Recent work on the history of towns in the late Roman and post-Roman periods, tends to fit under two main headings. Firstly, ‘Survival or Decline’: did towns flourish in these centuries, or did they decline in size, in density of population and in prosperity? Secondly, ‘Internal Transformation’: how were the monuments and public spaces of those towns which survived transformed, in particular by the appearance of a Christian topography and by the decline of classical ideals of urban life?

In this article I wish to focus on two scholarly debates from the east Mediterranean which relate to these major issues: the first regarding the survival of cities in the Byzantine East in the seventh century; and the second concerning the internal transformation of the city in the Byzantine and Arab Levant during the sixth and seventh centuries.

The Decline of the City in the Eastern Empire

In a series of influential articles and books, published in the 1970s, Clive Foss altered scholarly views on Byzantine cities; and thereby helped to alter the broader scholarly conception of early medieval Byzantine society (Foss 1975, 1976, 1977a, 1977b & 1979). He gathered together the evidence from excavations in a number of cities of Asia Minor (in particular Ephesus and Sardis), and concluded that, while late Antiquity (the fourth to sixth centuries) was a period of considerable urban vitality, with many new monumental and private buildings, the early seventh century constituted a dramatic change (in Foss’s view, attributable initially to Persian invasion). Substantial parts of the old cities were abandoned, and the remaining population impoverished. Small walled circuits, generally on top of hills and often located within the old acropoleis, became an important feature of the landscape. This change effectively destroyed all ancient traditions of urbanism: ‘City life, as it had been known under the Greeks and Romans, almost entirely disappeared, and the people of Asia Minor came to live instead in small towns and fortresses.’ (Foss 1975, 747).

There is, I believe, no reason to doubt the basic outlines of the Foss model, which, with the work of other scholars, has helped create a new image of the early medieval eastern Empire. Seventh-century Byzantium is now seen, not as some unchanging jewel of Hellenic culture, preserving all that was best from the classical world while it rapidly decayed in the barbarian West; but as a society in crisis, out of which was born a new Byzantium, that, despite its inheritance of late Roman political structures, was close in character to the world of the early medieval West: militarised, economically depressed and culturally impoverished.

This revised view of the Byzantine seventh century will probably appeal to most scholars whose primary interests are in the West. There is often between Westernists and Byzantinists an element of competition, and it is something of a relief to feel that modern Byzantinists can no longer look down their noses at their barbaric westernist colleagues. Scholarly insecurity apart, what was happening in the seventh-century East must be of considerable interest to historians of both West and East. Somehow medieval scholarship has to explain how the world of the fifth and sixth centuries (when it was the East that was both economically and militarily dominant) was transformed by the eleventh and twelfth centuries into western economic and military superiority in the Mediterranean. The issue of when the West achieved this great ‘sorpasso’ has to be central to any comparative view of East and West in the early

1 Before being presented at Ravello, much of this paper was given in bits to various seminars in Oxford ('After Rome', the Byzantine Seminar, and a seminar on towns organised by S.J. Allen, Neil Christie and Simon Loseby), and I am very grateful to the many people who have suggested corrections and improvements. I am particularly grateful to my colleague at Trinity Chris Prior who produced figs. 1 & 2, and to Mark Whitto and Marlia Mundell Mango who have read parts of this published version in draft and whose learning I have exploited at all stages of its publication. Because I am dealing with two very specific issues, I have kept references to earlier works to the essential minimum; general discussions of towns in this period and full bibliographies can be found in Brandes 1989, Cameron 1993, Claude 1969, and Whittow 1990.
middle ages. Currently the seventh century is seen as a critical moment in the change: when fifth- and sixth-century eastern military power, and cultural and economic achievement declined, leaving the ‘Romani’ very much level-pegging with their barbarianised western cousins.

Limitations to the Archaeological Evidence

I do not wish to challenge the basic model for Byzantine urban history proposed by Foss (and recently very effectively extended by him to Lycia: Foss 1994). Indeed I agree with him that the excavated evidence strongly suggests, that the classical style of city-life substantially disappeared in the seventh century, and took with it almost all the traditional secular public buildings and even the sumptuous late Roman aristocratic private houses; and that, in roughly the same period, Byzantine cities shrank markedly in prosperity.

However, in assessing the evidence for one specific area of urban decline, shrinking population, I would urge more doubt and caution than Foss has normally expressed. It is very likely that the population of towns in the Byzantine world shrank during the seventh century; but I am not convinced that the archaeological evidence currently available is generally good enough to prove this fact categorically.

My doubts exist because sophisticated techniques of excavation are far less often deployed in the excavation of Roman and post-Roman cities in the east Mediterranean, than they are in many of the north-western provinces of the Empire. One will search in vain in most excavation-reports from the East Mediterranean for the kind of microstratigraphy so zealously charted on many sites in Britain, Gaul and Italy, and on some excavations in Africa (e.g. several of those at Carthage), and for the detailed analysis of pottery deposits which might (or might not) reveal evidence of late occupation. It is clear that many east Mediterranean excavations still consist of only very roughly stratified and recorded clearances down to the first ‘respectable’ structures.

In these circumstances, evidence for post-Roman settlement, which might be of a very ephemeral nature, may often have been cleared away by the archaeologists themselves. Unfortunately, a lack of evidence of settlement can all too easily be caused simply by excavators knowingly or unwittingly destroying it (Ward-Perekins 1987, 345-6, for one well documented example). An enormous gulf exists between the archaeology of pits, post-holes and pot-groups, which early medieval towns require, and that of frescoes, fora and, at best, fine-wares, which is what we normally meet in the East Mediterranean.

In the absence of detailed and meticulous stratigraphy, the archaeological debate about cities in the Byzantine ‘dark age’ tends to revolve around two types of find that all archaeologists invariably record and recover: city-walls and coins. Unfortunately neither are necessarily reliable indices of the extent and density of settlement.

The absence of later seventh- and eighth-century coins forms a central plank of the argument that cities shrank dramatically in the Byzantine dark age. The absence of new coin is indeed widespread outside Constantinople, and is very striking (e.g. fig.1). Unfortunately, however, absence of new coin is not necessarily caused by an absence of people (though it may be). That it need not be, is shown by a detailed breakdown of the coin-data from the American excavations at the Agora in Athens (fig.2). Here new coins are extremely rare after the reign of Constans II (641-668), until the reign of Leo VI (886-912). This evidence, combined with the absence of other evident signs of occupation, was used by the excavators to conclude that the Agora region was substantially abandoned in the intervening period (Frantz 1988,116-24).

However, there are two anomalous blips on the otherwise fairly steady downward path of coin-finds from the seventh and eighth centuries. The most substantial of these, the large number of coins of Constans II, almost certainly reflects, not a resurgence of activity in the Agora, but the sudden appearance, after a period of dearth, of an abundance of copper coins, due to the arrival in the city of the emperor and his entourage during his travels to Italy in 663.

Even more striking, since it happens in a period when new coins were apparently extremely rare on all east Mediterranean sites, are the 61 copper coins of Philippiacus (711-713), which form a thin peak at the beginning of the eighth century. Like the coins of Constans, these were found, not as a hoard, but as scattered finds over the site. It is theoretically just possible that these 61 coins represent a sudden burst of activity in the region of the Agora around the time of Philippiacus. But it is much more likely that they represent the appearance (for reasons that we do not know) of a single consignment of new coins from Constantinople, 61 of which were then lost in the area of the Agora by the many people who continuously occupied this region of Athens up to at least the early eighth century. The American excavations (begun in 1931) were pioneering in their interest in the post-classical period; but they were crude by the highest modern standards, and it is perfectly possible

2 To anyone who knows the archaeological world of northern Italy, it is as though one were attempting to understand what happened to Italian cities in the early middle ages with only the evidence of Aquileia and the early excavations at Castelseprio and Luni, and with none of the recent data from Brescia, Verona and Milan.
Fig. 1) Coin finds from Ephesus, expressed as numbers of coins found per year of reign: thus the one coin of Philippicus (711-13) appears as a bar 1/2 a coin high and 2 years wide. Coins that are only datable approximately (e.g. to the 'sixth century'), or were issued by other rulers (e.g. Vandal coins) have been included in the totals for the contemporary Byzantine emperors. (Based on information from Foss 1979: 197-8, and from the yearly Ephesus interim reports, up to 1986, published in Anzeiger der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse).

Fig. 2) Coin finds from the Agora at Athens, expressed as numbers of coins found per year of reign. (Based on information from Thompson 1954).
that they destroyed all traces (except these coins and perhaps some unpublished pottery) of a substantial early medieval settlement. We will probably never know for certain.

City-walls are also at best only a poor index of the extent of settlement. In this context, the example of Athens can again be cited. The principal late antique and early medieval defences of Athens are generally assumed to have been the walls of the Acropolis and the small ‘post-Herulian’ circuit that was linked to it, rather than the much larger classical circuit (fig. 3). The Agora falls outside both the Acropolis and the post-Herulian walls. But despite its position, the area of the Agora was certainly densely and prosperously inhabited in the fifth and early sixth centuries; and, as we have seen, dense settlement may well have continued at least to the early eighth century.

Was there perhaps more settlement outside the early medieval walled circuits of many Byzantine cities than the very meagre archaeological evidence currently available suggests? For instance, it is generally assumed that settlement at Aphrodisias, in Asia Minor, shrank in the dark ages to the area of the ‘acropolis’ in the centre of the town, where a new and tiny defensive circuit was constructed at some point in the post-Roman period (perhaps in the seventh century) (fig. 4). This assumption may be correct, but it may not be: the evidence available at present is quite simply too slight to prove the point either way. It is clear from published photographs that standards of excavation at Aphrodisias have until recently been very poor; and in these circumstances, as we have seen, early medieval settlement can easily disappear for ever at the hands of the archaeologists (Erim 1986, 55 & 74).3

Some scraps of evidence indeed make one wonder whether seventh-century Aphrodisias was

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3 The most recent publication of the Aphrodisias project shows that there has been something of a revolution in excavation techniques deployed on the site since Kenan Erim’s death. The report contains detailed discussions of dating (based on finds and their stratigraphic context), detailed plans and section-drawings (Smith, Raffé 1995).
Fig. 4) Plan of Aphrodisias. (From Smith, Raffe 1995, by kind permission). A: The theatre- or acropolis-mound, walled in the post-Roman period. B: The cathedral (adapted from the temple of Aphrodite). C: The north-east gate, with the ‘Stauropolis’ inscription. D: a second known church, possibly of the tenth/eleventh century, but not yet precisely dated.
really as tiny as its acropolis. It is almost certain, for instance, that the large cathedral (converted in the fifth century from the former temple of Aphrodite), which stands outside the acropolis wall, was continuously used and maintained through the early middle ages (Cormack 1990). Did it stand unprotected and alone outside the walls of a drastically shrunken Aphrodisias, or was it also a focus of settlement? Particularly because the post-Roman acropolis wall appears not to have been dated accurately by its excavators, it is even possible that the long fourth-century circuit of the city was maintained for at least a part of the early middle ages (perhaps in conjunction with the inner 'acropolis'). Certainly at some very late date, which was probably in the seventh century, someone took the trouble to alter the name of 'Aphrodisias' (City of Aphrodite) to 'Stauropolis' (City of the Cross) on an inscription over one of the fourth-century gates (Roueché 1989, 75 & 148-51). It could be that this gate was serving a symbolic, rather than its original defensive function when this alteration was made; but, in our present state of ignorance, it is best to keep open all alternative possibilities.

A view from the West, with its better excavated sites, encourages some scepticism over the quality of the archaeological evidence currently available to us from Byzantium; and therefore some caution in deciding at present precisely how marked was the abandonment of the seventh-century Byzantine cities. A western perspective can perhaps also suggest a different way of viewing the dark-age fortifications of Byzantium, that does more than stress their short length as a sign of urban collapse.

In comparison to Hellenistic and earlier Roman town-walls, the new circuits are certainly tiny in length, and the extensive use of spolia within them will upset any scholar versed in the glories of the classical age. But some of these walls are nonetheless very impressive in width, solidity and height; and their limited length, of course, also added to their defensive strength. The post-Roman fortification of Ayasuluk at Ephesus and of the acropolis of Ankara, Sardis and Pergamum are formidable defensive structures, with spolia carefully built in for structural solidity and, occasionally, aesthetic effect (Foss, Winfield 1986, 131-42). Nothing as impressive and powerful as these walls can be found in the seventh-century West, where (except perhaps in Visigothic Spain) this period is something of a low point in both state power and monumental and defensive architecture. Seen from the West, these Byzantine fortifications look like the efforts of a society and state that were still powerful, and which could still mobilise substantial resources to meet the Persian and Arab threats.4

In leaving large parts of the ancient cities unprotected, at least by newly-built fortifications, the Byzantines of the seventh century approached defence against military invasion in a very different way to, say, the imperial government in early fifth-century Italy, which (in the face of the Gothic threat) expended massive resources on heightening and strengthening all the gates around the entire 19 km circuit of Rome. It is very likely that the principal reason for the seventh-century Byzantine state building on a lesser scale was because it had fewer resources at its disposal; but it is also possible that it chose how to spend what it had more wisely. The West fell to the barbarians in the fifth century, but Byzantium, though shorn of its African and near eastern provinces, managed to survive the Persian and Arab attacks. The focusing of military defence on small and powerfully-fortified sites may have been an important factor in Byzantine success.

From Colonnaded Street to Suq:

In a few towns of the Near East - Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem - the main axis of the ancient city has been preserved in the modern townplan as a band of interlocked parallel alleyways that constitute the medieval and modern commercial area, the suq. In 1934 Jean Sauvaget produced a brilliant and convincing hypothesis, subsequently supported by excavations on sites such as Antioch, that these modern townplans were brought about by gradual encroachment onto the wide colonnaded central streets that were characteristic of near eastern cities in antiquity (Sauvaget 1934). According to the Sauvaget model, temporary booths, at first on the pavements and then on the main carriageway itself, gradually gave way to permanent and solid workshops and retail outlets, engulfing and destroying the classical structures and converting pavements and roadway into a maze of alleys (fig. 5). He hazarded a guess that the process took place as late as the tenth century.

Sauvaget's hypothesis has recently been elaborated and made into a central feature of an important and influential article by Hugh Kennedy (Kennedy 1985). Kennedy sees the transformation of the colonnaded street into the suq as symptomatic of a wider change in near eastern urbanism; with formal, monumental classical planning slowly giving way to the more chaotic, but, in Kennedy's eyes, more dynamic medieval town characteristic of the Islamic period: 'The main consequences of the change from the open colonnaded street to the crowded suq was to increase the number of retail shops in the city centre as the old shops were subdivided and new structures were

4 I owe this perspective to Mark Whittow who discusses these issues in Whittow 1996: chaps.4 & 5.
erected in the old roadway. Urban design now responded directly to commercial pressures ...' (Kennedy 1985, 25). Kennedy stresses the positive aspects behind the change, and, unlike Sauvaget, dates the beginning of the process very early, to the late Byzantine period, before the Arab conquests of the 630s. The essential features of Kennedy's argument are that the change was slow, starting before the Arab conquest, and that it was a good thing.

Like all discussions about the transformation of the classical city, Kennedy's article is closely enmeshed with broader scholarly debate and fashion, and, in a tangled region like the Near East, is also tied up in contemporary political and ideological conflict. For instance, his conclusion, that the end of formal classical urbanism was by no means synonymous with the end of cities, is part of a broader scholarly reevaluation of late antiquity and the early middle ages - seeing them as dynamic and important periods of change, rather than as sad appendices to the classical world. Indeed, by highlighting the transformation from controlled monumental colonnade to unplanned and vibrant suq, he makes, perhaps better than anyone, the very important point that the decline of classical styles of city-life is by no means necessarily synonymous with the decline of the city. Sauvaget's model explains the gradual destruction of the uniform and magnificent appearance of the ancient cities. But in this case it is a destruction caused by continuing (indeed, apparently growing) commercial pressure on space; and therefore points to remarkable urban vitality.

By taking the argument further and depicting the decline of formal urbanism in the East as a veritable benefit, Kennedy, as an Islamicist, is enjoying the process of slaughtering a sacred cow that dwells deep within all classicists (and probably within most modern observers), who see the monumental and the organised as essentially good. To achieve his end, Kennedy develops and extends the arguments of some ancient historians (e.g. Finley 1973, chap.V) who saw Roman urbanism as an artificial construct, focused on aristocratic display and consumption, and as fundamentally different to the looser and freer mercantile urbanism of the medieval and modern East and West: 'The development of the Islamic city is often seen as a process of decay, the abandonment of the high Hippodamian ideals of classical antiquity and the descent into urban squalor. On the contrary, the changes in city planning may, in some cases, have been the result of increased urban and commercial vitality, as in early Islamic Damascus and Aleppo for example.' (Kennedy 1985, 17).

Kennedy also dedicates part of his article to proving that the change to a less regulated style of city began before the Arab conquests. Here, in line with archaeological thought over the last decades, he is emphasizing long-term internal change, rather than rapid, invasion-based explanations. More specifically, by shifting the beginning of the process firmly into the late Roman/Byzantine period, he is, of course, 'exonerating' the Arabs from any 'blame' in the decline of classical monumental urbanism. Thus, for Kennedy, the seventh-century Arabs were not only presiding over a desirable change in city life; but also (just in case this change does not appeal to us) were not really responsible for it anyway!

Kennedy's desire fully to exonerate the Arabs is, of course, very understandable. Previous generations of western scholars, and indeed some scholars still writing today, would be quite comfortable with a view of the changed nature of the Arab city as an obviously bad (if picturesque) thing, readily attributable to the innate Arab (or more generally 'oriental') character, and only held in check in earlier periods by the disciplined order of Rome. For instance, a very recent article, by two Israeli scholars, says, of the seventh-century city of Scythopo-
lies, where classical formal urbanism was gradually breaking down, that it ‘reflected a combination of Roman and oriental building styles’ (Tsafrir, Foerster 1994, 114). In this context, ‘Roman’ means ordered and imposing; while ‘oriental’ means small-scale and shambolic. The choice of words is not a happy one politically, conjuring up some unspoken comparison between Tel-Aviv and Aleppo. Nor is it happy in scholarly terms - for how ‘Roman’ was the urban culture of the late antique East; and should not ‘oriental’ be applied to the monumental colonnaded streets (a common feature in the East, inherited from pre-Roman Hellenistic times, but very rare in the Latin West), rather than to the humble buildings of the seventh century (which are similar to buildings of early medieval date all over the Mediterranean, if rather more imposing at Scythopolis than those generally found in the West)?

There is no doubt that Kennedy’s argument has successfully achieved its main purpose - to reopen debate and, in particular, to challenge some basic cultural assumptions. However, it is also true, that looked at in detail, two of his contentions - that the transformation of the classical street began early, and that it was a good thing - are nothing like as clear as he suggests.

To support an early date for the beginnings of encroachment onto the formal layout of the colonnaded streets, Kennedy cites excavations at Gerasa (Jerash), Antioch and Apamea (Kennedy 1985, 12). Unfortunately, none of these cases is convincing: accurately dating encroachment by buildings with dry-stone walls and (in particular) earth floors requires meticulous excavation and meticulous observation of the provenance of finds. From the available published data, it is fairly clear that none of these sites meet the necessary criteria.5 Some of these encroachments may be of the sixth, or early seventh century and pre-date the Arab conquest of the region, but this is very far from demonstrable at present.

There is indeed evidence (much of it published since Kennedy’s article appeared) to suggest that at least some colonnaded streets survived intact into the period of Arab rule. At Caesarea, the capital of Palaestina Prima, an entirely new colonnaded street was laid out as late as the mid-sixth century (Vann 1982).6 I do not know if there is any good evidence to tell us how long it was maintained; but it seems unlikely that it was abandoned early. In Byzantine Asia Minor, at Sardis, the main colonnaded street, with its shops and workshops, was certainly functioning in its pristine form until its violent destruction in the early seventh century; the only ‘encroachment’ documented in the substantial section excavated was a very narrow structure that looks like a bench outside one of the shops (Crawford 1990, 37-8, & figs.126 & 129). If the monumental colonnade at Byzantine Sardis stood intact and unencumbered at the beginning of the seventh century, in the absence of good evidence to the contrary, it is best to assume that the same was true in at least the major cities of the Near East.

Sardis and Caesarea were both provincial capitals, and it is not impossible that the monumental heritage of lesser towns was being eroded, while theirs was being carefully maintained and even added to. It is also possible that in some towns the main colonnaded axes were maintained, while lesser monumental streets disappeared. Only meticulous excavation will show what really happened; and, in the case of many streets (clear for tourism), the evidence has, sadly, already disappeared. Recent work at Gerasa (Jerash), which would be particularly interesting (since Gerasa was an ordinary provincial town), revealed an Umayyad-period house with shops opening onto the colonnaded south decumanus (Gašlikowski 1986). The building of these shops during the Umayyad period, in such a way as to respect the original Roman lay-out, very strongly suggests that the colonnaded pavement and roadway in front of them were still unencumbered and serving their original function at the end of the seventh century (and were only blocked when a new house, which definitely spills out onto the pavement, was built in the late eighth or ninth century) (Gašlikowski 1986, 115-6). But, as the excavators point out, the conclusive evidence, that the colonnade was maintained in exactly its earlier form well into the Arab period, has gone, since the roadway and pavement were summarily cleared long ago.

Further evidence that classical planning persisted into the Islamic period is in fact cited by Kennedy, though he uses it in a curious way. When building new settlements, Arab rulers certainly favoured the formal, the rectilinear and the monumental... it was almost impossible to make any distinction between the periods before and after 636-40. (Tsafrir, Foerster 1994, p. 113).

5 Another, recently published, case of a pre-conquest dating for encroachment comes from Scythopolis, capital of Palaestina Secunda (Tsafrir, Foerster 1994, pp. 110-11). However, this account is strongly influenced by the letter (though not, as we have seen, by all of the spirit of Kennedy's article), and, when dating is discussed in any detail, the authors very honestly admit that the issue is not at all straightforward: it is rather hard to differentiate archaeologically between the end of the Byzantine period, the Early Islamic period and the Umayyad period... it was almost impossible to make any distinction between the periods before and after 636-40. (Tsafrir, Foerster 1994, p. 113).

6 The excavations at Caesarea seem, from the published data, to be of a reasonable quality. It is anyway usually fairly straightforward to date the building of a substantial structure, since solid floors and solid foundations normally reliably seal datable material.
mental (Kennedy 1985, 16-17). The classic case is Anjar, just south of Baalbek (fig.6). It is crossed by two colonnaded streets, complete with shops and central tetrapylon, and the plan is so regular that strenuous efforts have been made in the past to attribute it to the Roman period. However all the excavated dated evidence shows that it is in fact Umayyad.

Kennedy cites Anjar and other sites, to show that the Arabs, when building anew, laid out their settlements in a monumental and ordered way, despite the breakdown during the Byzantine period of formal planning in established cities. It would however be much simpler to assume that large parts of the Roman and Byzantine heritage of colonnaded streets persisted into the Arab period, as a living model for the builders of Anjar, and indeed that the new Arab rulers maintained at least some of this older heritage. If Arab rulers liked formal town-planning sufficiently to implement it at Anjar (and even later at Samarra), is it not likely that in Damascus, at least, the existing colonnaded streets were also carefully maintained as a foil to Arab power? Again, only very careful excavation will prove the point either way.

In my opinion, Kennedy also overstates the case for a fundamental shift in the basis of town life, from a Roman and Byzantine aristocratic and administrative base (with little involvement in production and exchange), to Islamic commercial dynamism. He is undoubtedly correct, and he makes the point thoroughly and elegantly, that there is a gradual shift away from the city as a place of formal and ordered civic architectural display (though, as we have seen, exactly when this happened is still open to debate); but his parallel assertion, that there is a commensurate growth of commercial activity within the towns, is more questionable.

Kennedy skates over or ignores the crucial fact that the colonnaded streets of the Roman and Byzantine East were laid out specifically for commerce, as well as architectural display - with shops or workshops as an integral part of the construction and design (there is now a very useful gazetteer of colonnaded streets and shops in Crawford 1990, 107-25). Admittedly classical archaeologists too have often ignored this aspect, and concentrated only on the formal and architectural appearance of the streets. At Ephesus, for instance, the excavators who, at the beginning of this century, cleared the great Arkadiane and ‘Embolos’ colonnaded streets, did not even bother to excavate the shops which lined them on both sides. Consequently it is not surprising that their published reconstruction of the Arkadiane is very empty and very idle - apart from a single water-carrier, a few figures stand or sit around, looking togaed and ‘civic’, rather than economically productive (fig. 7). However, recently published work on the colonnaded street at Sardis has now corrected the balance - here a continuous row of some thirty shops was carefully excavated and examined; as a result, here the reconstruction-drawings...
are peopled by workers busily producing and selling (e.g. fig. 8).

It would even be a mistake (as Kennedy himself very briefly states in passing on page 11) to assume that commercial activity on the colonnaded streets in Roman and Byzantine times was always restricted to the shops that lined them. In fourth-century Antioch, Libanius took great pride in the fact that there were also booths between the columns of the colonnades: ‘The cities that we know to pride themselves most on their wealth display only a single range of merchandise, that which is set out in front of the buildings, but nobody works between the pillars. With us these too are places of sale, so that there is a workshop (ergasterion) opposite almost each one of the buildings.’ (Libanius, Oration I, the ‘Antiochikos’, as translated by LIEBESCHUETZ 1972, 55-6). Similar booths are documented in other cities, though here principally in the context of attempts to remove them: they were cleared from the pavements of Edessa by a governor in 494/5 (CLAUDE 1969, 45), and in Constantinople a series of fifth-century laws tells of a running battle between stall-holders and a government keen to maintain a tidy and monumental appearance to the city (listed and discussed by PATLAGEAN 1977, 59-61). Evidently in all cities the pavements of the colonnades were lined with continuous rows of shops, displaying their wares in front of them; while in some great cities at least, commercial activity also spread, whether licitly or illicitly, further out onto the porticoes.

The main objection to Kennedy’s argument, that the development from colonnaded street to suq is indicative of increased commercial activity, is that it ignores the effect this change may have had on other parts of the city. In the specific area of the future suq, it is obviously true that the spread of shops and workshops onto the street increased retailing and manufacturing activity, and it is obviously also true that individual stall-holders benefitted from the ending of attempts to clear them off the pavements; but these very local commercial gains could well have been at the expense of other areas of the city. Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and (probably) early Umayyad planning, because it wished to maintain the comfort and formal splendour of the colonnades, spread shops and workshops in narrow bands widely through the city. With the ending of this control, outlying shops were perhaps abandoned in favour of a single more concentrated and central site.

Kennedy’s article serves a very useful function, in broadening our thinking about a vital period of change, when the near eastern town departed from the classical model (and also diverged from the wheel-based pattern of town-life in the West). However, as an Islamicist, he has perhaps felt obliged to overstate his case. As the son of a classical archaeologist (who wrote on Roman architecture and published a short book on classical town-planning), I perhaps feel equally obliged to take issue with him! Anyone who has shopped under the porticoes of Bologna during a thunderstorm or on a blisteringly hot day, will appreciate that in building colonnated street oriental rulers (whether indigenous or foreign) and oriental citizens were not just indulging a taste for display architecture, but had also found a sophisticated means to combine monumentality with both commerce and amenity.


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