

URBAN COMMUNITY AND ANCIENT CIVILIZATION

The appearance of the great cities marked the beginning of a new phase in the cultural life of the ancient Near East. Indeed, Near Eastern civilization can be described as the sum total of the life of its urban centers, whether they are seen collectively or singly and in the case of some of them successively as agencies of empire in the hands of powerful rulers. Three problems pose themselves here. The first is to understand what particular combination of circumstances brought the first large urban communities into existence. The second is to understand the effect that the intimate association of great masses of people in the urban

centers had upon the character and development of ancient civilization. The third is to distinguish from one another the different patterns of urban life that developed in different geographical and political contexts and to describe the facets of the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural life of the ancient cities. These several factors in the development of urbanism received general consideration in a symposium on the "Expansion of Society and Cultural Development in the Ancient Near East," held at the Institute, December 4-7, 1958. A report on the symposium entitled *City Invincible* has been published. In the field a number of fact-finding operations are currently in progress.