

Archaeology of the Modern City

Examining the city as an artifact is the theme of this book. Piecing together the various archaeological sites and their microhistories presents a picture of the city and its evolution over time. Crucial for this process is a detailed description of each site and its contextualization within time and space. Many Baltimore sites lack such documentation, without which fully understanding the site is difficult to impossible, and thus, so is a deeper analysis and comparison.

The modern city has been the subject of increasing scholarship in archaeology. Articles and books have been written on the archaeology of Charleston, Denver, New York, Philadelphia, Reno, St. Augustine, and Virginia City.¹⁸ Other studies have examined cities thematically or more regionally, such as urban landscapes of the U.S. South.¹⁹ The archaeology of Annapolis stands out as a concentrated and concerted examination of the evolution of Maryland's capital. The Archaeology in Annapolis program has operated for over thirty years and excavated more than forty sites in and around the capital.²⁰ Using critical theory, Mark Leone and his students have studied the interrelationship of the development of Annapolis and the growth of capitalism around material expressions of identity, freedom, and inequality. In addition to an extensive body of scholarship, the program has trained numerous archaeologists and led public programs.

The term *modern* reflects the definition of historical archaeology used in this book. This book is centered in historical archaeology, but the archaeology of cities in what became the United States includes the cities and urbanized areas of premodern places such as Cahokia, Acoma Pueblo, and Chaco Canyon. Before proceeding further, a more precise definition of *historical archaeology* and an explanation of its use are needed. The field of historical archaeology is currently defined by two main focal points. First, the use of both documents and material culture defines the historical archaeology of populations with written records. Since the beginning of the field, archaeologists have advocated for such a definition based on the use of documents, and the availability of such texts extends the discipline's reach from the present back several thousand years.²¹ In Europe, Africa, and Asia, historical archaeology is still defined using this methodology, and subfields within archaeology are delineated by research focus or specific time periods, such as classical archaeology or the archaeology of a specific kingdom or dynasty.



Figure 1.1. Looking west from Federal Hill past the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rowhouses to a twentieth-century hotel and the stadium for the Baltimore Ravens, the modern city of Baltimore is a conglomeration of interrelated individual sites, but taken together, the city itself can be seen as an artifact. (Photograph by Adam Fracchia.)

A more nuanced definition that has increasingly gained traction and moved away from methodological-centered definitions is a historical archaeology of the recent past. Building on earlier definitions, such as that advanced by James Deetz, this definition examines the wider world in what Charles Orser terms an “archaeology of the modern world.”²² Specifically, modern world archaeology is defined as a kind of historical archaeology of the last five centuries that seeks to analyze and interpret the interrelated processes and effects of capitalism, colonialism, Eurocentrism, and racialization. These processes have not only structured the modern world as we know it; they also influence the study of archaeology. In setting out this modern world archaeology, Orser advocates for a historical archaeology focused on the material and social realities of the present and near past.²³ Although the archaeology of post-1492 is but one possible historical archaeology in a field that uses all forms of documentary history, the archaeology of the modern world provides a unifying and relevant research

target.²⁴ Such a perspective has the capacity to study the interrelation of multiple scales or even regions as part of the analysis of these processes. Thus a focus on the modern world affords and provides archaeologists the ability to pull together research at multiple scales and time periods in a search for relevance to the present. In this book we attempt to examine the archaeology of Baltimore from a modern world archaeology perspective using the strengths of a multi-scalar analysis that seeks and speaks to the present through its continuity with the past.

From this vantage point, and to put the city into an even wider and more relevant context, the analysis has to examine the city as an artifact of larger processes situated in the modern world. To a large extent, economics have governed the evolution of the city. Trade and production structured life in this mercantile port city. Soon after, industrial production expanded the city structurally and demographically into the twentieth century. Deindustrialization and loss of manufacturing saw the city contract and lose residents.

Throughout its history, the city has been shaped and structured specifically by the capitalist economy, which structures more than just economics. For instance, a wage laborer's work hours are set by an employer, which in turn sets the structure of the worker's day. Yet by setting the day's schedule, the employer is also setting parameters of time outside of work. In the same way, the city's physical infrastructure—roads, bridges, and railroads—are often aligned for work and hence influence the movement and lives of its citizens. Taken one step further, social relations within the city—where people live, who they interact with, and how people are viewed—are influenced not only by income but also by work relations. Thus the modern city is shaped by a socioeconomic process, capitalism. As represented by its particular mode of production, the economic structure of society provides the basis for a superstructure of social, political, and legal forms.²⁵

Thinking in terms of the city as part of a larger process breaks down the artificial delineation between the inside and outside of a city and its boundaries. Modern cities are an integral part of modern life and society; a society that has become ever more urbanized, rather than cities becoming deurbanized.²⁶ Taken further, this process is not limited to the city and so looking at the city in isolation is not possible.

Although municipal boundaries define the geographic area and limits of Baltimore City, roads do not stop at its boundaries with surrounding counties. Delineations between urban and rural are a more useful way of conceptualizing the larger process involving the local, regional, national, and

global connectedness and interaction. The United States Census Bureau classifies urban as an area with 2,500 or more individuals while an urbanized area is termed a densely populated area with 50,000 or more residents with a central area and urban fringe.²⁷

Viewing modern capitalism as a process, urbanization involves the internalization of surplus production within the circulation of capital, whereby everything, including time and space, falls within the sphere of capitalism. In this theoretization, the city becomes the centerpiece of accumulation and surplus production generated through exploitation of laborers in production. According to David Harvey, urbanization allowed for evolution of the modern city through the appropriation, mobilization, and geographical concentration of surpluses of capital, productive forces, and labor power in commodity form.²⁸ Eventually, these forces transformed scattered populations and decentralized systems of property rights into the massive concentrations of political and economic power we have today.²⁹

Using this integrated theoretical approach, it is possible to understand how the physical, social, and spatial structures of cities are created, maintained, and destroyed by the cycles and crises of capital circulation. The process of urbanization allowed surplus capital to be mobilized and concentrated in a small segment of the population and was necessary before the circulation of capital through production could start.³⁰ Therefore cities like Baltimore play an essential role in this larger process and their roles can be studied archaeologically.

Looking at the city from this theoretical perspective provides an avenue to understand Baltimore not as a setting but as an artifact of this larger process. The form, structure, and relations of the city can be examined from this vantage point. To this end, the problems of the city can also be examined within this context and unequal process, removing them from the present excuses such as a lack of hard work, identity, or cultural stigmas.

The Present City

Baltimore, the economic center of Maryland, lies at the head of the Patapsco River estuary, about 15 miles above the Chesapeake Bay. Its geographic location makes it a major seaport and a key point for shipping automobiles overseas. Stretching over 92 square miles, the city had a population of just over 602,000 in 2019.³¹ Demographically diverse, almost 63 percent of the city's residents are Black or African American, just over 30 percent are white, 5.1 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 2.6 percent are Asian, 0.3 percent

are American Indian and Alaskan Native, and 2.5 percent identify as two or more races, according to 2018 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau in 2020. These statistics reflect a historical pattern of rich diversity.

As in all cities, urban renewal has shaped Baltimore throughout its history, but especially so in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The city was forced to undertake massive rebuilding in the harbor and central business district following the 1904 fire, which destroyed 1,500 buildings over 140 acres.³² Urban renewal, beginning in the late 1960s, razed many city blocks, as highway construction, the building of two large sports stadiums, a convention center, and new retail and hotel businesses in the Inner Harbor reshaped the city. Since 2010 new construction has turned many old commercial buildings into residences, with the city's rate of home ownership at 50.2 percent in 2000.³³

Despite Baltimore's growing economy in the information technology, health, higher education, and bioscience sectors, the city struggles with economic and social challenges typical of the early twenty-first century. Economic inequality is a pervasive challenge, with some city neighborhoods characterized by over 50 percent of the working age population either unemployed or looking for work and over a third of the homes abandoned or vacant.³⁴

Economic inequality remains one of the primary causes of tensions that erupted into protests in 2015 after the death of Freddie Gray in police custody. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income (2014–18) in Baltimore in 2018 dollars was \$48,840, and 21.8 percent of the population was listed as in poverty. With high poverty rates, the city has a growing homeless population, particularly among young people. The number of homeless in 2018 was 1,962, according to the Maryland Interagency Council on Homelessness, while St. Vincent de Paul provided a current estimate of 4,000 homeless individuals.³⁵ Yet the city counted over 16,577 vacant homes in October 2019.³⁶

Baltimore is not just marked by concentrated poverty; the city is also home to vast wealth. The city's extreme disparities in wealth are often hidden by tragic examples of poverty and disenfranchisement, from drug abuse to violent crime. The resulting and detrimental effects of this disparity carry over into the lived experience of a segment of the population, depending on one's address in Baltimore. Statistically, a child born in the Roland Park neighborhood in north-central Baltimore will most likely live to eighty-four, while a child born five miles to the south in the Seton Hill neighborhood can expect to die by the age of sixty-five. A distance of

roughly five miles equates to a difference of nineteen years of life. Overall, fourteen of Baltimore's neighborhoods have lower life expectancies than North Korea, while eight neighborhoods experience a lower life expectancy than Syria.³⁷

Newspapers and local and national news carry daily statistics of the violence plaguing Baltimore. For instance, 1,660 people were killed in Baltimore from 2015 to 2019.³⁸ The violence spurred the City's Board of Estimates recently to approve the use of privately run surveillance planes over the city, to be coupled with the already extant non-racially neutral positioned network of cameras.³⁹

The importance of this book lies in its use of archaeology to document the past, not only to add to the rich heritage of all Baltimoreans and the interconnected nature of so many of these stories, but also to use archaeology to document patterns of inequality that have led to poverty and violence as well as the evolution and maintenance of inequity. For these reasons, examining the sites of the city together to understand the history and impact of the process of capitalism, colonialism, Eurocentrism, and racialization is critical, especially for serving the present that is still structured or shaped by these processes.

Structure of the Book

This book tells those stories, attempting to form an overall picture of Charm City. The resulting collection is not a strict history of Baltimore; Sherry Olson provides an excellent and comprehensive history of the city.⁴⁰ Instead, this book is an archaeological examination of the city, showing the unique contribution and viewpoint of archaeology. Each chapter highlights a different theme or aspect of Baltimore as seen through archaeological evidence. Archaeological research in Baltimore has not been systematic in its breadth and scope. This omission and the general lack of in-depth analysis preclude detailed comparisons between sites. We hope this is more indicative of a reflection of nascence rather than a permanent pattern, and it is our further hope that a book written twenty years from now will not have such a problem.

Chapter 2 delves more deeply into this issue and discusses the history of archaeology done in the city. The chapter relates the earliest avocational explorations of curious finds to concerned citizen-led salvage projects during the mid-century urban renewal initiatives. The rise of the city archaeology program in the 1980s and 1990s brought forth an exciting focus

on Baltimore's archaeology during late twentieth-century urban renewal efforts. The collapse of this program left a lack of leadership and attention to Baltimore's archaeological heritage. The chapter concludes with current efforts and the state of archaeology in and of Baltimore.

Chapter 3 discusses the setting and early history of the city. The pre-European contact history and natural environment are discussed, providing context for Baltimore before the city was founded. Growth was slow, and the city remained a series of scattered buildings and a sleepy port for much of the eighteenth century. Instead of tobacco cultivation, grain agriculture and the city's location on the fall line would grow what were previously three small settlements into a bustling mercantile port and later an industrial boom town during the early Republic.

In Chapter 4 we discuss the many different peoples who have worked and resided in the city. The demographics of the port and later the industrial city have attracted and fostered a diversity of peoples since its very beginning, from French Canadian, Irish, and German immigrants to people from Poland and Latin America as well as the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. These people found work at the wharves, in building ships, and in numerous industries from canning to making steel. They ran and continue to run small businesses. Until Emancipation, a portion of this population was made up of enslaved Africans and African Americans, but Baltimore was also home to a large free Black population that helped make it a gateway to the South and the North. Together, these people have all contributed to building the Baltimore that stands before us today.

Industry played a large role in shaping Baltimore demographically and physically. Chapter 5 details the various industries that structured the city's landscape, from the placement of railroads and roads to the formation of ethnic neighborhoods and divisions of class and race on the landscape. The chapter details some of these businesses, from glass and pottery factories to breweries and sugar refineries. The material record of textile and railroad workers and their families has also been studied and is discussed.

Chapter 6 focuses on what archaeology has to reveal about the city infrastructure—those systems and facilities that support Baltimore's overall operations. The chapter pays particular attention to the archaeology of the city's privies. Archaeology has been called the science of rubbish. One of the most scientifically bountiful records of Baltimore residents is the objects they have discarded and left behind, many of them ending up in privies. These unique deposits of waste, household trash, and biological data often endure as stratified records that archaeologists can analyze systematically.

Since the privy was the garbage can of its day, the layers of a privy provide snapshots of life at a particular moment in time. The chapter details the amazing histories that can be deciphered from the seeds, the ceramics, and other items left behind in privy deposits.

Chapter 7 expands on the unique archaeological data sets that have been excavated in the city. This chapter explores the foodways that have characterized the city over the last 250 years. Beyond just the food consumed by residents and visitors to the city, foodways entail a wider understanding of relationships between the city and beyond, where most of the food is being produced. The taverns and markets where this food was bought and consumed were places of socializing where different groups came in contact, transactions were made, and ideas and culture were shared.

The structural transformations of deindustrialization have marked the second half of the twentieth century and this century. Not only has the pressure to stem the loss of business and manufacturing, and with it people, produced drastic policies; these strategies have prioritized and incentivized business and its remaking of space. Chapter 8 details this more recent aspect of the process and some of its consequences as Baltimore has moved into the twenty-first century. Without robust legal protection for the archaeology of the city, archaeology has been largely swept aside as irrelevant in this crisis mentality.

This chapter also briefly looks back and summarizes the contributions and limitations of archaeology. The recognition of the limitations of archaeology as currently practiced provide opportunities for expanding its use to explore the city and the connection of its practice and findings with building heritage in the city. The chapter ends the book by offering recommendations for building a strong, robust, and relevant archaeological initiative.