

# From Contrary to Complementary Models: Central Places and Gateways in the Southeastern Provence (Arles and Marseille)<sup>1</sup>

Gregor Utz

The concepts of gateways and central places, formerly opposing approaches to spatial planning, can be merged into a powerful tool for archaeologists, by defining the terms as a “relative concentration of interactions”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we can use markers that were compiled for both concepts to understand the dynamics of the evolution of cities and settlements in a long-term perspective.

The two cities of Marseille and Arles in the southeastern Provence offer a worthwhile case study. Located within a range of about 90 km of each other, the development of both cities was closely connected and dynamic throughout the whole Greco-Roman era. This study focuses on aspects of trade and administration, encompassing three major points of interest: the natural environment and transport geography (accessibility, width and variety of the service area, connectivity), natural and political factors regarding the urban port development (sedimentation, inundation, waterfront, storage facilities, politically motivated stimuli), and the role of supply and exchange of long distance and local/regional products (by quantified ceramic ensembles from the port area).<sup>3</sup>

Arles certainly was the main gateway for the Rhône corridor during Roman times. The river constituted a fast trade route, while keeping the transport costs low and the distance between cities along the Rhône high. The role of Marseille, however, was not a minor and competitive one, as an established narrative regarding the aftermath of the civil war among Caesar and Pompey leads us to believe.<sup>4</sup> Instead, it was a complementary part of the supra-regional trade network of Arles. But, together with its tiny service area it was also an independent consumer city that imported products from the Mediterranean market and produced fine and coarse wares to meet the demand of the city itself. All the evidence points towards a complex interaction of partly overlapping, partly differing trading connections of both port cities. Arles was orientated on inland trade, and as an *annona*-port it was also supplied with products from the Mediterranean; Marseille, instead, had its main focus on sea trade and acted more as a hub for traders performing cabotage and tramping along the Tyrrhenian, Ligurian, and southern Gallic coastline.

The decisive difference to Marseille was the locational advantage of Arles in the midst of an area adjoined by several cultural landscapes. Thus, it was the political decision of the Roman government to support Arles as a port city (e.g. by means of the construction of the *fossae Marianae*) that outweighed the environmental danger of the frequent inundations. As a consequence, Marseille lost its predominance and was now one important transshipment port of the prevailing gateway at Arles. In this regard, Marseille complemented the supply of Arles and the whole Rhône corridor, but was also a static gateway

for its own service area. The dynamic of the gateway Arles integrated the static centrality of Marseille.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The complete article of this extended abstract is part of the special issue “Central Places and Un-Central Landscapes: Political Economies and Natural Resources in the Longue Durée”, published in the open access journal *Land*: Utz 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For the theoretical framework on systems of market exchange, see Smith 1976; for the concept of the so-called gateway cities and its application to North-American colonization, see e.g. Burghardt 1971; for the reflection of W. Christaller’s centrality in a general way as a relative concentration of interaction, see Nakoinz 2012, 219.

<sup>3</sup> As main analyses one could name Heijmans 2004 and Long 2009 for Arles, Hesnard 1999 and Bonifay et al. 1998 for Marseille.

<sup>4</sup> Busquet – Pernoud 1949, 87–95 describe the economical role of Marseille in imperial times as commerce in slow-motion (commerce au ralenti); Loseby 1992, 179–183 stresses the ongoing competition between the two cities after the punishment of Marseille resulting in the loss of its status as the main gateway in the area.

### References

#### **Bonifay et al. 1998**

M. Bonifay – M.-B. Carre – Y. Rigoir, *Fouilles à Marseille. Les Mobiliers (Ier–VIIe s. ap. J.-C.)* (Paris 1998).

#### **Burghardt 1971**

A. Burghardt, A Hypothesis about Gateway Cities, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 61, 1971, 269–285.

#### **Busquet – Pernoud 1949**

R. Busquet – R. Pernoud, *Histoire du Commerce de Marseille, Tome I. L’Antiquité. Le Moyen Age jusqu’en 1291* (Paris 1949).

#### **Heijmans 2004**

M. Heijmans, *Arles durant l’Antiquité Tardive. De la Duplex Arelas à l’Urbs Genesii* (Rom 2004).

#### **Hesnard 1999**

A. Hesnard, Le port, in: A. Hesnard – M. Moliner – F. Conche – M. Bouiron (eds.), *Parcours de villes. Marseille: 10 ans d’archéologie, 2600 ans d’histoire* (Aix-en-Provence 1999) 17–75.

#### **Long 2009**

L. Long, De la mer au fleuve: Les ports antiques d’Arles, in: L. Long – P. Picard (eds.), *César. Le Rhône pour Mémoire. Vingt ans de fouilles dans le fleuve à Arles* (Arles 2009) 30–43.

**Loseby 1992**

S. Loseby, Marseille: A Late Antique Success Story?, *JRS* 82, 1992, 165–185.

**Nakoinz 2012**

O. Nakoinz, Models of Centrality, in: W. Bebermeier – R. Hebenstreit – E. Kaiser – J. Krause (eds.), *Landscape Archaeology. Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Berlin, 6th–8th June 2012 (Berlin 2012)* 217–223.

**Smith 1976**

C. Smith, Exchange Systems and the Spatial Distribution of Elites: The Organization of Stratification in Agrarian Societies, in: C. Smith (ed.), *Regional Analysis II. Social Systems (New York 1976)* 309–374.

**Utz 2018**

G. Utz, From Contrary to Complementary Models: Central Places and Gateways in the South-Eastern Provence (Arles and Marseille), *Land* 2018, 7, 95. <<https://doi.org/10.3390/land7030095>> (17.08.2019).