

---

## Chieftdom Confederacies and State Origins

---

**D. Blair Gibson**

*El Camino College, Torrance*

### ABSTRACT

*A number of historical political systems of regional scale in varied locales across the globe have been described as confederacies, and some, such as those of Early Medieval Ireland, as chieftdom confederacies. In light of recent mulling as to whether some complex political systems of prehistoric and early historic North America could be considered to have been chieftdom confederacies (Pauketat 2007), this article surveys the political systems of the historic Iroquois league, Early Medieval Ireland, Late Iron Age Britain, Archaic Boiotia, Bronze Age and Iron Age Korea, and 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Iran with the objective of determining the essential characteristics of chieftdom confederacies. Subsequent discussion is given over to the question as to whether the states that arose out of chieftdom confederacies possessed organizational characteristics attributable to their origins in them.*

Chieftdom confederacies have not had a high profile in the literature of social or political anthropology, and only pop up from time to time in historical literature. This relative neglect is odd considering that, as this survey will demonstrate, they occurred among populations in nearly every culture area of the world, and once carpeted Europe. Quite possibly, not much attention has been lavished upon chieftdom confederacies because most came into existence and declined prior to the appearance of written documents in most regions where they existed. A second likely reason for their obscurity is due to an unspoken consensus among scholars that chieftdom confederacies never evolved into, or had an imprint upon the character of early states. As this study will hopefully demonstrate nothing could be farther from the truth. Indeed, it will emerge that

Social Evolution & History, Vol. 10 No. 1, March 2011 215–233

© 2011 'Uchitel' Publishing House

the organizational characteristics and values that maintained chiefdom confederacies had a decided impact on the character of states that are termed 'feudal', or which are said to exhibit a network strategy of economic and political organization (Blanton *et al.* 1996).

### WHAT IS A CHIEFDOM CONFEDERACY?

A confederacy was the centerpiece of one of the earliest monographs in anthropology, Lewis Henry Morgan's *League of the Ho-De'-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois*, and the Iroquois League also figured prominently in his theoretical work on social evolution in *Ancient Society*. However, the Iroquois League should not be considered to have been a confederacy of chiefdoms. Morgan characterized the political system of the Haudenosaunee as a 'League of Tribes', and by this he meant that sachems did not represent their nations, but were rather the spokesmen of totemic clans (Morgan 1954 [1901], I: 78). Within the league and within the nation the councils of the sachems constituted the only corporate activities. The various 'nations' that made up the Haudenosaunee were distinguished from each other on the basis of dialectical differences and occupied territories with recognized boundaries, but were otherwise politically not integrated.

Iroquoian society seems also to have been minimally socially stratified. In contrast to the situation observed in the more complex chiefdom societies of Early Medieval Ireland and pre-contact Polynesia where warfare was most often directed by aristocrats, Morgan reports that the Iroquoian warfare was undertaken by local leaders and communities (Morgan 1954, I: 68–69). Furthermore, these local leaders were village headmen who had become chieftains on the basis of merit (*Ibid.*: 67). Seen in this light, the Haudenosaunee could be viewed as constituting a confederacy of what Johnson and Earle have termed 'regional groups' (Johnson and Earle 1987), somewhat akin to the alliances that existed among the Grand Valley Dani of New Guinea described by Heider (1991: 68). The eighteenth century Creek Confederacy of the southeastern US should also be considered in a similar light, though ascribed social status played a greater role in the selection of its leaders (Smith 2000: 58). Richard Tapper has referred to such confederacies of populations lacking unitary leadership as *coalitions* (Tapper 1990: 68).

In discussing the potential for the organization of supratribal political entities in the past among the Arabs and the Turco-Mongolian peoples of Asia, Thomas Barfield contrasts the egalitarian ethos of the former with the conical clan organization and hierarchical social relations of the latter (1990). He says of the latter '...the acceptance of hierarchical authority and hereditary right to leadership was already deeply embedded in their culture and was reflected in the organization of tribal confederacies' (Barfield 1990: 159). Chieftdom confederacies must then be composed of chieftdoms, which in turn must possess an aristocratic social stratum (Tapper 1990: 68).

With the objective of drawing a distinction between chieftdom confederacies in Early Medieval Munster and another smaller and more stable configuration of Irish chieftdoms termed a composite chieftdom, I offered the following definition of a chieftdom confederacy: 'A chieftdom confederacy consists of a number of genealogically related and unrelated chieftdoms which were unified through coercion or common agreement' (Gibson 1995: 123). This definition reflected the existence of charters in the form of written genealogies or lists of chieftains as part of the documentary record of Early Medieval Ireland, which laid out the purported kin relations that existed between the founding ancestors of each of the constituent chieftdoms within a chieftdom confederacy. The genealogies in turn reflect the fact that as in Polynesia and among the Turco-Mongolians, the leading families of the chieftdoms of the Irish exhibited ramage or conical clan organization (Barfield 1990: 164; Firth 1963 [1936]; Sahlins 1958; Kirchoff 1955). In Early Medieval Ireland, the structure of the conical clan was promulgated in the political sphere to link the leaders of otherwise unrelated ramage together into the web of fictive descent. It is conceivable that in other regions of the world where chieftdom confederacies are encountered no attempt may have been made to link the leading families of the various chieftdoms making up a confederacy together through genealogies. It must be admitted, though, that a documentary record comparable to Ireland's in terms of the number and variety of texts that reflect upon the political makeup of chieftdom confederacies does not exist anywhere else with the exception of Archaic Greece, so this issue cannot really be examined.

## CHIEFDOM CONFEDERACIES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

In Early Medieval Ireland the chiefdoms of a chiefdom confederacy were located in near proximity to each other within a region but were not always geographically contiguous. In contrast, the chiefdoms that made up Irish composite chiefdoms were arrayed into circular clusters and had adopted a corporate identity. This identity was premised upon the genealogical ties between the leaders of the constituent chiefdoms that linked them into a *ramage* in the sense of Firth (1963 [1936]) and Sahlins (1958). Irish composite chiefdoms often endured for centuries – the Corcu MoDruad, a composite chiefdom that was located in the far north of Thomond, can be traced back to an Iron Age composite chiefdom named the Ruad-raige. This composite chiefdom changed its name to Corcu MoDruad in the Early Middle Ages, and retained this identity despite experiencing catastrophic defeats at the hands of the Uí Fidgeinti and Dál Cais in the eighth century AD. What remained of it was partitioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> century into two descendant composite chiefdoms. One of them retained the name Corcu MoDruad, and this composite chiefdom persisted until the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Though Irish chiefdom confederacies would seem to have been less tightly integrated than composite chiefdoms, they may also have lasted for considerable stretches of time. The chiefdom confederacy for which the best historical documentation exists is the Dál Cais confederacy of Thomond (coextensive with modern Co. Clare). The first annals entry to allude to them dates from 934 AD. In the early tenth century they were probably expanding aggressively under the leadership of the Uí Tairdelbaich ramage (Gibson 1995: 120–122). The evidence of the chieftain lists shows that at the time they were imposing their members into the succession of the Corcu MoDruad chieftains in the far north of Thomond, and the tenth century Psalter of Cashel describes the ramage of Cenél Fermaic as members of the confederacy, though this chiefdom was located beyond the core chiefdoms of the Dál Cais composite chiefdom to the north. The Dál Cais confederacy was superseded in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century AD when Muirchertaich Uí Brian created the first state in Munster, though the appellation Dál Cais would endure for centuries thereafter in the literary sources of Munster.

The Early Medieval Irish text that is called by scholars the ‘West Munster Synod’ describes the formation of a chiefdom confederacy in the western half of the Munster region of southern Ireland, possibly in the eighth century AD (Byrne 2001: 216). The text expresses a rationale of mutual defense for the formation of the confederacy, but it also seems likely from historical examples such as the confederacy of the Dál Cais that confederacies were created to facilitate predatory military expansion on the part of the confederacies' leaders. As stated above, the emergence of the Dál Cais coincided with the defeat and imposition of Dál Cais chieftains upon the Corcu MoDruad, a composite chiefdom that bordered the confederacy in far north of Thomond. These imposed chieftains were drawn from ramage of the Uí Tairdelbach chiefdom of the Dál Cais confederacy. Thereafter the descendants of Lorcán, the leaders of the Uí Tairdelbach and of the Dál Cais, undertook to attack the Éoganacht confederacy of Munster and fended off an attack from the leader of the Uí Néill confederacy in Leinster. Eventually Lorcán's grandson, the famous Brian Boroimhe (Boru), would go on to defeat his rivals in Munster, attack Connacht to the north, and challenge the Uí Néill for supremacy within the province of Leinster in the east of Ireland.

**CHIEFDOM CONFEDERACIES THROUGHOUT HISTORY  
AND AROUND THE WORLD:  
THE CELTS, GERMANS, AND GREEKS**

Surveys of the literary sources and the archaeological record has lead to a consensus among archaeologists that the named Celtic ‘tribal’ groupings encountered by the Greeks and Romans in Gaul and Britain amounted to collections of allied chiefdoms (Cunliffe 1991: 129, 141, 189; Pryor 2001: 129). Indeed, the archaeological record leaves little room for any other kind of political system to have existed. In 1972 David Clarke indicated the cellular character of settlement within the territory of the Iron Age Celtic Dumnonii of modern Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, which he described as a ‘loose confederation of sea-linked Celtic tribes’ (1972: 803). Barry Cunliffe has said the same about the neighboring Durotriges of Dorset, calling them a ‘loose confederacy of smaller units...’ (Cunliffe 1991: 159). Cunliffe's appraisal of the more centralized British ‘tribes’ of southeastern England reveals them as concatena-

tions of 'smaller socio-economic units' (1991: 131–132). Nico Roymans reached the same conclusion regarding the organization of the Celtic *civitas* of the tribes of Northern Gaul 'The Gallic-Germanic *civitas* ... consisted of a confederation of a number of sub-tribes, or *pagi*' (Roymans 1990: 22). There are indications in Tacitus' descriptions of the Germanic tribes of the first century AD that they were organized in an analogous fashion, e.g., '[the Batavi] ... were once a people of the Chatti, and on occasion of civil war migrated to their present home – destined there to become part of the Roman Empire. But the honor and distinction of their old alliance remains' (Tacitus, *Germania*: §29). 'The Bructeri were ousted and almost annihilated by a league of neighboring tribes' (*Ibid.*: §33).

Chieftdom confederacies can also be located in Archaic Period Greece in the *ethnos*; political systems which consisted either of a loose association of towns, as in the case of the Boiotian League, or villages and territories as in the case of Lokris, Doris, or Aetolia. Political systems described as *ethnos* predominated in central and western Greece (Ferguson 1991: 179; Snodgrass 1980: 42–44). The *ethnos* was integrated solely by religious and political assemblies.

The Boiotian League has been the subject of recent intensive scrutiny by both archaeologists and historians. In the early Archaic Period, c. 1000 BC – 650 BC, the governments of Boiotian towns and villages consisted of councils composed of the heads of noble clans, presided over by an elected leader, the *archon*, who is presumed to have served a one-year term (Buck 1979: 92–93). This form of government is not unique in the context of societies of the ethnographic record that were organized into chieftdoms. It can be equated to the Samoan councils of *matai* (chieftains), called *fono*, from Polynesia. The councils of Boiotian towns in turn selected delegates to serve on religious councils called *amphictyony* which were involved with organizing the festivals which drew participation from all Boiotian communities (*Ibid.*: 89).

Beginning in the mid-seventh century BC, or perhaps earlier in the case of Orchomenus, larger towns such as Thebes, Thespieae, and Plataea compelled the formation of tributary associations with smaller towns, a form of association termed hegemony (Buck 1979: 98–101; Schachter 1989). These early political formations seem to

have been equivalent in spatial extent to Irish composite chiefdoms, that is around 400 km<sup>2</sup>, and the three-tiered settlement hierarchy (homestead, secondary town, primary town) encountered by the Bradford – Cambridge survey of Southwestern Boiotia reinforces this impression (Bintliff 1985; Bintliff and Snodgrass 1989: 288).

Echoing Aristotle's statements in *Politics*, modern historians also frequently point out the social significance of a change in warfare tactics during this period. Heavily armed hoplite forces organized into phalanxes became the prevailing military formation, displacing cavalry in importance. The ascendancy of the hoplites supposedly reflects a broadening of social participation in warfare to the middle ranks of society (Jeffery 1976: 67). However, this change cannot be taken as an indication of state formation as the hoplites were aristocratic and self-supporting. Furthermore the extant records fail to note the existence of any officials beyond the councils of oligarchs. Therefore no state bureaucracy can be said to have come into being.

Around 520 BC in response to external wars with the Thessaloi and Phokis to the north and threats from Athens from the south the Boiotian League was formed (Schachter 1989: 81–82). This league was dominated by Thebes, though each major participating town was represented in the governing assembly, or *halia*, and each nominated boeotarchs, who were dedicated military leaders (Buck 1979: 124–125). Still, even though the governing system had become more formal the towns making up this alliance cannot be said to have been states, nor could the alliance itself be termed a state as these changes did not involve instituting a bureaucracy, a legal system, regular taxation, or a full-time military. Instead the Boiotian League could be better thought of as a chiefdom confederacy since the functions of the *halia* were restricted to military and diplomatic undertakings. It certainly behaved like an Irish chiefdom confederacy as the League proved to be highly fissiparous – the Boiotian town of Orochomenos, an early rival of Thebes for dominance, initially resisted membership. Plataea, and several other Boiotian villages in the south steadfastly refused to join, and Thespieae deserted the league following the battle of Thermopylae (Buck 1979: 133). The extent of the territory of the Boiotian League would also seem to fit the chiefdom confederacy model. The land area that was contained within the collective territories of the members of the Boiotian

League is roughly equivalent, if not somewhat smaller in extent, than the land area dominated by the Dál Cais chiefdom confederacy of Early Medieval Co. Clare.<sup>2</sup>

Chiefdom confederacies were a fact of early Korean history since the first millennium BC. The first may have been Old Joseon (also Kochosŏn, Gojoseon), said to be a confederacy of three tribes (Lee *et al.* 2005: 53).<sup>3</sup> ‘The Hwanug tribe formed an aggregation with adjacent tribes or villages and then subjugated other aggregations...’ (*Ibid.*: 54). ‘Old Joseon was basically a confederation and could not be easily ruled from the center’ (*Ibid.*: 64). Old Joseon's counterpart in South Korea was Jin (also Chin), also described as a loose confederacy. These confederacies ultimately broke apart into their constituent units (*geosuguk*), which then reformed into new confederacies: Puyŏ (also Buyeo), Koguryŏ (also Goguryeo), Ye, the Three Han (Samhan), and Gaya. These chiefdom confederacies were eclipsed by the consolidation of three of these polities into the states of Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla in the first century CE. However even these polities did not really develop centralized systems of territorial administration until the fourth century AD (Lee *et al.* 2005: 179).

Chiefdom confederacies have also been suggested for the Himalayan region, though the data are not as solid as they are in Korea or Europe. Nancy Levine has concluded that a chiefdom confederacy founded by Rajput invaders called the Kalyal or Kalial came into being in western Nepal during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Levine 1988: 25; Petech 1980: 87). The indigenous Magar people of Nepal may also have been organized into chiefdom confederacies.

#### **CHIEFDOM CONFEDERACIES AMONG PASTORAL NOMADS? THE HISTORIC CONFEDERACIES OF IRAN**

Fredrik Barth's Khamseh confederacy of South Persian nomadic Persians, Arabs, and Turks had been created *de novo* by Naser ed-Din Shah in 1861 and placed under the leadership of a wealthy urban merchant family in order to protect their economic interests and those of the British from depredations by the larger but similarly multiethnic Qashqa'i confederacy (Barth 1961: 88; Beck 1986: 31). Apart from the chief and his family an aristocratic social stratum cannot be said to have existed – the leaders under the chieftain were mere heads of lineages. The authority of the headmen was limited to formulating consensus (Barth 1961: 25–27),

and headmen imposed no exactions upon the members of their section or camp. Hence the Khamseh confederacy was not composed of chiefdoms.

The same cannot be said about the Qashqa'i confederacy. Within this confederacy there were three levels of leadership, and both Khan and headmen appropriated taxes and labor from members of their groups, though only the lineages of the Khans and Ilkhanis (paramount chieftains) constituted an aristocracy (Beck 1986: 193–195, 233). Thus the Qashqa'i confederacy can be considered to have been a true chiefdom confederacy. It is the contention of Lois Beck that this confederacy was a product of the interaction of nomads with the economy and institutions of the Persian state over the last 300 years (*Ibid.*). Similarly, Richard Tapper credits Nader Shah with the creation of the Shahsevan confederacy in Northern Persia in the eighteenth century (Tapper 1997: 139).

These examples drawn from Iran's history mirror the thesis of William Irons (1979) whereby any amount of social stratification among pastoral nomads is attributed to contact with state-level societies. Thomas Barfield takes this thesis further, tracing the origins of not only chiefdom confederacies among pastoral Turco-Mongolians, but also what he calls state-level 'imperial confederacies' to contact between nomadic pastoralists and agricultural states (Barfield 1990: 167). The appearance of chiefdom confederacies in Korea during the last two centuries of the first millennium BC has been similarly attributed to sustained contact with the Chinese Yan and Han states (Pai 2000).

It does not fall within the scope of this paper to examine the influence of state-level societies upon the political constitution of the peoples described in this paper. It should be evident from this survey that chiefdom confederacies had existed in places distant from states such as Iron Age England, Scotland, and Ireland where the subsistence economy could be described as agricultural or agro-pastoral (Gibson 1987). So even though the paramount chieftains of the Turco-Mongolians and of Iranian confederacies may have owed their prominence to their role as conduits of trade goods and booty obtained from states, those of the British Iron Ages did not. It is likely that the circumstances of the peoples so far described who attained not only chiefdom-level social complexity but who also formed chiefdom confederacies were varied. Clearly

these political systems were supported by economies productive enough to support a high degree of social stratification, but at the same time there were other factors which worked against the monopolization of political power. In societies with an agropastoralist subsistence base, such as prevailed in Early Medieval Ireland, settlement nucleation was largely absent, population densities were relatively low, and vital immovable capital investments such as irrigation systems, vineyards and orchards did not exist. These conditions posed considerable challenges to the centralization of power. In Boiotia towns and fixed capital investments did exist, but the preponderant settlement was still the isolated farmstead (Bintliff 1985: 60; Bintliff and Snodgrass 1989: 288).

### **CONFEDERACY AND DEMOCRACY**

In their very constitution chiefdom confederacies would seem to have embodied a mixture of coercion and voluntarism. Their leaders had often come to prominence as able and successful military commanders against a backdrop of constant infighting between chiefdoms. However this success was brought about through the exercise of skills in building and maintaining alliances. The central leader of a confederacy will not have been able to exercise power in sufficient measure to eliminate or bypass subordinate leaders, and these can (and frequently do) withhold or switch support away from unpopular apical leaders (Beck 1986: 200). In Medieval Ireland, followers were known to go further and kill or expel failed leaders (Gibson 2010).

We deduce from the Medieval Irish sources that the impetus for the creation of a confederacy came initially from a militarily powerful chiefdom: for instance the paramount chieftain of the Cíarraige Lúachra was the instigator of the chiefdom confederacy described in the 'West Munster Synod', and other textual sources indicate the military prominence of the Cíarraige Lúachra in West Munster and Thomond in the seventh and eighth centuries AD (Bhreathnach 1999; Gibson 1990). The lead role taken by the Uí Tairdelbach in the expansion of the Dál Cais chiefdom confederacy has been described above. However the evidence is equally ample that coercive force was only part of the equation. Member chiefdoms of confederacies would change their chiefdom's name to go along with the conceit of common descent. There is also ample evidence from the Irish documentary sources of two rimages

within a confederacy agreeing to alternate the paramountcy between them with every change in succession. Secondly powerful chieftdoms of a confederacy also assumed a kingmaker role with respect to the dynasty in power, as in the case of the Mac Con Mara and their relationship to the Uí Briain within the Dál Cais confederacy in the Middle Ages (Nic Ghiollamhaith 1995).

The pervasive distribution of democratic procedures for selecting leaders within Celtic and Germanic chieftdom confederacies across northern Europe, as well as in Archaic Period Greece, might be seen then as a natural outgrowth of the system of confederation, and of this dimension of voluntarism (Gibson 2010). Within these groups the succession to leadership was restricted to a given aristocratic lineage, however the successful new apical leader was chosen by subordinate chieftains and the choice was validated in an assembly. Over the two hundred year course of its existence, the Boiotian League progressed from a loose alliance of sovereign towns to develop a federal government with four councils consisting of elected aristocratic representatives. In all stages of its existence aristocrats elected representatives and voted on policy in assemblies at both the town and federal levels (Buck 1979: 157; 1994: 108).

Outside of Europe however, the evidence for democratic mechanisms for determining chiefly succession is scant or lacking. Chiefly succession seems to have followed along lines of primogeniture among the Turco-Mongolians (Barfield 1990; Beck 1986: 201). Chiefly titles would seem to have been inherited patrilineally in Korea as well (Lee *et al.* 2005: 66–68). The paramount chieftain of the Korean Old Joseon confederacy, the Dangun, functioned as the head of a shamanistic religion. His successors and the holders of other high religious offices were restricted to his clan (*Ibid.*: 76). It would seem that the only truly universal manifestation of democracy within chieftdom confederacies lay in the fact that the constituent member chieftdoms of a confederacy retained and exercised the right to withhold support or leave a confederacy if they became displeased with the leadership.

#### **THE EMERGENCE OF STATES FROM CHIEFTDOM CONFEDERACIES**

As has been stated above, most authorities on Asian chieftdom confederacies cited in this work lay stress upon the fact that the confed-

eracies were either created by states or that their unification under a single apical leader came about as result of their economic relations with states. Barfield and Pai similarly argue that when states arose from chiefdom confederacies in Central and East Asia it was a result of a strategy to obtain luxury goods from Chinese states through the threat or application of force (Barfield 1990; Pai 2000).

This argument may hold for states with a background in nomadic pastoralism, but is less persuasive in the context of societies with agro-pastoral or agricultural subsistence economies. In Europe states arose from chiefdom confederacies against a background of constant internecine warfare between confederacies, or in Greece between chiefdom confederacies and *poleis*. I would hazard to argue that status rivalry between rival elites or rival groupings of elites in the form of warfare was as important as a desire for luxury imports in first millennium Korea as well.

States emerged from chiefdom confederacies in Scotland in the tenth century AD and in Munster in Ireland in the early twelfth century (Gibson 1995; Grant 2000). Both Scotland and Munster were at some remove from more complex societies though both regions had experienced sustained contact with Vikings in the form of permanent settlements, and the Viking economy was dedicated to a large measure to the trade in a wide range of commodities and the manufacture of goods for trade. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Irish had had relations with Viking towns and exposure to their trade goods for two hundred years, so it is difficult to view Viking influence as having played pivotal role in the emergence of Irish statehood. Korean chiefdom confederacies had also been in contact with the Yan and Han states for over two hundred years before beginning to assume the character of states. I would therefore consider these to have been primary, rather than secondary states.

In the late fifth century BC the Boiotian League began to acquire a more state-like organization, for the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* describes a formal constitution that had been adopted by 446 BC (Buck 1979: 154, 159). The constitution set out qualifications for selection for service on town councils, limiting service to a limited section of the nobility. This significance of the constitution is that a federal government was now dictating the social constitution of the political bodies of its member polities. The *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* document further describes the payment of taxes by the member polities to the state and the selection of judicial officers (dicasts). The fed-

eral Council of the Boiotians consisted of 540 members who were apportioned into four sub-councils, and these representatives were now paid for their service (Buck 1979: 157). The council continued to select military officials for one-year terms of office, and to name commanders for specific military operations (*Idem* 1994: 108). The sub-councils possessed executive committees, and there were always councilors present at the citadel of Kadmeia in Thebes (*Ibid.*). The Boiotian League had therefore acquired a formal full-time government, but it persisted in being federal in character with nobles sharing administrative functions rather than devolving them to non-noble professionals.

Thomas Barfield's discussion of 'imperial confederacies' – states that emerged out of chiefdom confederacies with a pastoralist orientation – highlighted their lack of knowledge, interest, and aptitude for developing systems of administration for their conquered agriculturalist subjects (Barfield 1990: 169–172). Organizational simplicity may be viewed as another characteristic of the administration of the state-level polities that evolved out of chiefdom confederacies with agro-pastoral or agricultural subsistence economies. In both Medieval Scotland and in Munster the only novel addition to the stewards (*rechtaire, maer*) used as functionaries by Gaelic chieftains since the Early Medieval Period was the appointment of *mórmaer* ('great stewards') as higher-level administrators, occupying a position just below the king and above subordinate chieftains (Grant 2000: 53). Their appearance would seem to have reflected a concomitant diminishment of the autonomy and status of the chieftains under the king's authority, connoted by a change of terminology relating to the title of these individuals from *rí* to *toisech*. The lack of complex administrative apparatus meant that the king still ruled indirectly through the local chieftains. This was apparently also the case in the early centuries of existence of the Korean States of the Multiple Kingdoms Period (Lee *et al.* 2005: 166–167).

An interesting corollary to these organizational aspects of the states that emerged from chiefdom confederacies is to be found among the Classical Period lowland Maya. Despite rapid advances in the decipherment of Mayan hieroglyphic texts there are very few titles that can be interpreted as having designated state functionaries or which refer to administrators. This has led to characterizations of the Mayan polities of this period by scholars as 'weak

states', 'segmentary states', 'galactic polities', or even as complex chiefdoms (Ball 1993; Ball and Taschek 1991; Demarest 1992). It is well known that major centers such as Tikal and Calakmul were linked with less powerful centers in extensive alliance networks (Culbert 1991; Marcus 1993; Martin and Grube 2000). It is therefore entirely possible that Mayan states may also have emerged from chiefdom confederacies and continued to preserve their devolved power structure.

## CONCLUSIONS

This survey of chiefdom confederacies has hopefully established the significance of this kind of political system as an analytical concept. From the data that have been examined here it should seem evident that chiefdom confederacies were not confined solely to nomadic pastoralists or were always the creations of states, and were therefore not always the parasitic or predatory entities that they were in Inner Asian contexts. In Greece, Western Europe and Korea they seem to have been born of the centuries of violent interactions between chiefdom societies in varied geographical contexts. In each region there were probably a number of conditions such as broken topography, food transportation costs, or the requirements of livestock which in turn lead to a prevailing dispersed pattern of settlement or a lifestyle premised upon transhumance. These conditions worked against the nucleation of populations and resources, and so fostered alliance formation as a favored strategy for political survival within a climate of constant internecine warfare.

In the same localities continuing violence led often very gradually to the transformation of chiefdom confederacies into states, accompanied by changes in territorial administration and only slight elaboration of administrative structure. Territorial administration largely devolved to local leaders, and so the institution of kingship was as a consequence weaker than it would have been in a more centralized state, if it existed at all. As we have seen, the institution of kingship was altogether lacking in the Boiotian League. We may conclude then that the states that evolved from chiefdom confederacies would then have a federal or feudal character – and so the legacy of chiefdom confederacies were the kingdoms found in the Germanic and Slavic regions, such as the Merovin-

gian state or the Rus, that exhibited strong oligarchies and weak kings.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my wife, Susan Saul, and to my colleague Rodolfo Otero for reviewing this article and making valuable suggestions for its improvement. I would also like to thank my two student assistants, Brittany Holtson and Shannon Espinosa, for helping me substantially with the ancillary work associated with my classes, and thus freeing up the necessary time that enabled me to write this article.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Or into the seventeenth century, in the case of the Gragans chiefdom.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the maps in Buck 1979 chs 7–9 with those of Gibson 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Information on Korea's earliest polities derive from Early Medieval written sources, and are separated by many centuries from the entities that they describe.

### REFERENCES

- Ball, J. W.  
1993. *Cahal Pech, the Ancient Maya, and Modern Belize: The Story of an Archaeological Park*. San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press.
- Ball, J. W., and Taschek, J. T.  
1991. Late Classic Lowland Maya Political Organization and Central-place Analysis: New Insights from the Upper Belize Valley. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 2: 149–165.
- Barfield, T. J.  
1990. Tribe and State Relations: the Inner Asian Perspective. In Khoury, P. S., and Kostiner, J. (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (pp. 153–182). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Barth, F.  
1961. *Nomads of South Persia*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Beck, L.  
1986. *The Qashqa'i of Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bhreathnach, E.  
1999. The Construction of the Stone Fort at Cahercommaun [Co. Clare]: a Historical Hypothesis. *Discovery Programme Reports* 5: 83–91.

- Bintliff, J.  
1985. The Development of Settlement in South-west Boeotia. In Argoud, G., and Roesch, P. (eds.), *La Béotie Antique: Lyon–SaintÉtienne 16–20 mai 1983* (pp. 49–70). Paris: Éditions du CNRS.
- Bintliff, J., and Snodgrass, A.  
1989. From Polis to Chorion in South-west Boeotia. In Beister, H., and Buckler, J. (eds.), *Boiotika* (pp. 285–299). Munich: Editio Maris.
- Blanton, R. E., Feinman, G. M., Kowalewski, S. A., and Peregrine, P.  
1996. A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization. *Current Anthropology* 37: 1–14, 65–68.
- Buck, R. J.  
1979. *A History of Boeotia*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press.  
1994. *Boiotia and the Boiotian League 423–371 BC*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.
- Byrne, F. J.  
2001. *Irish Kings and High-Kings*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Clarke, D. L.  
1972. A Provisional Model of an Iron Age Society and its Settlement System. In Clarke, D. L. (ed.), *Models in Archaeology* (pp. 801–870). London: Duckworth.
- Culbert, T. P.  
1991. Politics in the Northeast Peten, Guatemala. In Culbert, T. P. (ed.), *Classic Maya Political History: Hieroglyphs and Archaeological Evidence* (pp. 128–146). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunliffe, B.  
1991. *Iron Age Communities in Britain*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Demarest, A. A.  
1992. Ideology in Ancient Maya Cultural Evolution: the Dynamics of Galactic Polities. In Demarest, A. A., and Conrad, G. W. (eds.), *Ideology and Pre-Columbian Civilizations* (pp. 135–157). Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.
- Ferguson, Y.  
1991. From Chiefdoms to City-states: the Greek Experience. In Earle, T. K. (ed.), *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy and Ideology* (pp. 169–192). Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Firth, R.  
1963 [1936]. *We, the Tikopia*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Gibson, D. B.  
1987. Agro-Pastoralism and Regional Social Organization in Early Ireland. In Gibson, D. B., and Geselowitz, M. N. (eds.), *Tribe and Polity in Late Prehistoric Europe* (pp. 41–68). New York: Plenum.  
1990. *Tulach Commáin: A View of an Irish Chieftdom*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.  
1995. Chieftdoms, Confederacies, and Statehood in Early Ireland. In Arnold, B., and Gibson, D. B. (eds.), *Celtic Chieftdom, Celtic State* (pp. 116–128). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
2010. Celtic Democracy. In Conley, K., Lehman-Shriver, E., and Zeiser, S. (eds.), *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium 28*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Grant, A.  
2000. The Construction of the Early Scottish State. In Maddicott, J. R., and Palliser, D. M. (eds.), *The Medieval State* (pp. 47–71). London: The Hambledon Press.
- Heider, K.  
1991. *Grand Valley Dani*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Irons, W.  
1979. Political Stratification among Pastoral Nomads. In L'equipe écologie et anthropologie des sociétés pastorales (eds.), *Pastoral Production and Society* (pp. 361–374). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jeffery, L. H.  
1976. *Archaic Greece*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Johnson, A., and Earle, T.  
1987. *The Evolution of Human Societies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kirchoff, P.  
1955. The Principles of Clanship in Human Society. *Davidson Journal of Anthropology* 1: 1–11.
- Lee, H., Park, S., and Yoon, N.  
2005. *New History of Korea*. Seoul: Jimoondang: Korean Studies Series No. 30.

- Levine, N. R.  
1988. *The Dynamics of Polyandry*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Marcus, J.  
1993. Ancient Maya Political Organization. In Sabloff, J. A., and Henderson, J. S. (eds.), *Lowland Maya Civilization in the Eighth Century AD* (pp. 111–183). Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks.
- Martin, S., and Grube, N.  
2000. *Chronicle of the Ancient Mayan Kings and Queens*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Morgan, L. H.  
1954 [1901]. *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*. New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files.
- Nic Ghiollamhaith, A.  
1995. Kings and Vassals in Later Medieval Ireland: The Uí Bhriain and the MicConmara in the Fourteenth century. In Barry, T. B., Frame, R., and Simms, K. (eds.), *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland* (pp. 201–216). London: The Hambledon Press.
- Pai, H. I.  
2000. *Constructing Korean Origins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Pauketat, T.R.  
2007. *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*. Lanham, MD: Alta Mira.
- Petech, L.  
1980. Ya-ts'e, Gu-ge, Pur-rang. A New Study. *Central Asiatic Journal* 29: 85–111.
- Pryor, F.  
2001. *Seahenge: New Discoveries in Prehistoric Britain*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Roymans, N.  
1990. *Tribal Societies in Northern Gaul: An Anthropological Analysis*. Amsterdam: Cingula.
- Sahlins, M. D.  
1958. *Social Stratification in Polynesia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Schachter, A.  
1989. *Boiotia in the Sixth Century BC*. In Beister, H., and Buckler, J. (eds.), *Boiotika* (pp. 73–86). Munich: Editio Maris.

- Smith, M. T.  
2000. *Coosa*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Snodgrass, A.  
1980. *Archaic Greece*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Tacitus, P. C.  
1958. *Tacitus on Britain and Germany*. Transl. by H. Mattingly.  
Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Tapper, R.  
1990. Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople on Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East. In Khoury, P. S., and Kostiner, J. (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (pp. 48–73). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
1997. *Frontier Nomads of Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.