Moses Finley’s study of the ancient city in 1977 embraced the Bücher–Sombart–Weber thesis of the consumer/parasite city\(^1\) — as in fact Collingwood had done some 30 years earlier\(^2\) — by laying stress on 4 essential features:

1. The ancient city unlike the mediaeval had no separation of function between town and country (Bücher)
2. The ancient town relied on the products of outside agricultural labour for its existence (Sombart)
3. The major income for urban consumers came from rural rents, not from commercial enterprises (Weber)
4. The commodity production of towns was essentially petty (Finley).

Against this thesis (simplified here for the sake of brevity), since 1977 have arisen 3 main attacks:

1. from archaeologists, like Pucci and Morel, who have argued that major changes in production of fine pottery — Campanian, parois fines, terra sigillata — and in its export coincided with the major growth of towns, beginning from the 2nd c. B.C.\(^3\) Some have gone on to include other urban ‘industries’, of which there is evidence on inscriptions and reliefs — fullers, dyers, weavers and smiths, etc. — which supposedly developed to service the countryside.\(^4\)
2. from Keith Hopkins, who has developed a theory of the city in two parts. Towns, he argues, were vital units in the tax cycle of the Roman empire, firstly, because they paid out money in cash to rural producers in exchange for basic produce, thereby enabling farmers to pay their taxes; and secondly, because they purchased this cash from the beneficiaries of the central state by the sale and export of articles of manufacture. High levels of artisan production and trade, therefore, paid for the town’s consumption needs.\(^5\)
3. A third model has been proposed by Wacher and others of whom the most recent is Leveau, that the city is to be regarded as the ‘organiser’ of the countryside. The latter has attacked the concept of parasitism on the grounds that it implies decadence.\(^6\) Both Wacher and Leveau argue that the city was necessary for the organisation and redistribution of rural surpluses — in Wacher’s words, “an essential prerequisite to prosperous farming”, since it was “the first to adopt new ideas and techniques”.

Let me take these alternative models in reverse order:

### The Wacher–Leveau model

To the Wacher–Leveau model of the town as organiser, I have little to add to what Goudineau said in 1983. Leveau, he showed, was simply mistaken in thinking that the theory of consumption in the city, as developed by Finley, had any association with decline.\(^7\) Insofar as I understand the model of the

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1. Finley 1981, 3-40 is a reprinting of the original article published in 1977. Full references to the works of Bücher, Sombart and Weber are given there.
2. Collingwood and Myres 1937, 198.
7. Leveau et Goudineau 1983. Leveau cites in his support Marx’s and Engels’ view, expressed in the German ideology, that the division of labour between the industrial town and the agricultural countryside heralded the decay of society. This could be interpreted to mean that, when the ancient town was a net consumer, it was in a healthy state — a view supported by Engels in the Anti-Dühring, where he imagined a utopian ruralisation of industry and production. It has to be said, however, that in developing their thesis of “the antagonism between town and country”, Marx and Engels had almost no interest in pre-mediaeval society, since they were preoccupied with the effects of post-feudal capitalism which had concentrated productive forces in urban centres.
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'organiser-town' in economic rather than in social terms, it means that the city paid for its consumption-needs by profits on trade, and in that respect it is similar to one strand of Hopkins' theory.

The most important part of Leveau's study of Cherchel, however, is his excellent demonstration of the intimate link between peri-urban country villas and urban foundations. This liaison is confirmed by studies of the land immediately surrounding towns like Silchester (what the Germans call 'Umland'), where the most recent theory is that the town-properties of landowners functioned as working farms. Surely this confirms, rather than contradicts, Weber's view (adopted by Finley) of the rôle of rural rentiers within the civitas organisation? The rural *potentes* were also the urban elite who supplied much of the town's consumption needs. They did not need to manufacture goods for exchange.

**The Hopkins model**

Hence arise doubts about the first part of Hopkins' model, whether or not city-dwellers paid for the food they consumed through a monetised cash transaction to the countryman so that the latter could pay his taxes in cash to Rome. In theory it is at least possible that dependant peasants paid rich landlords not in cash but in kind. And that raises questions about the second part of Hopkins' model. How did the city pay its taxes? In theory, again, it is possible that a city paid its taxes not in cash but in kind. And if so, there was no pressure upon it to manufacture goods for export to buy its tax money.

As so often in ancient history, questions are easier than answers. Both these alternative theoretical propositions can be supported by evidence, although neither can actually be proved to have been the norm. Recently there have been discussions, for instance, about the importance of gift-tribute, based upon the surprisingly large number of reliefs depicting peasants bringing food to landlords; the reliefs of so-called rent-payers at Igel, Neumagen and Luxembourg have been reinterpreted as labourers receiving, not giving, cash. Galen's famous description of starvation in the countryside says "The city dwellers, as it was their custom to collect and store enough corn for the whole of the next year immediately after the harvest, *carried off* all the wheat, barley, beans and lentils" etc. The phrase 'carried off' does not sound like evidence of market transactions between town and country. Even in the monetized society of Castille in the 16th c., when rural surpluses were as high as 50%, between 10% and 20% of the surplus never went to the market but straight into the granaries of urban landlords.

As for state taxes, we have the literary evidence of the Younger Pliny and the *agrimensor* Hyginus concerning rural produce which the citizen allies gave in tax to Rome; sometimes, at any rate, according to their evidence, tax was levied as *fructus pars* not as money. But unfortunately neither passage makes it obvious what was the normal practice. In other words, it is not a matter of either/or, but a more delicate matter of deciding which was the predominant practice and how high the level of manufacture and trade were in the Roman empire.

More recently Hopkins has made a bold attempt to substantiate his claim that trade in the city was far greater than the low level assumed by Finley and Goudineau. If 10% of the population of the Roman empire — viz. 7 million, he calculates — lived in towns, they would have consumed food to the minimum

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8 Leveau 1983, more fully developed in Leveau 1984 ch.15.
9 Drewett, Rudling and Gardiner 1988, 214; Petrikovits 1975, 130.
11 Galen, *de probis pravisque alimentorum succis* 1; Salway 1985, 71-72.
14 Hopkins 1983.
value of c.630 million sesterces per annum, if one accepts his estimated average price for corn. The sum is so
great, concludes Hopkins, “that I am now convinced that the upper echelons of Roman society were not
involved in trade.” The ingenious calculations by which this conclusion is drawn ignore, however, the
possibility which Braudel describes in Castille, that significant sectors of the population of towns —
dependants, servants, etc. — were fed by the rich directly from their estates and not through the market.
For this practice in Roman times, also, we have support from ancient texts, although again it is impossible
to be sure just how widespread it was.  

But even if Hopkins' figures were roughly correct, I am not convinced that it proves that rich land-
owners were extensively involved in entrepreneurial activities. It comes down, in the end, to a matter of
judgement of how we think the profits of trade were distributed. If, for instance, traders of all types in the
Roman empire constituted no more than between 1 and 2% of the urban population (which is probably low,
judging by mediaeval figures), that would mean there were about 70-140,000 traders big and small. The
average trade turn-over, therefore (not the profit-income) for each trader from foodstuffs would have
been valued at 9000-4500 sesterces. Even with a regular entrepreneurial mark-up of 100% between the
farm gate and the consumer, a trader could expect to gain at most an average of only between 4500 and 2250
sesterces per annum as his trading income — and more likely the lower figure if we think of his costs and
the high risk of losses on the sea.

Although we can offset that ever-present possibility of disaster by allowing for greater profits on cash
crops, it can still hardly be called evidence of great riches by comparison with that of landowners. The
income from the minimum property qualification of an equestrian (400,000 sesterces at 6%) was about
24,000 sesterces per annum. For a decurion of a medium-sized town (who had to have property valued at
100,000 sesterces), the income was about 6,000 sesterces. The profits from trade were not, of course, evenly
distributed, and the existence of some rich traders is not in doubt. But how can we decide how many there
were, how large a slice of the total commerce they controlled, and how many came from the “upper
echelons of Roman society”? It is notorious that the evidence is virtually silent about this. What is
certain is that there is nothing in the total volume of trade, as such, to challenge Weber’s axiom that the
major income of urban consumers was as rural rentiers, not as commercial entrepreneurs.

The archaeologists’ model

In the end it is probably from archaeology, not from literary sources, that the most conclusive evidence
will come to answer such questions as the degree of monetisation in rural areas and the quantity of money
in circulation on rural sites. The theory of the circulation of money proposes that the state paid money to
officials and soldiers, who used it to pay for their food and other purchases to provincials, who in their
turn paid the money back to the state as taxes. Britain contained the largest concentration of military
personnel in the Roman empire in proportion to the size of the province; that is, Britain ought to appear in
the archaeological record as a highly monetised community. The evidence, however, shows that coinage
was relatively scarce in the countryside until the 3rd-4th c. Analysis of 14 British sites shows that 80% of
coins found date from the period 259-402, and ironically it was only debasement that produced sufficient

15 Braudel 1972, I. 425: “So 60 or perhaps 70 percent of the overall production of the Mediterranean never entered
the market economy to which our methods of accounting mistakenly seek to assimilate it”. The 16th c. was a
period of prosperity and there is no reason to think that Roman surpluses ever reached such high levels. The
point is simply to illustrate that, even in the highly commercialized world of that time, “the market economy
covered only a fraction of economic life” (ibid.438). Dig.XXXIV.1 de alimentis vel cibaris legatis records a
number of legacies for freemen and slaves to ensure the continuation of the food and clothing which had been
provided in the lifetime of the master. We cannot tell whether the food was bought or whether it came directly
from the rich man’s property; but cf. Whitaker 1985.

16 Pounds 1974, 295 quotes figures for business undertakings in Frankfurt in the 16th c., when trade had recovered
from the early mediaeval slump. Innkeeping, trade and transport constituted 10.1% of all business undertakings
in the town of 10,000 persons. In very large mediaeval towns (i.e. over 25,000), the numbers of traders could be as
high as 30% of the population, while in small towns (less than 3,500) they hardly existed (ibid.255).
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quantity of small copper coin to conduct everyday transactions.\textsuperscript{17} The same message seems to be conveyed from Gaul by the recently-discovered Trésor de Garonne, although less clearly.\textsuperscript{18} The irony lies in the fact that the taxation-trade cycle was at its weakest in the later empire, when no one would wish to deny that taxation in kind generally increased.

The model of the city as a producer, and in particular the model (following Hopkins) of the city as an agent which transformed low-value, high-bulk foods into high-value, low-bulk products, has been subjected to much examination and accepted, perhaps too trustingly, by some archaeologists in the absence of any evidence.\textsuperscript{19} The distribution of industrial sites on the ground does not give much comfort to those who have challenged Finley's view of petty-commodity production.\textsuperscript{20} Take, for instance, the recent conclusion of a British archaeologist whose speciality is the metal industry: “The tendency to equate industry with towns ... is fallacious and misleading, based as it is on a structure that is hardly two centuries old in western Europe. Indeed, the current picture of Roman industry suggests that major primary industries were almost exclusively located outside urban centres.”\textsuperscript{21} Silchester, the only Roman *civitas* capital in western Europe to have been examined in its entirety, has turned up nothing which can be termed other than petty production.\textsuperscript{22} More significantly, the most recent study of the site states, “From the manufacturing point of view, there is little to distinguish a rural from a town-based craftsman”, and it concludes that the main *civitas* towns were indeed parasitical on the countryside.\textsuperscript{23}

If we may compare recent opinion in France, all efforts to find how Amiens paid for its consumption-needs have failed, and we must conclude that the town played a negligible rôle in the transformation of raw materials from the countryside.\textsuperscript{24} Once again, the irony is that the only real urban industry to have been discovered is the later-empire arms factory, which was a non-commercial state enterprise, lying outside the trade cycle. Likewise, in Roman Trier nothing has been found in the town which compares to the metal worker’s workshop found in the village of Pachten, itself described as an “ordinary backyard” enterprise.\textsuperscript{25}

Even potteries, which are ideally suited to an urban context, are missing in many towns of the Roman empire.\textsuperscript{26} The larger-scale ceramic wares of Britain — Oxfordshire, New Forest, Alice Holt, and Dorset Black Burnished Ware — are often rural and, contrary to the urban centre-place theory of market distribution which was once believed,\textsuperscript{27} they are now acknowledged to have been influenced by other, often social factors. A recent report concludes: “If the towns were responsible for the marketing, one would expect rural locations to be disadvantageous, especially to large scale production. This is clearly not the case and there seems good reason to suggest that these industries were seasonal and run by those involved in agriculture”.\textsuperscript{28} The same conclusion was reached long before in a Gallic context — “pauvre poitier, pauvre paysan” — and can be well illustrated by sites like La Graufesenque which never rose in status beyond that of a *vicus*.\textsuperscript{29} I see nothing in the graffiti to suggest that the *civitas* capital organised the production or the trade. The *vicus* of Rheinzabern earned its name *Tabernae* because it too marketed its
famous *terra sigillata* outside the urban framework. That may be true of the products from the *vicus* of Mayen (Germania I) in the later Roman empire.

The rôle of the *vicus* in theories of the ancient city

This brings me to the question which is central to my paper — the crucially important rôle which the *vicus* ought to play in any theory of the ancient city. The village was almost wholly ignored by Weber, except for his comment that the distinctive feature of Greek and Roman political life, whereby the power of the nobles was broken, was the incorporation of the rural demes and tribes into the city, unlike the mediaeval city where the *popolo* was promoted at the expense of the peasants. But I am not sure that this takes us very much further.

In the decade since Finley's paper on the consumer city, however, an increasing number of archaeological studies from Germany, France and Britain have stressed the importance of what the French call the *vicu*, the Germans the "*Dorf*" and the British "small towns". "The future", it was said at a conference recently, "lies very much with the *vicu*." None of the terms is entirely satisfactory, since the distinction between a small town and a village is arbitrary. Many of the rural settlements, which have loosely been called *vici*, for want of a better name, have not actually produced inscriptions to show that they possessed the juridical status of *vicus*. Some *vici* did, however, set up inscriptions which seem to show that they were units of civic administration possessing magistrates, an *ordo*, and public buildings grouped around a forum (e.g. *ILS* 9361, Vandoeuvre-en-Brenne). In Upper Germany, no more than 30 of the settlements, to which the classification of "*Dorf*" has been applied, have yielded inscriptions which actually name them as *vici*.

I should make it clear that I have no intention of entering the controversy about whether a *civitas* capital was itself a *vicus*, on which opinion is divided. The crucial inscription in this debate remains that from the *civitas* capital of Sens (*CIL* 13. 2949), which appears to have been called *vici*, for want of a better name, have not actually produced inscriptions to show that they possessed the juridical status of *vicus*. Some *vici* did, however, set up inscriptions which seem to show that they were units of civic administration possessing magistrates, an *ordo*, and public buildings grouped around a forum (e.g. *ILS* 9361, Vandoeuvre-en-Brenne). In Upper Germany, no more than 30 of the settlements, to which the classification of "*Dorf*" has been applied, have yielded inscriptions which actually name them as *vici*.

My interest, rather, is in what the implications of this socio-political distinction are for the economic theory of consumer or producer town. Which town are we talking about? It must be fairly obvious, for instance, that if Constantine could create *civitas* status for Orcistus or Maiuma almost on the spot, and if Julian could revoke it, status had little to do with economic reality. When Augustus downgraded the 24 *oppida* of the Volci Arecomici by attributing them to Nîmes, do we consider these *oppida ignobilia* then to have been town or country? Cunliffe has recently suggested that we should differentiate between "nucleated urbanism" of the typical Graeco-Roman type and "dispersed urbanism" of the Central American or Chinese type. The latter spread over as much as 10 sq.km. and seem to correspond more closely to the polyfocal sites of Gaul, such as Levroux, or to the territorial *oppida* of pre-Roman Britain, such as Camulodunum.

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30 Wightman 1985, 277.
32 Drinkwater 1985, 54-55. For French *vicus* studies, see Chevallier 1986; for British "small towns" studies, see Rodwell and Rowley 1975; for German "*Dorf*" studies, see Petrikovits 1975.
33 Petrikovits 1975, 88.
34 A convenient summary of the ancient evidence is given by Johnson 1975; for the debate see Mann 1960, Frere 1961, Mann 1966, Picard 1986.
36 Orcistus: *FIRA* 2 I. 95; the only stated grounds for the grant are strategic (cross roads, water etc.) or social (population, decurions, buildings, Christianity). Maiuma: Sozom.2.5, 5.3, Eusebius, *vit.Const*.4.38.
38 Cunliffe 1985; Weber 1958, 82, also considered the Chinese village, but rejected it from his definition of a city.
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It may be worth expanding on the ambiguities of the *vicus*. Many of them were large — the Burgundian *vici* of Malain or Mirabeau cover between 150 and 200 ha — bigger than the smaller *civitas* capitals, although most *vici* elsewhere average around 20 ha. Industrially, however, their artisan quarters were as important as anything found in the *civitates*, usually more so. At Trier the specialist artisan centres like Speicher-Herfort (near Bitburg) and Mayen took over the pottery production for which Trier was once celebrated. To assess their importance in the economy of the city, one has only to think of the many *vici* like Sulz on the Neckar with its evidence of potters and smiths, including goldsmiths, or of Castor-Durobrivae on the Nene in England with its 5 sq.km. of buildings attached to the pottery industry which lay north of the actual settlement of 18 ha; or of the enormous ‘company’ towns devoted to mining and smelting, like Charterhouse-on-Mendip or Corta Lago on the Rio Tinto, whose buildings extended for 0.75 km. and whose quasi-‘urban’ organisation can be read on the Vipasca inscriptions.

The celebrated artisan quarters of Alesia or Entrains remind us of the fact that many of these artisan *vici* sites derived from the late La Tène oppida where they “formed the principal base of the economy.” Precisely those oppida were reduced to ‘ignoble’ status “en liaison avec le milieu rural dont elle n’est pas coupée.” Does this therefore make them part of the town or the country? The ambiguity is compounded by the fact that *vicus* was also the term for a sector of the urban centre itself, as at Köln, where perhaps landowners farmed land in the suburbs, as at Silchester.

If they were not industrial producers, neither were the *civitas* capitals the only centres of trade and exchange. Enormous numbers of the small roadside *vici*, fora, castella, conciliābula — call them what you will — were important rural markets, some of very large dimensions and of pre-Roman origin. At Les Tours Mirandes (Vienne) in the Pictones’ *civitas*, the area thought to represent the forum is roughly the size of Trajan’s Forum in Rome. The large and densely populated road village at Mont Berny in the forest of Compiegne has produced large quantities of late Gallic coins — a good deal more than seem to have come out of the *vici* in the recent studies of the Berry.

That brings me to the final ambiguity of *vicus*, which is not its urban character but its similarity to the rural villa. In Britain there is still a debate about whether there was any industrial production in villas, since no parallels have been found to the villas at Anthée or Chastres-les-Walcourt in Gallia Belgica. That is also true of the Beauce where all industry until the 3rd c. was concentrated on the *vici*. It has been suggested recently that some Gallic *vicus* did not even have a primary agricultural economy, since the proximity of villa sites appears not to have left them enough land to farm.

But a *vicus* could always be sited on an estate — as in the famous *vici circa villam* model of Frontinus in Africa. And that presumably means that an industrial *vicus* could also have been part of the estate. The *vicus* at Chateaubleau, 72 km. east of Paris, is clearly related to the large villa nearby, as are villages

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40 Petrikovits 1977, 103.
41 Webster 1975.
42 Jones 1980, 156.
43 Goudineau 1980, 217.
44 Martin 1977, 182.
45 *CIL* 13. 8254: *possessores ex vico Lucretio scarno primo* (“landowners from the vicus Lucretius on the first strip of field”); Petrikovits 1977, 127.
46 Frere 1975, 6; reported in *Gallia* 25 (1967) 269-70.
48 Percival 1981, 162.
49 Ferdière 1986, 221-23.
50 Ferdière 1988, 53.
51 *Agrim. rom.* p.53 (Lachmann).
Montmaurin, Carnac, etc.52 Iron-smelting is also linked to villas in the Somme valley.53 On the Kentish Weald, however, iron production took place on what were almost certainly imperial estates, where neither towns nor villas were associated, giving rise to the theory that metal work, like pottery-making, was “only a part time activity” alongside agriculture. Imperial estates containing artisan vicani would also explain the Speicher pottery production north of Trier, which lay within the Landmauer estate.54

Thus it appears that villa and vicus played a similar and sometimes complementary rôle. In size, villae complexes and many vici are comparable. The villas at Anthee or at Echternach, including out-houses, were as great or greater than Chelmsford or Godmanchester; and some of the vici in the Berry would have fitted into the courtyard of a villa urbana in the same region.55 In manufacture, therefore, and in primary produce, the vici were exporting their surpluses, serving as a market for distribution and exchange and servicing concentrated populations without the intermediary rôle of any “small town”, let alone of the civitas capitals.

It is a banality of archaeology that villas were primarily, although not of necessity, an urban phenomenon.56 This statement, however, needs some qualification. Villas were a phenomenon of a central civitas town, not of the so-called small towns.57 That, I think, must be the decisive fact which dictated the difference between them, despite physical ‘urban’ similarities between civitas centres and small towns. The civitas town was the social and political centre of the state. The vici were firmly rural like the villae. By the 3rd c. any ambiguity was dispelled by legal opinion that rural workers were not liable to the munera of the city, since they did not benefit from city life.58 The Code of Justinian added rustici to the term vici used in legislation of the Theodosian Code.59 In the late Glossators, κόμη is defined as vicus, viculus, castellum and villa, but not as town.60

The theory of the consumer city

I conclude by returning to the theory of the consumer city.

1. It does not seem true that the civitas capital, even with its satellite vici and villae, acted as the sole or even the major transformer of taxes and goods. The largest ‘industries’ we can detect, the lead and iron works of ‘company’ towns, are now believed in Britain, at least, to have been imperial estates, serviced by the Roman fleet in one case.61 This was probably paralleled by some centres of production of the ceramics which were supplied to the Roman army. I have no way of deciding whether these transactions were paid for commercially by the state, or whether they were exacted by corvée labour. But evidently they were not mediated by the city.

2. There is clearly no simple urban–rural dichotomy in the ancient world upon which to build an economic theory of taxation and trade. It would be possible to think of small towns as physically-distinct but economic parts of a larger ‘producer-trading city’, not unlike Cunliffe’s poly-focal city, with its artisan quarters in the vici and its political/administration sector in the civitas capital, around which were grouped the villas of the powerful. Within their own discrete local territories or pagi, it may also be true that some vici manufactured and traded goods or money in exchange for the rural produce they consumed.62

52 Burin 1986; Grenier 1931-60 II.2, IV.2.
53 Wightman 1985, 139.
56 Rivet 1964, 105; the point is illustrated by Leveau’s work at Cherchel.
57 Rodwell 1975 argues that there is no sign of villas as satellites of “small towns” in Trinovantian territory in Britain. Hodder and Millett 1980. Compare the example of Bath, a highly romanised town but without the administrative status of a civitas centre, which did not attract a large number of villas.
58 Dig. L. 1.27.1; Millar 1983, 79.
59 Cod. Just. XI, 54; Cod. Th. XI. 24.3.1.
60 Köbler 1977, 138-41.
61 Cleere 1982.
62 Cf. Drinkwater 1985, 54, and above n.50.
I cannot tell. But this was certainly not true of the *civitas* capitals, where the rich and their employees were the major consumers.

3. Hopkins' theory of the ancient city as a transformer of bulk food into high-value exports is not dependent upon whether this transformation was carried out in the town or in its dependent villages and villas. But, if each time we discover corporate, artisan production (such as that of the villas), we say that this is somehow 'urban', we reduce to a tautology the whole urban–rural opposition, which lies at the heart of the debate of both the 'consumer town' and the 'producer-trading town'.

Perhaps this is the correct conclusion, and the answer to those who find themselves restless with what increasingly looks like a non-question. The foundation and growth of the *civitates* of western Europe was unrelated to their economic function or performance. They were "an ideological and political phenomenon." This judgement written recently in *World Archaeology* is pretty well the same as that proposed by Finley. But frankly I doubt whether it is a conclusion worth repeating endlessly, since the ancient *civitas* or *polis* was indivisible, as any ancient Greek and Roman knew. The interesting economic questions about manufacture or exploitation and redistribution of wealth, whether between rich and poor or between province and empire, are unrelated to the internal divisions between town and country.

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63 Fulford 1982, esp. 417; Ferdière 1988, 296 illustrates the point very well with a map of the Franche-Comté around Besançon.
64 Millett 1982; Leday 1980, 431.
65 Jones 1987, 54.
66 This paper was first delivered at a *table ronde* organized by François Hertog and Jean Andreau at the Collège de France in September, 1988. The intention of the meeting was to discuss the ideas of the late Moses Finley, which will explain the form taken by my paper. I must express my gratitude both to the organizers of the event and to Keith Hopkins, who has generously improved my paper even when he was obviously in disagreement with it.
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