while we cannot review here in detail the subsequent ideology, a few comments may be useful, taking as a starting point the great final work of St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*.

4.2. St. Augustine

We should reflect on the use of the word "city," *civitas*, in St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. By speaking of the "city of God," he uses a term that he otherwise implicitly defines as having a negative connotation—because, historically, the "city" is only the "city of man." It is so on the basis of the record we have. It is so in the biblical perspective, while only in Mesopotamia is the city seen as having been created by a divine agency. So why does Augustine speak of a city of God when ostensibly the city is only attributable to man?

He tells us in the first chapter of the eleventh book how he saw this term to be rooted in the biblical text. He cites three psalms: "gloriosa dicta sunt de te, *civitas Dei*" (86:3), "magnus dominus et laudabilis nimis in *civitate dei nostri*" (47:2), and "fluminis inpetus laetificat *civitatem dei*" (45:5).

It is on this basis that "didicimus esse quandam *civitatem dei*, cuius ciues esse concupiscimus illo amore, quem nobis illius conditor inspirauit": so God is the "creator" (*conditor*) of this city. He goes on to say that "huic conditori sanctae civitatis ciues terrenae civitatis deos suos praeferunt," setting up therefore the earthly city as a counterpart.

Now, the historical city to which the psalms refer, Jerusalem, was created as a city of man, the way the historical records show us. It is not as the Mesopotamian ethos would have had it, because God is understood as the *conditor* of *his* city only in the sense that he cooperated with humans in transforming it as it developed. As we saw at the beginning, the biblical narrative tells us that he created the human couple, not the city. On the one hand we might say that what he created was the human community, and that the city is already, *in nuce*, inscribed in the aboriginal couple. But we might also, on the other hand, say that the city of God, in the full sense of the word, was built on the city of man.

4.2. The city of man

All of which, significantly, does not imply that the city formula was invalid, but only that it had to be seen as inscribed in the

personal values of the human community, if for no other reason than that it derived from it. If Jerusalem is the city of God it is not because God created it the way he created the couple; his creation was not like Marduk's. The biblical God is the city's *conditor* because he created the conditions that made it possible, conditions which must continue to govern this human efflorescence that is the city, precisely if we want it to remain human. Thus the city of God is the transformation of the city of man as the indispensable ingredient that can be historically changed, which must happen already in the course of history. This complements the Augustinian view, which focuses exclusively on a trans-historical and transfigured view of the ideal "city." We may instead focus on ways in which the "city of man" can already exist, in the historical dimension of the here and now, as a community rather than only as a functional system. It seems fair to say, in other words, that there cannot be a city of God without a city of man, the latter being as if the raw material for the former. Let us briefly consider two pertinent instances where this can take effect: 1) the role of function and 2) the role of technology.

1) Demographic expansion reaches a point where the functional dimension becomes necessary: it is intrinsically impossible for a large human group to operate solely on the basis of face-to-face association. The need of a functional system is thus, de facto, inescapable. But it must be so constituted that instead of serving primarily the system, it serves the person as the function holder. As one of the reviewers of an early version of this paper put it very aptly: function should be seen as "a 'role' that more deeply defines, and even amplifies, the responsibility and purposefulness of the person in relation to his community." There is dignity in serving, if the system empowers, rather than suffocating, the freedom of the individual. A modern application of this concept can be seen in the principle of subsidiarity, according to which the overlaying structure (such as the government) does not replace, but rather supports the constituting elements, whether subsystems or, especially, persons.

2) Historical development showed that technology is an essential presupposition if relationships among individuals must proceed beyond their face-to-face contact. Limiting ourselves here to the technology of communication, we can recollect how writing was an outstanding example at the time of the urban

revolution, just as electronic data processing is today. The mental templates created by these innovations can profoundly alter the perception individuals have of each other, and, if unbridled as to their application, can contribute to the depersonalizing trend that technology can bring with it. Anonymity can thus become the natural counterpart of the abolition of the need for face-to-face association. Here, again, technology can be harnessed so that it may be put to the service of the individuals and empower them in the very ability to relate to each other. In Mesopotamia, next to the ledgers that magnified the system, writing made possible the exchange of letters among private persons, which often resonate, to this day, with a touch of great individuality. While today's "social media" may be leaning in the direction of greater impersonality, it is obvious that digital technology serves to restore the reality of face-to-face association if at the altogether different level of a non-physical contact.

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The study of the origin of the city offers an excellent example of what it means to reflect on our roots, to learn from history. The actual story of the fractures as we see them throughout human history (the biblical one is the most notable but there are others) goes beyond the limits of this paper. And so does an analysis of the continuities, interesting though all this would in fact be. But all the foregoing resonates so strongly to our modern ears that I believe we all do, instinctively, feel deeply immersed in what we want to continue and what we want to shed. It is part of this great experiment of what it means, for us humans, to be also urban.   □

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