
Unveiling Urban Realities and Spaces of Practices in Seleucid and Post-Seleucid Central and Western Asian Cities

Patric-Alexander Kreuz*¹ and Julia Heil*¹

¹Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel – Allemagne

Résumé

The exploration of Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic cities in the Mediterranean has been a prominent subject of archaeological research and significantly shapes our understanding of ancient urbanity. However, the phenomenon that is Seleucid and post-Seleucid cities in Western and Central Asia remains enigmatic as it often defies straightforward interpretations. Consisting of both new foundations and re-foundations of sites with complex urban biographies, cities such as the Syrian Tetrapolis, Jebel Khalid, Dura Europos, Seleukeia on the Tigris, Ai Khanoum, Babylon and Uruk/Orchoi each represent unique urban realities that profoundly influenced the daily lives of their inhabitants. These cities indicate a remarkable diversity and local specificity of urban experiences, calling for a more in-depth exploration of their peculiar heterogeneities.

Recent fieldwork enriching our knowledge on urban sites, coupled with innovative studies and analyses of existing urban structures, has unveiled previously hidden facets of these culturally plural ambiances. Drawing on other disciplines such as Urban Geography and Social Studies has opened new perspectives on the urban phenomenon and its build environments. This encouraged a turn towards shared experiences, perceptions, and intentions, putting the individual as an ‘actor’ in the center of attention as well as performances which play a vital role in the formation of social practices.

The panel aims to unravel the complexities of these urban environments and seeks to foster a deeper understanding of these cities as lived-in spaces. We advocate for ‘close readings’ of the urban build environments by shifting the focus from urban topographies and architectural typologies as supposed proxies of ‘the urban’ to urban practices and experiences that shaped them and were shaped by them. The particular interest lies within public spaces – the street, the plaza, the sanctuary, a neighborhood, even ‘empty’, undefined spaces of the urban tissue or temporary appropriations of contested urban spaces – as vital arenas for a wide range of practices and interactions. The panel will therefore seek a deeper assessment of contexts, group dynamics and practices within public spaces. Focusing on these areas, it can offer valuable insights into the archaeology of the diverse urban realities in the (former) Seleucid realm on a local and regional scale and shed light on their significance in the broader context of ancient urban culture.

Mots-Clés: Urbanism, Hellenistic Asia, Seleucids, City foundations, Urban practices

*Intervenant