
Pauketat's *Chieftoms* and Other Archaeological Delusions: A Challenge to Social Evolution

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ABSTRACT

*Timothy Pauketat's *The Chieftom and Other Archaeological Delusions* is an extended critique of the concept of the chieftom and other social evolutionary ideas that have been applied to the prehistory of the Southeastern United States. In Carneiro's attempted refutation of Pauketat's arguments, he makes (among others) the following points: (1) As critical as Pauketat is of the concept of the chieftom, nowhere does he clearly define or characterize it. (2) In his discussion of ways of interpreting the past, Pauketat fails to see a difference between 'evolution' and 'history', thus depriving himself of an important distinction. (3) While recognizing the prevalence of warfare in the Southeast during Mississippian times, Pauketat fails to recognize its preeminent role in the rise of the chieftom. (4) Pauketat incorrectly claims that in explaining social change, 'agency theory' is diametrically opposed to and irreconcilable with the kinds of explanation offered by social evolutionists. (5) While arguing for Cahokia's having been a state, Pauketat nonetheless makes the state a vague, elusive, almost metaphysical concept. In short, Pauketat would sweep away the intellectual structure that has provided a robust interpretation of Southeastern prehistory without replacing it with anything like a substantial theory.*

In this book, Timothy Pauketat has launched a major assault, not just on the concept of the chieftom (as the title indicates) but, more broadly, on all manner of evolutionary reconstructions in Southeastern archaeology. Even more broadly, his assault is aimed at

social evolution as a general interpretive principle in anthropology. Thus if his onslaught is successful, the consequences are bound to be not only broad but dire. The entire intellectual structure of Southeastern prehistory will be seriously undermined, if not completely demolished. And with it, will fall the evolutionary ideas upon which it is based.

It is important, therefore, to examine Pauketat's attack very carefully, focusing on the coherence and validity of his premises and the arguments that flow from them. Can they stand up to incisive criticism? Much is at stake here.

If Pauketat were a lone voice, crying in the wilderness, he could perhaps be dismissed or ignored. Certainly it would be unnecessary to try to answer him in detail after detail. But he is not alone in his efforts to unhorse evolutionism. He has sympathizers – indeed, co-conspirators – in considerable numbers among contemporary anthropologists (pp. 40–45). As a member of a relatively new but growing band of *neo-antievolutionists*, Pauketat needs to be squarely confronted (see p. 42).

The very title of Pauketat's book tells us clearly what the author has in store for us. From it we learn the identity of his primary target – the chiefdom – and the disdain with which he holds it. He not only believes that the concept of the chiefdom is a delusion, he laments the fact that it has captivated and mesmerized so many of his Southeastern colleagues. As evidence of this, he cites some dozen books by them in which the word 'chiefdom' appears prominently in the title (p. 3). And while he fails to single out any one of these studies for particular criticism, collectively they all feel the sting of his lash.

Since the Southeastern United States has become the area of the world in which the chiefdom has been most intensively studied, it seems advisable at the outset to examine the ideas advanced by the archaeologists working there (p. 126). Pauketat is convinced that their thinking is dominated by evolutionary ideas, an influence he regards as misguided and perverse. And in order to combat this baleful influence he proposes to lead us 'into a strange new world of theory' where, he suggests darkly, 'scale and history take precedence over system and structure' (p. 63). Let us join him, then, in his excursion into this 'strange new world'.

Pauketat makes it clear that his goal is 'to evaluate the degree to which conceptual biases derived from our definitions and [evolutionary] preconceptions have skewed our understanding of pre-Columbian North American history' (p. 82). His chief aim, then, seems to be, not so much to set things *right* as it is to expose how they went *wrong*. Criticism rather than constructivism is his watchword. Let me reiterate that while Pauketat's more immediate target is the chiefdom, his ultimate aim is to bring down the entire edifice of present-day evolutionism.

FAILURE TO DEFINE THE CHIEFDOM

I find it quite extraordinary that in a book so fixated on the chiefdom, nowhere does the author present a clear, simple, straightforward definition of just what a chiefdom *is*. We *know* he does not like the concept since he calls it a 'whopper' of a 'delusion' (p. 3), asserting that it is '[t]he most misused concept' (p. 13) in archaeology. And he advises us with great earnestness that 'we should distance ourselves from the chiefdom models so happily referenced and refined by Mississippianists...' (p. 205). Indeed, he bemoans 'the box [that] the received wisdom of chiefdom thinking has put us in' (p. 207). But what exactly – we insist – is this enemy against which Pauketat is so ready to level his heavy guns? At the very least, he owes us a clear identification of this miscreant.

Yet in the early pages of this book, in which Pauketat should be painting in bold outline and vivid colors the full figure of his *bête noire*, he simply fails to do so. Despite talking about 'a precise definition' of the chiefdom, he never presents one ... never even comes close to it (p. 14). He tells us that his aim is 'to deconstruct' 'the old canned chiefdom approaches', (p. 16) but without specifying what these tired old approaches are. At one point Pauketat advocates returning to 'a purely *descriptive* usage' of chiefdom, but once again fails to tell us what that 'usage' is (p. 13). If, as he assures us, he wants to 'rethink' the causes and consequences of the chiefdom, would he not be well advised to at least *think* about it *first*? (p. 14). Evidently Pauketat regards the concept as so fugitive ... so elusive, that he finds it necessary to come at it 'through the back door' (p. 14), stalking it stealthily in hopes, perhaps, of catching it unawares!

The question thus inevitably arises, *why* is it that nowhere in the 211 pages of text of Pauketat's book does he give anything like a precise definition of a chiefdom – his own or anyone else's? What is the basis of this ingrained, knee-jerk reaction to the concept that keeps him from doing so (p. 124)? Does he enjoy keeping us baffled? And since Pauketat never makes it clear what the chiefdom is, it is therefore difficult to grasp his reasons for being against it (p. 39). Only on page 140 – more than halfway through the book – when at last he begins to discuss his own Mississippian site of Cahokia, do we get our first tiny inkling – and it is little more than that – of why he is so opposed to the idea of the chiefdom. But more of that later.

NIBBLING AT THE CONCEPT

Of course, it is not as if Pauketat says *nothing at all* about chiefdoms. Indeed, he talks about them incessantly! But he does so obliquely and tangentially. On page 24, for example, he presents a false contrast between a pristine and a secondary chiefdom, after first having given an inaccurate characterization of the difference between a simple chiefdom and a complex one (p. 23).

Appearing to be on a warm scent at last when he says that 'complex chiefdoms are simply larger versions of petty chiefdoms' (p. 47), Pauketat then minimizes this important distinction and fails to explore it any further. And then he loses the scent altogether by insisting that there is 'no qualitative difference' (p. 47) between them.

At one point, Pauketat makes the cryptic and paradoxical remark that 'the greatest barrier to understanding Mississippian chiefdoms may be Mississippian chiefdoms themselves'. Such a statement, it would seem, is made in the interest of appearing profound, mindless of the risk he runs thereby of becoming obscure. What he *seems* to mean by it is that Mississippian chiefdoms were difficult to understand because they differed markedly among themselves – that is to say, because they *varied* (p. 81). Here and elsewhere, Pauketat revels in variety. Why? Because variety, to him, is proof of *lack of regularity*. And *irregularity* suits him just fine. Indeed, it is his 'comfort zone', as the current saying goes.

Nevertheless, the 'variety' that Pauketat holds so dear can be interpreted rather differently from the way he does. Some of the

variability he points to in Southeastern chiefdoms may, of course, be a matter of 'random variation'. Some of it, though, may appear in subtle forms – may be *regularity in disguise*. It must be examined carefully lest, hidden within its folds, lie obscure but significant *regularities*. The variety of forms that Pauketat points to among Southeastern chiefdoms was not simply a matter of perverse heterogeneity. In many cases it resulted from societies being at *different stages* of the *same* developmental process (p. 19). But Pauketat gives very little indication of being aware of this possibility (e.g., p. 32). An evolutionary perspective, however, would have given him the penetrating vision needed to see beneath the surface irregularities to the order, pattern, and system underlying them.

While no two Southeastern chiefdoms were exactly alike, nor did they evolve in just the same way, still, there were also *similarities* among them. And similarities imply *regularities* (p. 64). The very purpose of science is to dissolve uniquenesses and discover underlying commonalities. Yet Pauketat asserts it as a profound truth that chiefdoms in 'one part of the world [*i.e.*, the Southeast] were structurally dissimilar from [those of] peoples elsewhere' (p. 205). That statement – which asserts far more than Pauketat can prove – seems to sum up the kernel of his wisdom. It would not surprise me, therefore, if after minutely examining every pea inside a pod, Pauketat were to announce, solemnly and triumphantly, that no two of them were exactly alike!

One would think that luxuriating in variety, as Pauketat does, he would be interested in searching out different *types* of chiefdoms as a way of highlighting this variety. Moreover, the typology of chiefdoms available to Pauketat in pigeonholing the collection of Southeastern chiefdoms need not be an evolutionary one, such as *minimal*, *typical*, and *maximal* chiefdoms, or *simple* and *complex* chiefdoms. He might have chosen a non-evolutionary typology of chiefdoms, such as *riparian*, *insular*, *impacted*, and *dispersed*, the first and fourth of which were actually represented among Mississippian chiefdoms. These types point to differences in the environmental conditions under which the chiefdoms developed, rather than to their degree of evolution.

To be sure, this last non-evolutionary typology does exhibit *variety*. But it's *explainable* variety. And if we can find a solid reason why something is what it is, the phenomenon in question can no longer be said to be idiosyncratic. If the variety is *patterned* and

its particular form *determined*, then it is scientifically accountable. And as such, it is the kind of variety Pauketat cannot chalk up to sheer happenstance or perversity, as he might like to do. Instead, it becomes a form of *regularity* that he will simply have to grit his teeth and learn to live with.

Is there any possibility that we can persuade Pauketat to abandon his distaste for patterned behavior? After all, would it not be more satisfying to a professional archaeologist to pursue order and regularity, hoping somehow to catch them, mount them, and ride them to the promised land? What is to be gained by tying one's colors to 'plurality', 'diversity', and 'irregularity'? But then that seems to be Pauketat's underlying cast of mind.

THE SPURNING OF EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

In places, we must admit, Pauketat seems to recognize that there are *processes* – regular modes of culture change at work. Even here, though, he prefers to trace the operation of such processes when they are running in reverse! Thus on page 26 he tells us, as a penetrating insight, that '[m]aybe chiefdoms were devolutionary remnants of collapsed states'. To be sure, in a *few* cases, from a worldwide perspective, chiefdoms may indeed have come into existence this way. But Pauketat cannot cite a single instance of this having happened in the Southeast. The reason being, of course, that *no states* arose there whose breakdown might have left a chiefdom standing in its wake! The Cherokee confederacy might be cited as a genuine example of *devolution*, being pretty clearly the 'decay product' of a full-fledged chiefdom that once stood there (p. 19). But of course this in no way explains how the assumed pre-Cherokee chiefdom arose out of simpler beginnings.

If what excites Pauketat and makes him prick up his ears is a society *on its way down*, why not also pay a little heed to societies *on their way up*? That is, why does he not pay attention to societies in the process of *evolving*? All chiefdoms can trace their roots back to an ancestral form of society consisting of small, simple, autonomous villages. By the same token, virtually all states, in their evolutionary trajectory, passed through a stage we would unhesitatingly label a chiefdom. And is tracing the process leading to chiefdoms, and then to states, not of the greatest interest and importance to anthropologists? Does this process not deserve, therefore, to be carefully studied in its upward trajectory as well as in its

decline? Ah, but that would be full-blooded *evolution*, and Pauketat and social evolution are not on speaking terms.

Looked at from a broad perspective, Pauketat's attack on chiefdoms is only a skirmish in a larger battle. Moreover, this battle is only part of a greater war – a systematic military campaign against social evolution in all its aspects. The entire concept of evolution – indeed, the very *word* evolution – seems to set Pauketat's teeth on edge. Now, does this stark and bleak assessment of his position seem overblown? Does it call for proof? Well, then, let us proceed to a dreary recitation of the evidence.

PAUKETAT, THE ANTI-EVOLUTIONIST

Without any attempt to disguise just where he stands, Pauketat speaks of himself as a 'critic of evolutionary-typologizing' (p. 163). He speaks disparagingly of 'the old social evolutionary logic' (p. 39) and derides 'the standard evolutionary line' (p. 186). In fact, instead of accepting social evolution as a legitimate and substantial theoretical approach, he regards it as an 'unfortunate ... metaphor' (p. 4), and thinks of it as a product of 'the sophisticated delusions of 1960s or 1970s anthropology' (p. 205). With great distaste and open disdain he talks of 'the evolution of institutions, organizations or, god forbid societies' (p. 208), all of which he seems to think of as an evolutionary chimera.

'We desperately need', he tells us, 'to retire the evolutionary emphasis on these societies' – that is, on chiefdoms and the like (p. 14). And he insists that in carrying out Midwestern and South-eastern archaeology 'we must abandon social evolutionary thinking' (p. 15). Indeed, with impenetrable logic, he goes so far as to assert that 'social evolutionary thought ... emasculates an archaeology of complexity ...' (p. 4)! And while he speaks repeatedly of 'the flaws with evolutionary models', never does he tell us – distinctly and specifically – just what these 'flaws' are. By merely *alluding* to them, without the need of even identifying them, let alone refuting them, he expects to conjure up dreaded specters at which his readers will reflexively cringe.

There are many facets to Pauketat's anti-evolutionism. For one, he dislikes to see anything evolve *in situ*. He much prefers having it emerge *elsewhere* and then having it *diffuse* to wherever it was later found (p. 56). The great advantage of this is that it absolves him of the responsibility of accounting for the manner in which

the phenomenon arose. An example of this mode of thinking is his assertion that ‘Polynesian-style governance did not evolve on each island but was spread by outrigger from island to island’ (p. 56). How many Polynesian archaeologists, I wonder, would agree with him in this regard?

Again, speaking of the fluctuations of *gumsa* and *gumlao* forms of social organization among the Kachin of highland Burma (as described by Edmund Leach) Pauketat allows himself a rare acceptance of an evolutionary regularity when he says: ‘such activities in political structure was an inherent quality of the pristine evolution of chiefdoms’ (p. 58). Note, however, that even *here* it is the *oscillation* in the process – its ups and downs – that catches Pauketat's eye, rather than any linear progression in its trajectory.

At one point, Pauketat quotes Kenneth Sassaman's bold assertion that the ‘remarkably resilient and dominant theme in anthropological discourse [by which he means progressive evolution] has now been thoroughly erased by evidence to the contrary’. However, after quoting this statement sympathetically, Pauketat adds – ruefully, to be sure – ‘If only this were true’ (p. 62)!

As one turns the pages of this book, he repeatedly finds himself wondering what could lie at the root of Pauketat's ingrained, relentless opposition to social evolution. A small part of the answer suggests itself at times, but whether this little glimmer can be considered the ultimate source of Pauketat's negative mindset is questionable. The fact remains, though, that in a number of places Pauketat happily quotes the anti-evolutionary pronouncements of Norman Yoffee, an acknowledged leader of that stalwart band of modern-day anti-evolutionists (*e.g.*, pp. 4, 38, 152, 185).

At one point Pauketat gives every indication of wanting to ‘clean house’ of all traces of evolution in archaeology. An ambitious goal, to be sure, so how does he expect to bring it about? Well, he appears to have a plan in mind. By using ‘comparative archaeo-history’ and the ‘principle of contemporary social theory’, he tells us, he hopes to transcend ‘the problems associated with the commonsense vestiges of social evolution’ (p. 109). One can see, then, that in pursuing this goal Pauketat is utterly implacable and unforgiving. He would not only expunge high-level theory from anthropology, he would not even leave us our evolutionary ‘common sense’!

But let us return to the chiefdom. While Pauketat never really faces the issue squarely, he nevertheless cannot deny that chiefdoms once existed in the Southeast, and that they were distinctly larger and more complex than the autonomous villages from which they sprang. Moreover, he admits – indeed he makes a great point of stressing – that Cahokia (where he himself has worked) was categorically larger and more complex than any other Southeastern chiefdom! Ineluctably, then, *some* process enabled Cahokia to rise from simple beginnings and attain a magnitude which Pauketat insists placed it well above its sister polities. With less flummery and a harder look at the facts, then, Pauketat might have gritted his teeth and been forced to admit that an evolutionary process was at work – *had* to be at work – driving Cahokia upward and onward. Yet at making such an obvious *démarche* he stubbornly shakes his head. He is, in fact, adamantly unwilling to accept *any* kind of evolutionism, even when it stands wide-eyed in front of him, staring him in the face. Later in this paper we will return to the problem of Cahokia and how to account for its development.

For the moment, though, all I will say is that the process by which Cahokia arose to become an imposing society took place in *time*. And while Pauketat is reluctant to call the manner in which it occurred *evolution*, he is quite ready to call it *history*, even *big history* (p. 15). He insists, however, that *history* and *process* are separate and distinct (p. 54). Why does he insist on this distinction? For fear, it seems, that ‘process’ may conjure up notions of ‘evolution’ (p. 49). And what particularly appeals to him about ‘history’ is that – unlike ‘evolution’ – it is known to be full of irregularities, idiosyncrasies and contingencies. It lacks, therefore, the *directionality* that is a salient feature of ‘evolution’. And for Pauketat, as we have seen, the exception is always more interesting – indeed, more *noble* – than the rule. Like countless scholars before him, he is drawn to – and bemused by – the specifics and uniquenesses of history. The danger here, of course, from the point of view of science, is that fixation on the ‘trees’ will prevent him from seeing the ‘forest’. ‘Forest? What forest?’ he might ask.

HISTORY, PROCESS, AND EVOLUTION

On one point, Pauketat is quite explicit: he favors the ‘historical-processual approach’ because, he believes, it is opposed to the evo-

lutionary approach, which he accuses of being *a priori* (p. 14). Thus when he speaks of the processes that gave rise to chiefdoms, he insists that ‘such processes are not evolutionary ...’ (p. 60). Rather, they are *historical*. By making such a statement, though, Pauketat reveals an obtuseness of thought. What he finds difficult to understand is that ‘evolution’ is not something clutched out of thin air or made up out of whole cloth. It is not the product of a fertile imagination, skillfully avoiding actual facts and making up its own. Rather, evolution is something *extracted from real events* – from *history* (p. 60). The historical particularities of which Pauketat is so enamored provide the very raw materials from which – by careful selection, abstraction, and synthesis – general evolutionary sequences are constructed. Where else could they possibly come from? (pp. 24–25, 194).

The great irony here is that for someone who so insistently trumpets the importance of history, Pauketat makes precious little use of it. By ‘history’ I do not mean archaeological reconstructions, but rather, *documentary* history. Archaeology can tell us a good deal about the chiefdoms of the past, but it cannot tell us everything. Crucial elements of the structure and function of chiefdoms simply cannot be revealed by the spade or the trowel. However, enough ethnohistorical accounts of intact, functioning chiefdoms exist – for the Southeast and for other parts of the world – to permit us to paint a fuller picture of how they arose and how they worked. This is especially true of the political aspects of these chiefdoms, in the portrayal of which Pauketat's account is markedly deficient.

THE DEPICTION OF SOUTHEASTERN CHIEFDOMS

While Pauketat does make use of a few ethnohistorical sources, he fails to cite the compilations of Charles Hudson and his associates at the University of Georgia. These accounts are particularly illuminating in telling us about the chiefdoms of the Carolinas and northern Georgia, especially Coosa, during the 16th century. Failing to avail himself of the kind of first-hand knowledge and evidence these sources provide, Pauketat's portrayal of Southeastern chiefdoms is sketchy, skewed, and flawed. Had he read these sources, though, he would have come away with a darker but truer picture

of what these chiefdoms were really like. Thus he would have learned that:

It is clear that Mississippian chiefdoms were not peaceable kingdoms. Far from it. There was a lot of fighting going on in the late prehistoric Southeast, and this was an important part of what the Mississippian world was all about (Hudson 2002: xvii). The players on this field [of competition] were simple chiefdoms which were sometimes aggregated into larger paramount chiefdoms. In some places and at some times, warfare reached a high level, occasionally so high that a major river valley – such as the Savannah River valley – might have to be abandoned (Hudson 2002: xviii).

Indeed, Pauketat seems to have a false notion of these chiefdoms. He fails to recognize, for example, that at its core a chiefdom is a *political* entity. It revolved around the person of the paramount chief and the inner circle of men – the ‘elites’ – who surrounded and supported him (p. 39). It was not for nothing that a chiefdom was usually named for its paramount leader. However, an erroneous notion seems to have taken hold of Pauketat that a chiefdom was somehow a *democracy*. Pauketat, in fact, comes off as a kind of prehistoric ‘populist’, who sees ‘the people’, by their own undirected efforts and initiatives, giving rise to a chiefdom.

An example of this ‘populist’ façade is found in Pauketat’s treatment of prehistoric mounds. Mounds were, to be sure, a conspicuous and distinctive element of Southeastern chiefdoms. And no one in his right mind would deny that they were built by *people* ... people heaping up earth. And for Pauketat, it was the combined labors of many hard-working individuals, building up these mounds, that holds the key to the rise of Southeastern chiefdoms. He insists that ‘we need to examine how the cultural power of these ordinary mound builders caused the ascent of chiefs, not the other way around’ (p. 42). But what we have here, I think, is a classic case of the cart pulling the horse.

Here again Pauketat reveals a puzzling unfamiliarity with how Southeastern chiefdoms arose and carried on their activities. By no stretch of the imagination were these chiefdoms democratic institutions. Paramount chiefs were not freely elected by universal suffrage. Initially, powerful leaders *imposed* themselves on the population by dint of their military prowess and exploits. And once

a chiefdom found itself established, and securely in the hands of a paramount chief, the reins of power were generally transferred, not by free elections, but by hereditary succession.

Furthermore, everyday people never simply got together and decided, on their own, to build a mound out of an overflow of civic mindedness. Mound building was instigated from above, and, while carried out by the people, was done at the behest and direction of the paramount chief (p. 42). Chiefs capable of exercising such command had already amassed a great deal of power; mound building being but one way in which they manifested this power. This exercise was, moreover, one of the ways in which a paramount chief impressed the populace with the scope and strength of his authority.

To be sure, in building a mound, people did not simply work under the lash. They might have done so willingly enough, having been persuaded by a far-seeing ruler that what they were about to engage in was a worthy enterprise, benefiting the whole community. That was the beauty of a well-run chiefdom! At bottom, though, people were following the dictates of a respected – and often feared – political leader. Were Pauketat even slightly familiar with the way chiefdoms operated he would know that ‘the people’ he so generously champions, were, in fact, working under leaders who exercised an authoritarian, even despotic rule over them. However, Pauketat flatly rejects the idea that there is a ‘tendency among [political] leaders to aggrandize and exert power over others’, claiming that this assertion is nothing more than ‘the same old evolution, just more nuanced’ (p. 84). Such statements are, in fact, the way he typically dismisses observations that run counter to his preconceptions. In sum, then, Pauketat steadfastly refuses to countenance a chiefdom's being run from the top down – and any evidence to the contrary be damned.

‘AGENCY THEORY’ BROUGHT TO BEAR

Another way in which Pauketat puts forward much the same kind of argument is by saying, ‘[I]f there's one thing we need in the archaeology of chiefdoms and states, it is a little non-elite agency’ (p. 195). As a matter of fact, in portraying events during Mississippian times, Pauketat appoints himself the great champion of the masses. He insists that the common man must be given a greater

role in the unfolding of prehistoric events. This is a role he feels evolutionists have consistently denied him. His unhappiness at the limited role he thinks evolutionists have assigned to 'people' stems from his fear that in their conception of the chiefdom, the evolutionists have turned 'people' into mere 'epiphenomena' (p. 39).

If Pauketat is to be believed, evolutionists hold that government popped up out of the ground, fully formed, separate and distinct from the populace over which it ruled (p. 194). 'For an older evolutionary school', he says, social institutions were thought to be 'outcomes or consequences of forces beyond the agency of ancient people' (p. 180). Thus he fails to understand the relationship that exists between 'evolutionary forces' and 'agency'. His contention is that the two things are of an entirely different nature – perhaps even outright contradictions of each other. (For an elucidation of the relationship between the two, see Carneiro 2003: 226–228.)

In discussing this subject, Pauketat often makes assertions that are difficult to fathom. There is no doubt, however, that he consistently goes down the line on behalf of 'agency theory'. He even boasts to a fictitious graduate student: 'I was thinking about agency before you were born' (p. 203). Seeking to further the cause of proper thinking about the causes of events, he calls on his fellow Southeastern archaeologists to renounce their evolutionism and employ 'an agency or practice-based approach' as they craft their interpretations (p. 208). In fact he writes as if he truly believed that in espousing evolutionism, some archaeologists are naïve enough to think that no actual flesh-and-blood human beings were required to create and operate a chiefdom! It's as though, in the minds of these benighted evolutionists, the *very concept* of the chiefdom was enough, all by itself, to bring a chiefdom to life and set it in motion!

Once Pauketat has seized something between his teeth, he will not easily let it go. Thus he admonishes us to 'stop pretending that the process [of cultural development] is somehow devoid of people' (p. 42). This is a strong accusation and – if true – those guilty of it deserve to be identified and properly chastised. But when it comes to naming names and quoting words to back up his outlandish charges, Pauketat's lips are sealed. He deals in allegations, and his allegations are seldom supported by evidence. The fact is, of course, that *no one* ever saw a mound or a pyramid build itself, nor

did anyone ever *claim* that he had. Only a deranged metaphysician could envision such an occurrence. But of course, deranged metaphysicians make the best straw men!

In advancing their position, dedicated advocates of agency theory (see *e.g.*, p. 195) often invoke a kind of wide-eyed innocence – or, as Elman Service used to say, a ‘barefoot empiricism’. *Of course* it is people who do things. How else could they get done? But once this is recognized – and who denies it? – it becomes little more than a shibboleth, a *mantra*, to say so. And what is to be gained by repeating it, mindlessly and endlessly?

The real question is, *why* did people do one thing instead of another? Why, for instance, did Mississippians build mounds instead of, say, carve totem poles? When people do what they do, they are responding to the set of cultural forces most strongly impinging on them. Does Pauketat expect people to behave *otherwise*? Are they to act *independently* of these cultural forces ... or even *against* them? Despite the solemn proclamations of ‘agency theorists’, agents are never *free* agents. They always act in accord with the most powerful set of determinants in a sort of cultural parallelogram of forces in which the strongest determinants predominate. Can there really be serious debate over something so simple and obvious?

WARFARE AS THE MECHANISM OF CHIEFDOM FORMATION

Granted that ‘agents’ exist, and that cultural forces always act through them, let us see how these forces might have operated in giving rise to the chiefdoms of the Southeast. The welding together of a number of autonomous villages into a larger political unit was, of course, the initial step – the defining moment – in the building of chiefdoms. This was true not only in the Southeast but wherever chiefdoms arose. And the mechanism by which village autonomy was overcome and transcended, and a higher level of political organization established, was warfare. Given the truth of this assertion, how readily does Pauketat recognize the prevalence of warfare in the Southeast during Mississippian times? And how correctly does he grasp the role it played in the political process that ensued?

Pauketat is well enough aware of the presence of warfare in this region. The evidence for it is so overwhelming that he could hardly deny it. Indeed, he speaks of the 'endless warfare' in this and other parts of the eastern United States (p. 116), taking note of the 'escalating intergroup violence' attested to in the central Mississippi area (p. 128). There is also frequent mention in Pauketat's book of palisades and other defensive structures, leading him to conclude (reasonably enough) that 'the reasons for building ... walls are to be sought in ... southern violence' (p. 101). Some Southeastern sites had particularly impressive fortifications, those at the Angel site in Indiana, for example, serving to create 'a formidable barrier to would-be intruders' (p. 100).

Summarizing Pauketat's impression of fortifications in this region during Mississippian times, we can say that he, unlike some of his archaeological colleagues, recognizes that they were built in response to recurring wars. And to anyone who would demur from this conclusion he says: 'I cannot believe that palisade walls were built originally to demarcate ceremonial space, a point of view common among those who would pacify the past' (p. 191). Well said! Nor does Pauketat hold that these fortifications were only a late development, thus raising doubts about the presence of warfare during the initial phases of chiefdom formation. On the contrary, he says that 'palisade walls seem to have been built at the founding moments of many ... Mississippian centers, large and small' (p. 101). So far, so good.

But here we witness a clear failure to extract from the evidence at hand the full fruit of the conclusion it irresistibly points to. While Pauketat is well aware of the prevalence of war in Southeastern society, he fails to grasp the critical role it played in giving rise to its numerous chiefdoms. Nor does he appreciate the further role warfare played in the *expansion* of these chiefdoms, close on the heels of their emergence (p. 101). Perhaps this failure should not surprise us, though, since he himself tells us that 'archeologists seldom theorize about warring as a historical process' – a failure in which Pauketat himself seems ready and willing to join them (p. 128)!

At this point, Pauketat again becomes ensnared in trying to distinguish between *history* and *evolution*. Citing George Milner,

he tells us that 'warfare [in the Southeast] ... is said to have increased ... not for historical reasons but for evolutionary ones' (p. 62). What could this possibly mean? And elsewhere, in an even more puzzling passage, he says of Mississippian warfare: The problem is, that wars were 'discrete historic events', and they had 'immediate and long-lasting impacts on the social fabric and cultural identities of everybody's lives'. Again, so far, so good, but then he adds that this form of warfare was different from 'warfare as generic epiphenomena', maintaining that warfare is 'poorly explained by ... evolutionist generalizations about chiefly warfare' (p. 128).

Sacre bleu! Just the *opposite* is true. Local, 'historical' wars become most intelligible precisely when they are viewed in the wider context of the evolution of competing polities, vying with each other for ascendancy.

What Pauketat fails to perceive, and thus to exploit, is that particular instances of war – *historical wars*, he would call them – are nothing if not recurring manifestations of a pattern of fighting among chiefdoms – as Charles Hudson clearly saw. Warfare of this sort (we repeat) is an integral part of the relationship among chiefdoms, and frequently turns out to represent steps in their political development. Here, as in other such cases, the *general* helps explain – indeed, to predict – the *particular* (p. 128). 'Unique', 'local', 'historical' wars are readily subsumable under the general rubric of unending competition among chiefdoms in which they are continually pitted against each other. As this process plays out, some chiefdoms gain dominance over others. The more successful ones survive, grow, and prosper at the expense of their less successful rivals. And we can staunchly affirm – confident that there is overwhelming evidence to back up the assertion – that the entire Southeast witnessed, and indeed was a *product* of, this general evolutionary process of military engagements and political competition on a grand scale.

Finally, what overarching conclusion does Pauketat distill from the fact – which he readily admits – that fortifications were a defining feature of towns along the middle Mississippi? Nothing more profound, it would seem, than this: 'maybe ... families that built walls together stayed together' (p. 126).

PAUKETAT TACKLES CHIEFDOM FORMATION

Well, then, if Pauketat is not going to use *warfare* to explain the rise and growth of Mississippian chiefdoms, what factors *does* he invoke? In accordance with his distaste for theory, Pauketat has no great, comprehensive, coherent scheme to offer us. Yet he cannot sidestep the issue altogether. He has to explain in *some* way, the socio-political developments that were so conspicuous throughout this region during Mississippian times. How does he do it?

Here and there, now and then, in tantalizing bits and pieces, we do gain some notion of how he sees chiefdoms arising. His simplest statement along these lines is this 'community formation and identity construction were the driving forces of [chiefdom and] state making' (p. 185). Indeed, for Pauketat, 'community formation' is a major spoke in the wheel that drives the process forward. It is an 'open sesame!' that flings wide the doors to everything that followed. But let us be a little more demanding here and insist on greater specificity. Just how *does* 'community formation' achieve what it's alleged to bring about? In carefully crafted prose Pauketat tells us that 'community was (and is) an open, malleable materialized and spatialized field of cultural identity formation' (p. 107; 131–132). And there we have it!

But let us examine this assertion more closely. 'Community formation' suggests to the reader the forging of new identities that were not present before. Are we approaching an answer here, perhaps? Are we about to learn just *how* – in Pauketat's cultural dynamics – new communities actually come into being? In an attempt to answer this question, he tells us that 'communities, like other organizations, are active projections of identities' (p. 208). Hmm. Is he saying that his mechanism for explaining the rise of more complex societies begins, *first*, with the breakup of older communities, and *then* with the subsequent re-forming of communities, making use of the constituent parts of older ones left over after their destruction or collapse? That would make some sense. But then how, exactly, does this collapse occur? What brings about the breakup of a society and, especially, the subsequent reorganization of its elements? What forces are at work? We are waiting to hear, in some detail, the constructive phase of this process.

But the closest we get to an explanation is the following statement: 'The regrouped people ... would comprise little melting

pots, where hybrid identities and diverse cultural practices could produce any number of potential historical trajectories' (p. 197; see also p. 115). A little vague and hard to fathom, but let us try following along. The mixing of previously different groups would give rise, in Pauketat's view, to a good deal of 'cultural diversity' – and we know that diversity is his stock in trade.

Now, diversity may be all well and good but how would it solve the next problem in the process, namely, integrating the disparate pieces of the new structure-to-be? What force pushes these disparate pieces together? What glue binds them when they come in contact? And just how does this cementing get done? To put the matter at Pauketat's preferred level of analysis, how was this integration handled by the persons – the *agents* – who brought it about? Well, says Pauketat, it was '*mitigated* [mediated?] through the formation of new *identities*' (p. 198). Does this help us any? I would say not. We are still not satisfied. We doggedly insist on knowing just how Pauketat envisions this process being carried out.

We know that for Pauketat the reestablishing of 'community identity' is key to his 'historical process'. But this still leaves a number of pieces of the puzzle unassembled. 'Integration', after all, is the putting together and solidifying of a number of elements *once they become available*. But where did they come from? And how were the disparate pieces torn from their original matrix and then amalgamated into a new one? Two major elements are missing from Pauketat's analysis of chiefdom formation: (1) What causes the *fragmentation* that breaks up earlier polities and provides the new constituent units? And (2) What brings about the binding together of the pieces resulting from that breakup? What we are after here are *factors* and *forces*, not just words. And we will not be easily put off.

According to Pauketat, the *evolutionist's* idea of how South-eastern chiefdoms grew was through the aggregation and rearrangement of 'building blocks', the solid social segments of former polities. And this, to us, seems to be an acceptable, minimal, skeletal view of the process. But Pauketat turns up his nose at this model. He would much rather conceive of new communities as being formed out of amorphous 'identities' (whatever they are) than from the aggregation of more substantial and clearly distinguishable 'building blocks'. Pauketat would much prefer to think

of the process in this way: '[Couldn't] we imagine', he says, 'any number of kinds and scales of community identities dependent on the circumstances of how people gathered at particular times and places?' (p. 78). If we are ready to imagine *that*, then apparently we can envision most anything. 'Variety' would then have free rein. And, as we have seen again and again, 'variety' rather than 'regularity' is the clay Pauketat much prefers to model with.

To the extent that Pauketat offers us any kind of intelligible dynamic or mechanism to account for the rise of Southeastern chiefdoms, it is this mixing and melding of peoples, brought together from elsewhere by a process of migration (p. 196). In a sense, then, for him Mississippian chiefdoms were more the product of *diffusion* (in this case, the movement of people rather than of traits) than of *independent invention*. As we noted earlier, Pauketat would rather not have to deal with development *in situ* (p. 50). He finds it easier and more congenial to bring in things ready-made from the outside than to have to tax himself to explain how they were built in the place where they arose.

Now Pauketat's 'mechanism' (such as it is) might possibly explain the emergence of a few chiefdoms as the hammering together of the 'decay products' of broken-down pristine chiefdoms. Naturally, though, it would not account for the rise of those *pristine* chiefdoms that arose before there were any 'decay products' to work with. Pauketat, however, carefully avoids facing this issue, speaking dismissively of 'the tired search for the first chiefdoms' (p. 63) and concludes that '[p]erhaps ... we should question the utility of calling any political formation pristine' (p. 56). Like it or not, though, the fact remains – unavoidable and ineluctable – that at some point in time there *were* first-generation chiefdoms, and that they arose from *non-chiefdoms* by some specifiable process. And while Pauketat would rather turn his back on these first chiefdoms and how they managed to come into existence, many of us regard their emergence as a problem to be solved, and not simply to be thrust aside as uncongenial. Indeed, a good many of us are eager to rush in where Pauketat fears to tread.

CAHOKIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO PAUKETAT'S INTERPRETATIONS

Late in the book Pauketat finally begins to speak at some length of Cahokia, a site where he himself spent some years excavating.

As I noted earlier, readers of this book may well have been puzzled why Pauketat is so adamant and relentless in his opposition to the concept of the chiefdom. And – more broadly – why he fulminates so vehemently against social evolution in any guise. When we come to his discussion of Cahokia, though, we finally begin to get some inkling of what may lie at the root of this antipathy.

Before giving full voice to our suspicions, though, let us examine how Pauketat describes Cahokia during its heyday, when it was undoubtedly a large and complex polity. Against the opinion of several other North American archeologists, Pauketat is prepared to call Cahokia a *city*, North America's 'first city' (pp. 162, 206) – indeed, a 'metroplex' (p. 206). In terms of population size, he thinks 'Cahokia proper' numbered between 10,000 and 16,000 inhabitants (p. 138). And at its apogee, circa A.D. 1250, he would assign 'Greater Cahokia' – the city and its outliers – a population of 25,000 to 50,000 (p. 151). This, he says, would make it bigger than the biggest of any other Mississippian society, not just by a narrow margin, but 'by at least one whole order of magnitude' (p. 140)!

With regard to its political structure, Pauketat is ready to affirm that 'Cahokia was more than just another Mississippian chiefdom' (p. 157). As a matter of fact, he is not afraid to call it a state (p. 196), although he is a bit reluctant to trumpet this opinion from the rooftops, being aware of how many of his colleagues strongly disagree with him on this.

Pauketat believes that between A.D. 1050 and 1200, a kind of 'Pax Cahokiana' prevailed along the central Mississippi and adjacent areas (pp. 123, 154–156). As evidence of this he cites the fact that at the time, Cahokia was not fortified, appearing to be strong enough not to require it. As a result, during this period small farmsteads began to appear on the landscape, the inference being that once Cahokia had established its dominance as the major polity in the region, scattered farm families under its umbrella no longer needed to fear enemy attack (p. 150).

Pauketat is convinced that Cahokia exerted an enormous influence throughout the entire Southeastern United States. He sees 'wall-trench' construction, for example, as originating in Cahokia and diffusing from there to wherever else it was found (pp. 105, 106). Political contacts between Cahokia and societies of

the Southeast Pauketat deems to be the way in which it extended its influence, an influence he believes 'spread like wildfire' down the Mississippi River and throughout the Southeast (p. 206). While he thinks this influence was primarily military and political, it is quite possible, he says, that it was effected through other cultural means as well. What he has in mind here are such things as artistic and ceremonial activities. Furthermore, he is convinced that this influence extended not just to the Southeast but also over large sections of the mid-continent (p. 159). Summarizing Cahokia's magisterial effect, he considers it to have been 'the principal reason for Mississippianization' (p. 112).

Not all of Pauketat's colleagues among Southeastern archaeologists share his elevated opinion of Cahokia, however. Several of them seriously question it. Such archaeologists he chastises by calling them 'those who favor minimalist evolutionary scenarios' (p. 150). (So again, 'evolution' comes in for a well-aimed brickbat. Note, though, that whereas it is grandiose evolutionism that usually draws Pauketat's fire, here he flips the script and it is small-minded evolutionary thinking that he chooses to castigate.) Could it be, then, that Pauketat has overreacted to those archaeologists who refuse to acknowledge Cahokia as representing a major evolutionary step beyond that of their own chiefdoms by peremptorily rejecting evolutionary trajectories of any sort? If so, this would be analogous to a snake turning in anger and striking at the foot that has rudely trampled on it. Is this analogy overdrawn? Well, perhaps a little.

But if it turns out that this interpretation is correct, then it is a false step on Pauketat's part, one not very well conceived or thought out. Indeed, he makes a serious blunder in proclaiming the evolutionist to be his enemy. Had he considered the matter more carefully, had he looked at it without lenses clouded by theoretical bias, he would have realized that, in this matter, the evolutionist is actually his strongest ally! Look at the matter this way.

Pauketat states that Cahokia is a whole order of magnitude above the next highest polity in the greater Southeast. To attain this level of culture, Cahokia necessarily had to undergo *evolution* – evolution to a very substantial degree (p. 140). How else could it have attained that level? In the course of its development, then, Cahokia had to have advanced well beyond the small, simple,

autonomous villages from which it started. And then, as it continued to evolve, it did so beyond the level attained by most, or even all Southeastern chiefdoms. How can Pauketat fail to see something so palpable as that? Wouldn't he be better off admitting it – in fact, proclaiming with full throat that this is exactly what happened? Had he done so, he would have found evolutionists cheering him on from the sidelines. Then, he could have appropriately and productively turned to the business of trying to account, in detail, for this evolution. And in this endeavor, he would again have found evolutionists ready to pitch in and help. Pauketat's failure to do any of this is little short of unfathomable (p. 101).

But there is yet more to consider. Not only does Pauketat oppose evolution himself, he would encourage others to do so as well. Accordingly, he expresses his 'impatience with archaeological models' used by his colleagues, models that 'retain social evolutionary underpinnings' (p. 4). '[E]volutionary theory', he insists, 'is fine for biology, but, in the archaeology of complexity, its conceptual clutter is counterproductive' (p. 4). Meaning what? Is this again another example of words, with nothing of substance behind them? As is his wont, Pauketat sedulously avoids specifics. One is forced to conclude that he is bound and determined to cut himself off at the knees. He has many opportunities to pursue productive ways of looking at culture change, but somehow manages to steer clear of them. Well, then – going back to the major site we began with – if Cahokia didn't *evolve* in order to reach the elevated status it attained, how on earth did it do so? Special creation?

Pauketat never seems to recognize that he has impaled himself on both horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, he regards with displeasure any colleague who wrongheadedly refuses to see Cahokia as having advanced very far along an evolutionary track (pp. 43–44). But, at the same time, he holds that all this talk about 'evolutionary tracks' is moonshine and hogwash! He is unable to comprehend that 'evolutionists' *as such* have no reason in the world to oppose his portrayal of Cahokia as a highly complex polity (p. 140). To the discerning evolutionist, whether or not Cahokia was a state is not a question of *theory*. It is only a question of *fact* – of fact, and of *definition*. If archaeological remains, carefully excavated and judiciously interpreted, point to Cahokia's having been a state, then a state it was. 'Evolutionary theory' of whatever stripe

has nothing to say against it. Theory comes into play only in accounting for its rise.

MOUND BUILDING AND ITS EVOLUTIONARY CORRELATES

To illustrate the pitfalls of Pauketat's line of reasoning about 'evolution' let us take the case of a certain mound located in Louisiana which is thought to have been built around 3600 B.C. Such an early date would place its construction in the Middle Archaic period, several millennia *before* the start of the Mississippian. The existence of a mound so early in the archaeological record, says Pauketat, totally discombobulates evolutionary theory (p. 64)! His reasoning is as follows: Evolutionists would claim (he says) that the existence of such a mound would have required the presence of some form of social hierarchy. But Pauketat denies the alleged evolutionary premise that a hierarchy would have had to be present, arguing that 'few if any special skills' – let alone a well established social hierarchy – 'are needed to dump dirt in a pile' (p. 64). Thus the existence of a mound so far back in Middle Archaic times, which to an evolutionist (Pauketat contends) would have necessitated the presence of a social hierarchy, shows how erroneous evolutionary thinking is (p. 64). No such hierarchy, he holds, was required. Thus if social evolutionists hold the notion that, *ipso facto*, the existence of a mound strongly suggests the presence of societal complexity, well, that just shows how wrong-headed evolutionists can be.

But does it? Let us examine the matter more closely. It may indeed be true that no special skill is required to 'dump dirt in a pile'. After all, a child can do it. However, it *does* take special power and authority to *aggregate, organize, and direct* the labor of the many persons required to dump enough earth in one spot to construct an entire mound. And the power and authority needed to do so may well have reflected the existence of a socio-political hierarchy.

The great irony here is that some pages after presenting the argument just quoted, Pauketat does a complete about-face! He decides that, after all, 'building an earthen pyramid was about much more than digging, carrying, and dumping dirt' (p. 98)! So, for all the world, it would appear that Pauketat was guilty of a glaring inconsistency. How could he get out from under the sting of this

charge? Well, he might jump to his own defense by noting, ‘Didn’t Emerson once say that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds?’

A few pages beyond that, Pauketat again contradicts his earlier statement, assuring us now that, along with whatever ritual accompanied the construction of pre-Mississippian mounds, some degree of political organization must also have been required! Still, Pauketat can be rescued from this apparent anomaly by the evolutionist in the following way: Whenever Archaic or Woodland period sites turn out to have architectural features usually associated with more advanced societies than those typical of those early periods, we are completely justified in concluding that the degree of societal complexity required for such constructions was indeed already present. In other words, it need not perturb us, or challenge our evolutionist tenets, that the degree of complexity found in those societies might have been greater than their early chronological position alone would have led us to expect. In a sense, then, we may fairly conclude that in such instances *precocity* had trumped *chronology*.

Still, to get at the heart of this seeming aberration takes more than just a snappy phrase. Let me continue the argument by saying that no real anomaly was involved here. It was simply the case that if the population of the mound builders was sufficiently large, and its ecological base sufficiently productive and secure, the social complexity needed to build a mound was already in place, ready to express itself. Ecology and population size together provide the critical ‘seed bed’ out of which cultural development can take place. It is not a society’s position in some broad generalized chronological scheme that is the determining factor here. Nothing in evolutionary theory argues against the possibility of such an advance having been made if the underlying conditions required for it were already there. On the contrary, what evolutionary theory *does* say is that when conditions are right, evolution may occur despite any abstract considerations about ‘proper’ sequences or trajectories. This is a lesson that Pauketat has evidently still to learn.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CAHOKIA RECONSIDERED

Setting high-level theory aside, let us return to a consideration of Cahokia itself. Such an impressive manifestation of evolution as that society represented cries out for interpretation. So much so,

that Pauketat, in spite of his distaste for developmental explanations, feels compelled to return to the subject. Earlier we saw that in accounting for the rise of chiefdoms in general, 'migration and mixing' were his mechanism of choice. Now, to explain the rise of Cahokia in particular, he puts these factors into overdrive. And the formulation he comes up with is this: 'Cahokia's foundations involved in-migrations, cultural pluralism, mitigations of diversity, and the creative reinvention of community' (p. 206) – factors which he says were supplemented by a new element – 'the creation and spread of powerful narratives' (p. 206).

What can we make of Pauketat's new formulation? Even if the things he cites are genuine determinants, they are still merely *factors*. The question that remains is, just how did these factors interact *processually* to give rise to Cahokia? Here, alas, Pauketat fails signally to provide us with anything remotely resembling a clear, coherent, and compelling answer to the question. We want to know just how these factors worked in tandem with one another to generate a state-like structure. But Pauketat makes no attempt to tell us.

Instead, he turns to alleged parallels for assistance. And in casting about for comparable instances of cultural development which might shed light on how Cahokia arose, Pauketat has selected what he deems to be appropriate illustrations. These turn out to be principally Chaco Canyon in the New World and Mesopotamia in the Old. And while his reason for choosing Chaco Canyon was because he thought it an instructive parallel, he soon becomes absorbed with Chaco, in and of itself (p. 172). So much so, in fact, that he fails to extract from its development whatever hints might be present that could have helped him understand the evolution of Cahokia. Norman Yoffee, who, as we have seen, is one of Pauketat's theoretical guiding lights, once called Chaco Canyon by the happy neologism of a 'rituality'. Struck by this word, Pauketat eagerly seized on it, convinced that *ritual* (in addition to *migration*, *mixing*, and *narrative*) was a key ingredient in *holding Cahokia together* (p. 171). But while that might have been true, focusing on the *integration* of Cahokia once it was well established sidesteps the problem Pauketat set out to solve – namely, that of *giving rise* to Cahokia in the first place.

Throughout this book it appears that Pauketat is much more comfortable with categories and concepts that have to be delicately

picked up with a tiny forceps and gently held in the mind – like the ones just cited. He is much less comfortable with tough, tangible, hard-edged determinants, like subsistence and warfare. The former are categories that fit nicely with his notion that the rise of higher culture was ‘all about building collective memories and group identities into [metaphorical] landscapes’ (p. 199), a favorite mode of expression of New Age anthropology. The other set of categories, one is led to believe, are too mundane and prosaic – perhaps even too crassly materialist – for his taste.

As already mentioned, in his effort to use comparative data to help explain Cahokia, Pauketat cites facts drawn from areas like the Southwestern United States and Mesopotamia. Never, though, does he point to specific developments in these societies that can be considered genuine parallels to Cahokia. More peculiarly, though, he overlooks areas of the world where similar environments and cultural developments gave rise to illuminating parallels, ones that might truly have shed light on the rise of Cahokia. The examples I have in mind are the chiefdoms of the Omagua and the Tapajós that existed along the Amazon River in the 16th century. The parallels between them and Cahokia were not only numerous, but striking. And not only striking, but significant. Pauketat's failure to make the connection between Cahokia and Amazon chiefdoms is not really surprising, though. It is closely linked to another failure on his part: not a word does he say about the bountiful riverine food resources and bottomlands of the Mississippi River adjacent to Cahokia (p. 160), and the absolutely major role they must have played in Cahokia's development. The comparable (in fact, even greater) food resources of the Amazon River clearly contributed significantly to the rise of those two great Amazonian chiefdoms. Here was a decided parallel, completely missed by Pauketat, much to his detriment.

It is hard to imagine that the riverine food resources of the Mississippi did not provide the solid ecological underpinnings needed for Cahokia's rise and florescence. Nevertheless, for some unfathomable reason they play no more than a microscopic role – if that – in Pauketat's thinking about the factors that brought Cahokia to the threshold of greatness. But in discussing Cahokia's evolutionary dynamics, such factors are crowded out of Pauketat's consciousness, to be replaced by a lacework of ‘commu-

nity identity', 'memories', and 'narratives', (p. 178). The net result is that what anthropologists generally regard as the *sinews* of cultural development play virtually no role in Pauketat's inventory of causes.

WRESTLING WITH THE CONCEPT OF THE 'STATE'

As we have seen, Pauketat wants his archaeological colleagues to recognize the eminence – indeed, the *preeminence* – of Cahokia. This is reflected in a series of jibes he tosses out, such as his complaint about 'the atheoretical downsizing tendencies of eastern archaeologists' (p. 61). Such criticisms are especially evident whenever his colleagues manifest their obtuseness by failing to recognize Cahokia as a state.

It is something of a mystery, though, why Pauketat should be so keen on having Cahokia accepted as a state when, for him, the 'state' is a vague, intangible, and fugitive concept. True enough, he quotes Joyce Marcus to good effect when he notes that chiefdoms grow into states (p. 56). But, oddly enough, that is about as close as he comes to really grappling with the actual dynamics of state formation.

Pauketat also cites, with approval, Kent Flannery's remark that it is a myth to believe there was ever such a thing as '*the state*' (p. 39). Clearly, what Flannery had in mind in saying this was only that each state had its own peculiarities, and thus it is hard to choose any one state as being the *archetype* of them all. Pauketat quite failed to grasp this and made Flannery's meaning appear metaphysical. But there is still more obfuscation to come, as when Pauketat ventures into philosophically murky waters by asserting that a state never *is*, but is always *becoming* (p. 40)! Indeed, for him, the state is something perilously close to a Platonic ideal – existing in the mind, perhaps, but never actualized in space and time. For Pauketat, the state is a will-o'-the-wisp, a concept forever fruitlessly pursued but never caught (p. 40). At times, in fact, the state, for him, seems like a kind of *chimera*, invented by wool-gathering anthropologists, their minds beclouded by evolutionary folderol (p. 40). If in fact there really *is* a conceptual wilderness when it comes to the nature of the state, Pauketat hardly seems like the man to lead us out of it!

Late in the book, when Pauketat again returns to the concept of the state and tries once more to characterize it, he seems to favor what he calls the 'contemporary view' of the state. This view, according to him, is that the state 'is less an organizational thing and more a pervasive phenomenon' (p. 146) – whatever that is. Then, in an effort to clarify this muddy assertion and give it some semblance of reality and substance, he tries to do so (but with a singular lack of success) by quoting with approval the remark of Adam T. Smith that the state 'is both everywhere and nowhere' (p. 146). Now you see it, now you don't. Sadly, then, for those genuinely seeking to strengthen the edifice of Southeastern prehistory, Pauketat seems to place a sign above the entranceway, reading, 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here'.

In spite of himself, though, on rare occasions Pauketat does offer a few clues about what real forces might have been at work in giving rise to Cahokia. To begin with, he does not deny that warfare existed along the Mississippi, or that, in some unspecified way, it played a role in Cahokia's rise. But while occasionally alluding to warfare, he never deals squarely with its significance or its effects. He never attacks it frontally, but always deals with it obliquely and tangentially. On page 100, for example, he tells us that he is impressed with the strength of Cahokia's defensive works. Fine. But does he say anything about the political leadership required to build and maintain those defenses? Or of the surrounding enemies that led them to be built? Next to nothing. He does say that having such defenses might possibly indicate that Cahokia at one time maintained 'a standing army' (rather unlikely), adding suggestively that military organization is 'one of the old criteria for statehood' (pp. 154, 156). Here, then, was a chance to expatiate on the intimate and recurring connection between war and the formation of chiefdoms and states. And having reached that point, he could have tied this general relationship to the rise of Cahokia in particular. But he failed signally to do so. Here was yet another golden opportunity which Pauketat allowed to slip through his fingers.

FINAL SUMMATION

It is time now for a final appraisal of Pauketat's assault on the concept of the chiefdom and – more broadly – on social evolution in

general. On any number of fronts his attack must be judged a failure. Pauketat's scaling ladders failed to reach the summit of the battlements he pretended to assail. At the same time, his sappers were unable to undermine the castle walls. In short, the intellectual structure of the chiefdom has withstood the zealous pummeling and come through intact.

Viewed more broadly, the book can be said to bristle with an undisguised and unrelenting anti-evolutionism, which, like his assault on the chiefdom, is also unavailing. What we are dealing with, however, is more than a simple recrudescence of the anti-evolutionism of old. It is a newer and more virulent strain of that virus. If we probe more deeply into the roots of Pauketat's version of it, we find it underlain by a familiar yet more disquieting substratum – a pervasive distaste for order, pattern, or regularity in the conduct of human affairs. Accordingly, Pauketat's philosophic attitude may even be judged to be a species of anti-science. Finding regularities of any kind, after all, is the acknowledged hallmark of scientific endeavor. But for Pauketat, such regularities are distinctly uncongenial. Instead, he strives to discover – in fact, to revel in – *irregularities*. One is even tempted to say that he seeks them out as the moth does the flame.

If we think of the existing body of anthropological work as a structure, an edifice still under construction, time and time again we get the feeling that Pauketat would rather demolish its scaffolding than try to cover it with bricks and mortar. Whenever he seems to be on the verge of even a modest generalization, he draws back from it reflexively, like an amoeba retracting its pseudopodia when pricked by a sharp object (see *e.g.*, p. 128). It is perfectly clear that Pauketat is *against* things. What is not nearly so clear is what he is *for*. If there *is* something he subscribes to, passionately and wholeheartedly, it is a secret he keeps well hidden. What *does* come through the pages of this book regarding Pauketat's assessment of the state of his profession, is his *generalized dissatisfaction* with things as they are. We cannot always discern whom or what he is fighting, but there is seldom any doubt that he *is* fighting!

Anyone searching between the covers of this book for an overarching conception of something – *anything* – is warned by the author at the outset: 'This isn't a theory book' (p. 16). True to his word, on page 85, for example, I made the notation: 'As of this

point in the book, it's impossible to tell if Pauketat has any theory at all'. Nor had he given me any reason to change my opinion by the end of the book. If one were to encapsulate the message of this book, it would have to be that – other than a blanket anti-evolutionism – it *has* no message!

Given the title of the book, we had a right to expect that in reading it *some* incisive delineation and critique of the chiefdom would be forthcoming. But such hopes were dashed from the outset, for Pauketat peremptorily dismisses evolutionary reconstructions, including attempts to trace the rise of the chiefdom, as misguided and fruitless. Needless to say, such a wholesale rejection of evolution – the Ariadne's thread that makes sense of so much of historical detail – cripples the entire enterprise of understanding. We are left with no genuine comprehension of a particular type of society – the chiefdom – which once dotted the landscape of the Southeast and led ultimately, in certain favored areas of the world, to the rise of the state.

In seeking to justify his views, Pauketat levels the accusation at his fellow archaeologists that they are insufficiently acquainted with actual chiefdoms. He affirms – correctly enough – that the political structure of a chiefdom cannot be directly *observed* archaeologically, but must be *inferred*. And if these inferences are to have any solid substance behind them, they must be based on ethnographic parallels or on ethnohistorical accounts of older chiefdoms, observed while they were still in their prime. Accordingly, Pauketat enjoins his colleagues to read more about Southeastern chiefdoms while these polities were still relatively intact. But while, to a limited extent, he has done so himself, Pauketat failed to make use of the most illuminating of these accounts. A greater familiarity with them would have opened his eyes to how Southeastern chiefdoms actually functioned, and (by reasonable inferences) how they arose from the autonomous villages that preceded them. With this assemblage of facts in his mind, Pauketat would have been less ready to spurn evolutionary perspectives and reconstructions. Indeed, he might even have contributed to them himself! Alas, a fine chance was wasted.

Finally, the Southeastern United States is quite possibly the most studied domain of chiefdoms to be found anywhere in the world. Thus this book had great potential. It could have pre-

sented a detailed and enlightening portrait of the origin, nature, and evolution of the chiefdoms of this important region. Instead, it turned out to be a diatribe against evolutionary trajectories in general, and the chiefdom phase of them in particular (p. 63). In short, in undertaking this survey of Southeastern prehistory Pauketat had every chance to produce a silk purse. Instead, he chose to go in the opposite direction.

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