

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE
**GSEM 605. Graduate Seminar: Urban
Morphologies through Time: built
landscapes and their representation.**

Spring 2021

Fridays, 1:10-3:30pm

Instructors:

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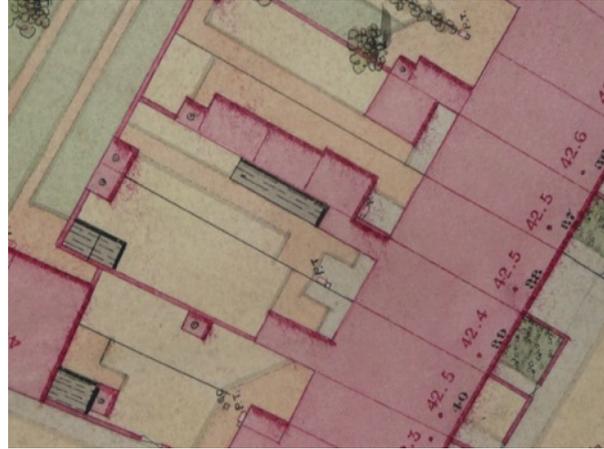
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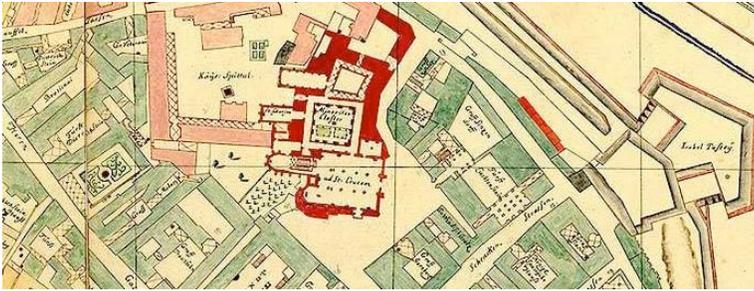
Subject and Approach

This term's Graduate Seminar is offered as a small and highly participatory forum for actively exploring the historical fabric of different cities of the past.

Mindful of our disciplinary diversity, the course will embrace a broad chronology with one foot firmly in the ancient world while the other strides well ahead toward the 19th and 20th centuries. It will address matters of component built types, of parts and structuring elements of cities, their evolution, and their experiential character in history.

Our two introductory readings help frame our inquiry: Carballo & Fortenberry demonstrate a strong degree of continuity between the urban patterns revealed by archaeological survey and those evident in studies of late medieval and more modern cities, even when they rely upon different tools of discovery and description; similarly, Whitehand, writing of M. R. G. Conzen, shows analytical constructs that emerge from looking comparatively at urban textures over a wide range of locations and periods that help us find patterns and speculate on their genesis.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have had a transformative, even sweeping impact on older cities. Our attention will focus before and during their massive impacts of railroads, industry, and urban population explosions in the 19th century, and then the often even more dramatic effect of tall building, cars, and suburbanization -- reconfiguring old centers and rendering the surviving historic fabric fragmentary. For knowing the now disrupted if not erased continuity, diversity, and character of the fabric of earlier iterations of the city, we are largely left to rely upon various kinds of representations and records, many on paper. And for ancient sites, we can add modern representations of archaeological revelations, providing some of the same kinds of descriptive information.

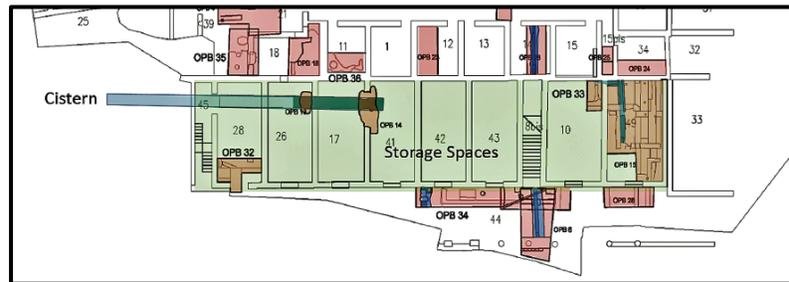


[Fig. 2. Vienna, Steinhausen map, 1710]

A general goal of the course, then, is to ‘see’ past cities, near and distant in time or place. We seek to know their physical form descriptively through images, texts, and vestiges, but also analytically, in terms of the motives, cultures, and socio-economic forces that

shaped them -- even where evidence is sparse on such questions, and we are left to inference and comparanda from better-known sites.

A lot of the course will lean on (too many!) very detailed plans of parts and the whole of cities, looking for patterns and what those embody, even in what seem chaotic assemblages of divergent private



uses and ambitions, of meandering roads, and willful intrusions. To some degree we’ll aim to collectively discover and construct what may seem a counter-narrative to one often presented in histories of urban form; it is meant to contrast with the thrust of many tellings that successively track the best-chronicled episodes of large-scale city planning at the behest of governments, often with grand geometries orchestrating hundreds of buildings. It will also depart in another way, in not ceding primacy to a focus on the monumental civic centers and their most ambitious structures, the locus of attention for most writing on the history of urbanism and architecture. Instead, this course will be more of a group workshop for interrogating a far more common, and often more confounding realm of urban form, found within and afar from those commanding planned urban geometries, in forms that seem responsive to other causes. Our focus will be especially on the sorts of cities or urban districts that we have sometimes cast as products of ‘organic’ or ‘unplanned’ growth, looking for logic in the apparent disorder.



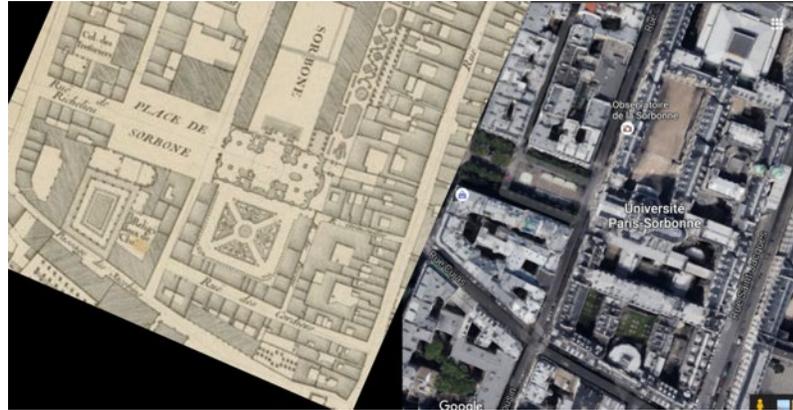
[Fig. 4. Rio de Janeiro, Michellerie, 1831]

Toward that end, our gaze will range in scale from the close study of individual buildings and adjacent spaces, to common building types and their clustering, and to the armatures of roads, public spaces, and natural topographies. Where we have information, we will explore functional, demographic,

and symbolic geographies, and will look at places diachronically, using a range of resources to track change through time.

‘Footprint-cadasters’

Among our best tools in this broad investigation of urban form is a particular species of very detailed map. There are examples of this for limited parts of cities dating from as early as the 16th century, but generally they first appear for whole large cities near the start of the 19th century. These go by many



[Fig. 5. Paris, Sorbonne area, from Delagrive, 1754 and Google Earth, 2016]

different names – most commonly Sanborn atlas (US), *catasto napoleoniche* (IT), fire insurance atlas (US and UK), *plan parcellaire* (FR), ward, fire insurance, or real estate atlas (US), ordnance survey (UK), Goad atlas (CA, UK, and beyond), *kadasterkaart* (NL), *katasterplan* (DE), *plano parcelario* (ES), and others. We can collectively reference them as ‘footprint-cadasters.’



They varied somewhat in specific purpose, but what is definitional about them is their precise record of the outlines of streets, of ownership lots, and of buildings, usually with dimensional accuracy and often a good deal more information, variously encoded with colors, inscriptions, and symbols -- to indicate building materials, uses, owners, height, fire resistance, water mains, tram routes, and regulatory authorities. Making scrutiny and comparison of these historic cadastral atlases much more feasible than ever before is the recent

increasing accessibility of dozens of these map sets, often digitized from large bound folio volumes, via the web, while others are available in archives, municipal offices, or in the collections of old real estate or title insurance companies. Offering largely unidealized records of the urban fabric of many large cities as they stood before the late-19th century, these detailed cadastral atlases also offer us a rare and very effective baseline for comparison with the present-day state of the same blocks seen in modern satellite images and sometimes other such atlases

decades apart, showing the product of successive tides of change in uses, scale, and types, ultimately prompting us to connect those with forces and ambitions that shaped such changes.

Looking further into the urban past, we enter a realm with fewer maps and views of these sorts on paper, but there are some on clay or stone, and most importantly, plans capturing some of the same graphic information that are the products of archaeological excavation and survey. If less

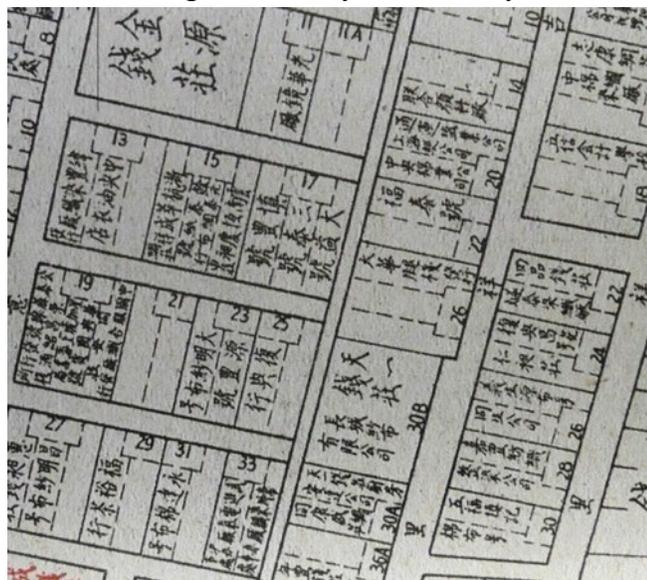


Fig. 8. L. Woolley, *Ur, section AH. ca. 2000 BCE, from 1931 survey*

enriched with the kinds of records of ownership and function as many 19th century atlases, they do have the advantage of showing interior partitions and artifacts that can reveal room use and even furnishings. These are often remarkably comparable with more modern footprint-cadasters, offering a similar lens on urban form.

covering the whole core of a city that would later be radically transformed. They show evidence of the prior city in patterns of buildings, streets, and lot boundaries. In many cases, we are able to penetrate inside representative examples of the most common building types, from Boston's three-deckers to Chicago's front-gabled early urban cottages, from Shanghai's *shikumen* houses to Birmingham's back-to-backs, whether through well-recorded or surviving examples.

A main subject and one of our principal activities, then, will be looking at these detailed historical ground-level representations for patterns of built form and adjoining spaces. They are especially helpful in revealing historically dominant building forms in various functionally and socially differentiated urban areas. Such area plans give us the footprints of buildings within city blocks, very often



[Fig. 9. Detail from *Shanghai Street Directory, 1947. The numbers mark the small street-facing vestigial courtyards that characterize the shikumen type.]*

Visual Concordances



[Fig. 10. Timbuktu, Mali, by Rene Caille, 1830]

Detailed topographical views in perspective within the city grew in abundance in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and then photography offered far more. One of the most ambitious efforts to map such views was one that situated hundreds of prints of Rome by Giuseppe Vasi onto the famously detailed 1748 engraved city map by Giambattista Nolli, showing their ‘viewsheds’ in red on the map in an interactive website (composed at right but, alas, now seemingly gone) that linked each Vasi print to a more detailed Nolli map excerpt, along with a brief history of the site. Even single views so situated offer an enriched sense of a place, amplifying an understanding of the site and the view, as well as the buildings and their larger place in the city.

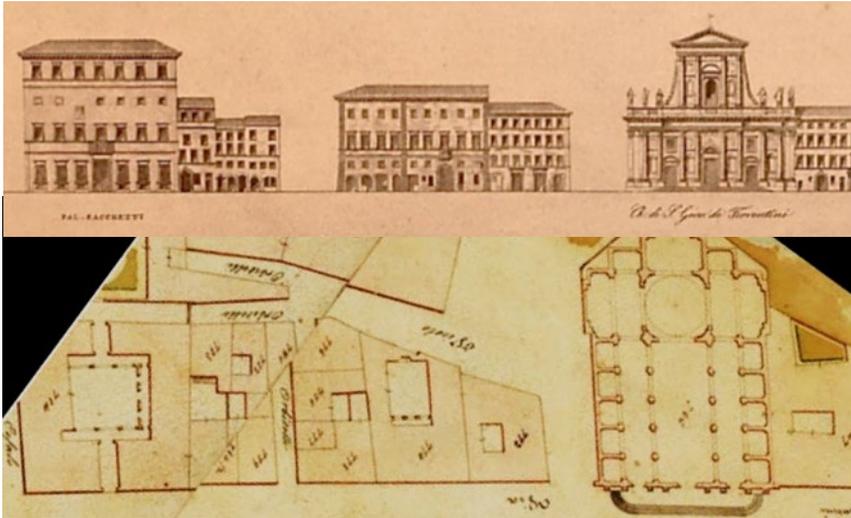
Another type of detailed view takes in much more, in a continuous form that records sequences of whole block faces, portrayed flat-on rather than perspectively. These often date from the mid-19th century and record buildings on both sides of key thoroughfares crossing the heart of the city. They were often recorded on the eve of a moment of transformation, just as the old center was being recast or reworked as an expanding setting of public attractions and private consumption. And this in turn would usually be transformed again over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, with larger new buildings in the central business district.

In many cases, we have the advantage of detailed urban views from an elevated vantage point that offer both a sense of common building forms and their spatial relation, and sometimes the spatial organization of the city as a whole, if usually from a distance. But more often, an especially informative strategy for more fully ‘seeing’ the historic urban fabric lies in pairing closer eye-level views – in drawings, paintings, coinage, historic prints, and photographs -- with map excerpts of the same spots, allying view to footprint and allowing us to integrate experiential glimpses of the historic urban fabric and construct a more three-dimensional understanding of given places.



[Fig. 11. Composite of Vasi print and Nolli map of Campidoglio, Rome, from the Interactive Nolli Map website=te, ca. 2008-18?]

These long street-view series often take in a city's most iconic structures, along with the ones in between, parts of an extremely changeable built landscape whose components one can revealingly track through time right up to the present photographic analogues.



[Fig. 12. Rome, part of the Corso, east side, in elevation from *Prospetto Geometrico della fabbriche...*, 1835, and from the *Catasto Urbano*, 1824]

Alignments of these detailed historical maps and coeval views richly inform our sense of lost parts of the city, especially central districts that were often completely rebuilt over the last two centuries, as in Hamburg, New York, Paris, or Birmingham, but in some cases, as in Dublin, Rome, or Amsterdam, they have changed far less.

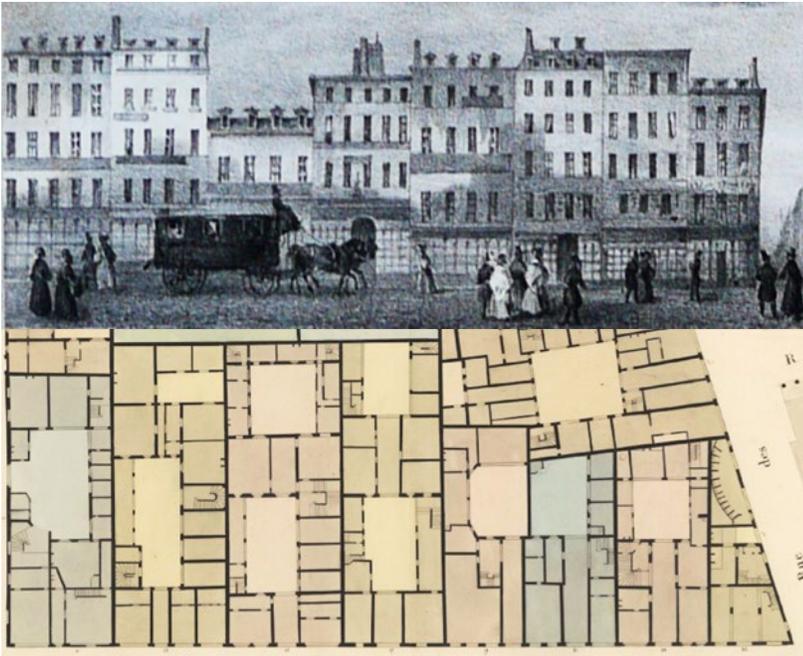
These long street-elevations are far rarer than the cadastral map series, often being made by graphic entrepreneurs for sale to visiting strangers, especially from afar, and usually recording just the streets that were attractions for them. Most such sets were offered as either touristic keepsakes or as guides to corridors of bourgeois consumption. The streets depicted were typically lined by either luxury shops and theaters or vaunted sites of civic grandeur.

Common Streetscapes

Those long street-views mostly recorded the faces of special streets that were destinations of desire for those who could afford to consume their attractions in terms of experiences and goods for sale, but in the smaller buildings in between they also broached another reality within each city, a texture embodied in the common urban fabric that surrounded and nestled behind, between, within, and beyond these special corridors. This second texture constituted a spatially and numerically dominant built aspect of the city, embodied in thousands of everyday houses, shops, and workplaces, streets, alleys, and courts. These streets and alleys often presented repetitive forms built at once, speculatively capitalized by developers and meant for sale or rental -- designed to anticipate the desires and budgets of their ultimate occupants for places to live and work.

That second city, this more distributed, more normative aspect of different cities, is a principal focus of this course. It is embodied mostly in smaller buildings covering a great proportion of the built landscape, and they are often far less well recorded as the primary focus of images-makers. Still, they are well captured in outline on cadastral maps and often through

survivals or surveys sufficient to illustrate the type, and their recognizable footprints sometimes allow one to extrapolate and roughly repopulate textures of this lost second cityscape. Though conceptually similar in different cities, in many they are distinctive in form, and occasionally we have tools to explore the form and basis of such local distinctions.



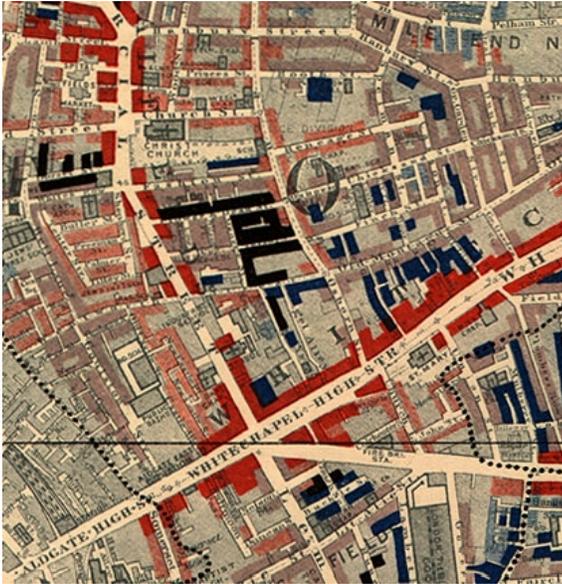
[Fig. 13. Paris, quartier Porte Saint-Martin, îlot n°12, in elevation as part of a long elevation of the Grand Boulevards, from Paris en miniature, par Arnout, ca. 1832-33 and in plan from the Atlas Vasserot, 1810-36. The latter is a very rare instance where the interior spaces of most building types are shown, here demonstrating a consistency in this single or double courtyard type even where they were clearly built independently.]

Such visual records offer fundamental starting points for the course, which will range broadly in geography. Detailed historic images are meant to provoke our curiosity, and prompt questions and analyses of the urban fabric through time that we will pursue in individual and collective explorations -- building concordances out of historic visual documents, looking at patterns and types, and digging into ranges of research within different realms of scholarly analysis in order to find writings responsive to questions these images raise.

There is also a third urban landscape that we will want to explore, one of people and activities less directly visible in maps and views. Most cities are sites of great economic and sometimes legal inequalities, patchworks of function and of movement, with clustering of particular populations defined by race, ethnic or national origin, religion, vocation, or class identities. If less apparent in bricks and mortar, and often transitory, such social and economic patterns are prominent in our lived experiences of cities, and play important shaping roles in what is built and where.

Using various sorts of collected data or general characterizing impressions, people have mapped or described such patterns in various cities at different times, from Charles Booth's map of poverty and wealth in London in the 1880s to W. E. B. Dubois's map of African Americans in central Philadelphia from 1899, precisely adapting Booth's method. Period descriptive accounts

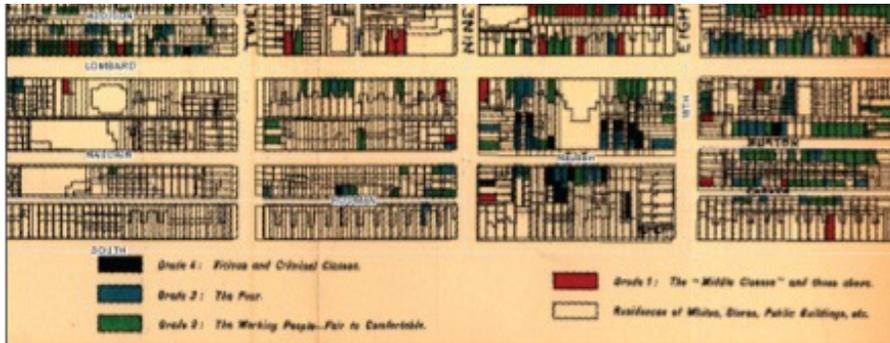
of cities, and even novels situated in them, often characterize parts of cities in such terms. In some ways more elusive than the physical fabric, this social mapping will be another of the subjects we will collectively pursue.



[Fig. 143. Charles Booth, map of class and wealth/ poverty in London, excerpt from Whitechapel area, in East End, 1889. and key.]

The Streets are coloured according to the general condition of the inhabitants, as under:-	
■ Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.	■ Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.
■ Very poor, casual. Chronic want.	■ Middle-class. Well-to-do.
■ Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family.	■ Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.
■ Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor.	

A combination of colours—as dark blue and black, or pink and red—indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.



[Fig. 15. W. E. B. Dubois map of African American households, from *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899).]

Yet other maps track land uses and their distribution across the built landscape, which often correlate in revealing ways with distinctive patterns in building forms, topographies, land values. and even transportation infrastructures that can condition difference.



[Fig. 16. Madurai, in southern India, Existing Land Use Map and Key, ca. 2014]

Learning goals

Rather than the process of simply absorbing established scholarly writing and approaches, our main method in our GSem will be more one of learning by doing, of working with primary period documents, visual and textual. Observations are meant to prompt thoughtful questions that students can follow up by searching independently for on-point writings within the broad scholarly literature on the subject. The course will venture into somewhat uncharted waters, drawing students into research processes and questions as we work together in constructing knowledge and critically pursuing relevant analytical perspectives

In this case, our primary subject lies in the historical urban fabric as portrayed in visual and textual records that detail a physical and social reality now largely transformed. Developing a facility for comprehending such evidence of built and experiential settings and attempting to 'read' the city will be essential; the visual records, especially maps, are legible and reliable to a limited degree as a somewhat abstracted and distilled representations of something far more complicated, both in detailed form and as an embodiment of shaping agents, motives, and processes -- realms that demand constructed recognition and understanding.

A collateral goal involves incrementally developing a mastery for navigating the landscape of relevant scholarly writings that will help us pursue historical and analytical questions, using all sorts of tools. Although the library will not be as fully available to us as it usually is, many scholarly sources will be, through JStor and other web pathways, and we aim to provide digital versions of all individually required readings. Period maps and views are increasingly accessible on-line, allowing us to tap many of those directly. When we do it will be important to initially see them through the lens of the reasons they were originally created and selectively framed in coverage, but to then assess how they can inform us about the often very different questions we bring to them. Building competence within both these sorts of informational realms will be key.

In reporting observations and findings, students will devise ways to effectively integrate key graphics into discussion, marshalling visual evidence in .ppt presentations and written work. Essential to the function of the course will be working both independently and together toward shared ends, cultivating our virtual classroom as a place of collective and constructively critical inquiry. The course is meant to invite students into a realm of new explorations and knowledge creation. There is a prospect of original analysis and historical compilations emerging from our work, and the reporting of findings, of discoveries, and newly constructed scholarly resources may be possible outcomes beyond our classroom.

A more general goal is building a culture of confidence for pursuing independent historical curiosities in probing, resourceful, and thoughtful ways -- closely observing, finding, weighing, and then reporting out.

Class Activities, Exercises, and Assignments

The course will be convened as a hybrid class, but with our initial sessions and perhaps all of them conducted through Zoom in live, interactive, necessarily synchronous sessions in



[Fig. 17. At left: Piri Reis map of Cairo, 1525; North below (note pyramids at upper right), and at right: Charles Goad atlas of Cairo, 1905, plate 11; North is at right.]

order to allow full participation. Toward the later part of the semester, vaccination and pandemic conditions permitting, perhaps we'll assemble in person together for those who can and choose to, maybe even walk together, but for now it will be best to assume that we'll be on-line.

Throughout the course, students will work from successive weekly or bi-weekly prompts defining individual and group exercises and readings, some of the latter assigned and some readings meant to be identified by students. These reading exercises will be the subject of class conversations, with brief observations and points for discussion to be prepared in advance. 'Making' exercises will involve devising digital presentations and projects such as discerning patterns, building visual concordances of maps and views, or finding descriptive information and map resources. A collective byproduct may lie in identifying and further populating an illustrated and linked website compiling the earliest 'footprint-cadaster' maps and atlases that we can find for large cities worldwide. And as we observe, we will connect patterns to forces, models, and aggregated actions that have shaped parts of cities, seeking to engage with and learn

to navigate within a rich literature of analytical scholarly writings and period documents that chronicle episodes and help us understand these patterns.

In the latter half of the course, we will work in successive stages toward a 15 to 20 page analytical paper on some aspect of historical urban form, patterns, types, processes, or themes in one or multiple places. This will start with a paragraph-long topical framing followed by a search for useful resources, then move on to a formulated question and strategy in a one-page proposal. After brief class introductions and discussion of chosen topics will come a partial draft, followed by a revision phase responding to feedback in the final version due at the close of the term. The term paper will be due by May 22nd at 5 pm and is to be submitted through Moodle.

Readings and Resources

There seems to be no perfect text for a course like this, one that fully tracks our interdisciplinary framing and observational approach. A good deal of excellent pertinent material is to be found in focused studies on specific cities in scholarly books and articles, and one can find good initial introductions to the evolution of individual cities on common websites, and in some cases websites that are more deeply transparent to their sources of information than most are. An ambitious collection of narratives on European cities is an 8-volume series by E. A. Gutkind, International History of City Development (New York, 1964-72), with short multi-page narratives and bibliographies in separate volumes organized by region, which may be accessible to us on-line. Resources like these may offer some good initial introductions to places, but one should consult them more for initial orientation than as research.

Beyond case studies on the form of individual cities, though, there is an emerging community of scholarly and professional interest in comparative patterns in urban form, past, present and future and across the globe, in the group called the International Seminar on Urban Form. For a few decades it has published a journal, Urban Morphology (HT101 .U679). Issues up through 2007 are available on an open electronic resource [www.urbanform.org/online_public/index.shtml] via the ISUF website, and the subsequent ones may be accessible through Tripod for the whole run of the journal. This will have many articles of interest (and some perhaps not so much, aimed more at contemporary planning), and we'll ask students to explore there, beyond those that might be on their focal cities. Although much work there is focused on the UK, Italy, France and Germany, Asian, especially Chinese cities, along with Latin American ones, are the subjects of a number of recent articles. In addition, some recent books by ISUF folks and others provide introductions to the larger field of inquiry: Vítor Oliveira's Urban Morphology: An Introduction to the Study of the



Fig. 18. Issues of the journal Urban Morphology.

Physical Form of Cities (Basel, 2016); J.W.R. Whitehand and the Historico-geographical Approach to Urban Morphology (Basel, 2019), edited by Oliveira; M. R. G. Conzen's Thinking about Urban Form: Papers on Urban Morphology, 1932-1998 (Bern, 2004), and T. R. Slater, The Built Form of Western Cities (Leicester, 1990) are among some key sources by the usual suspects, and Oliveira appears to have just written an [Oxford bibliography](#) on the subject, which may or may not require a subscription to get beyond the introductory parts.

Cities of antiquity appear to be far less well represented in this literature than medieval and early modern ones. Much incisive writing on point for ancient urban form, and more generally, will lie in venues nominally categorized in, and born into, disciplinary realms such as geography, city planning, archaeology, urban history, vernacular architecture, and other sortings that can often act as topical silos entered mainly through disciplinary affiliation. We'll ask participants to keep an eye out for good pertinent, useful readings they encounter anywhere within his broad landscape of good research and writing, in order to build a collective working bibliography over the term of the course.

Evaluation, Accommodations, and Schedule

This course will rely more than most on a sense of shared inquiry, on an evolving conversation shaping incremental steps, on small projects, on independent research and adventurous reading. Evaluation will be based on intellectual engagement, resourcefulness in pursuing topics, timely submission of assigned work, on collaborative spirit in collective undertakings, and on energetic participation in class activities generally.

Those who may need accommodations in this course because of the impact of a learning, physical, or psychological disability are encouraged to meet with the instructor privately early in the semester to discuss their concerns and to contact Deborah Alder, Coordinator of Access Services (610-526-7351 or dalder@brynmawr.edu), as soon as possible

This could be a challenging and unpredictable semester, but our subject and the questions it provokes remain engaging ones that invite our explorations by whatever means we can make work. An 'active learning' approach of independent work and shared results may lend itself well to the circumstances, and we'll reserve time for individual help when wanted -- remotely of course, though this might actually be easier via on-line screen-sharing than by peering over someone's shoulder at their screen.

Still, we may have to be flexible, adapting to the prevailing circumstances of public health as we move ahead. We'll also need to collectively adapt to teaching technologies that may take some time to get comfortable with, and that may shape some possibilities, for better or worse -- but for most, this won't be your 'first rodeo.' Together we'll hope to build a collaborative sense among the group and figure out ways to proceed along the way. As we do,

we'll work from a continually updated class calendar, with exercises, activities, assignments, readings, and resources, all of which are available at Bascom. The website is also linked at the start of our Moodle page, where most readings will reside and work should be posted, but you can bookmark the web calendar and needn't go through Moodle each time.
