

Archéologie de l'espace urbain. (Collections 'Perspectives Villes et Territoires'). Edited by Élisabeth Lorans & Xavier Rodier. 22 × 29 cm. 535 pp, 229 colour and b&w pls, figs and tables.

Paris & Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais & Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 2013. ISBN 978-2-86906-311-2/978-2-7355-0821-1 (ISSN 1635-6187). Price: €44.00 hb.

While the title suggests a volume exploring the archaeology of the urban form in France, this strong collection of papers — deriving from a 2012 conference and populated by a rich array of field practitioners, research directors, specialists, conservationists, doctoral students — does much more, offering in particular overviews of new finds, evolving methodologies and revised thinking. The emphasis is firmly on French urban sites, with examples including Marseille, Paris and Reims; the conference venue of Tours, the focus of much fascinating and well published urban archaeology, features three times; while a rather nominal three ‘external’ papers (out of 34) consider Damascus (Syria), Angkor Thom (Cambodia) and Barcelona, and Macphail uses both English and French examples for compactly discussing dark earth. Core to the whole is the modelling of urban spatial and social evolution, across short or long spans, ancient, medieval and/or modern; heritage issues are not central, although recording and synthesising the urban resource and questioning the impacts of rescue archaeology are noted by various authors (eg Joly for Chartres, Fondrillon et al for Bourges and GaiFFE et al for Toulouse). Many papers employ the ‘chrono-chorematic approach’ — a graphic modelling of key phases of site evolution and of urban functions and viewing these against theoretical types (chorotypes) — to help better explain forms and processes. This modelling is outlined by Desachy and Djament-Tran (see online papers at <http://mappemonde.mgm.fr/dos_chrono.html>) but applied explicitly to Bordeaux, Le Mans and Reims from Roman implants to pre-industrial modern cities (note that while the volume’s colour illustrations help, the graphics definitely need consulting on screen). The models work best when archaeological data are good, although rarely are they good for all periods. Similarly for approaches centred on GIS (papers on Barcelona, Bordeaux and Paris). There are intriguing offerings here also on visual analytics, terminologies (words used to define space in Angers), traditional time divisions (Lefebvre interrogates periodisations in the *Atlas historiques des villes de France*), land plots, water management (in Paris), networks (in the Nîmes territory) and medieval ceramic supply systems. En route we gain insights into urban roots (Vaginay and Krausz on *oppida*), Roman planning (Berthelot et al claim the *insulae* in Reims among the largest in the Empire), early medieval monastic urbanisation (Marot on Tours) and medieval to early modern efforts at merging settlement units at Clermont-Ferrand (Grémois). This is a busy, but very rewarding volume that will certainly stimulate interest and ideas for all scholars dealing with towns, space and urban theory.