

Review Essay:

**Multiple Trajectories
in Political Development:**

**Review of Jonathan Haas (ed.),
*From Leaders to Rulers****

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ABSTRACT

Jonathan Haas, an archaeologist at the Field Museum in Chicago, has long been interested in political evolution. In an effort to deepen our understanding of this process, in October, 1997, he assembled nine other archaeologists who had worked in various parts of the world – the Southwest, Mesoamerica, Peru, Spain, Scandinavia, Mesopotamia, and Polynesia. These scholars shared Haas' interest in laying bare the steps and mechanisms by which political leaders (chiefs) had been transformed into rulers (kings).

No ethnologist was invited to participate in this conference because, Haas felt, archaeologists are better equipped than ethnologists to unravel the intricacies of cultural evolution. In fact, he argues, 'the intellectual responsibility for studying the evolution of complex cultural systems has shifted almost entirely to archaeology in the past two decades' (p. 9). The essays in this volume illustrate various evolutionary pathways that led to the emergence of chiefs and kings, and these pathways differ substantially from one another. Indeed, the entire volume may be said to be an exercise in multilineal evolution. But as Haas points out, 'while each individual case is historically unique, there are common patterns that run through them all' (p. 36). Thus each prehistoric society represented in this volume can be said to lie 'along the broad cross-cultural trajectory toward increased centralization and concentration of power in the hands of ruling elites' (p. 18).

INTRODUCTION

In *From Leaders to Rulers*, Haas tells us, this trajectory is examined from ‘the experimental political strategies of the Rio Grande pueblos through the combination of leadership arrangements found in the chiefdoms of Europe and Polynesia to the rule of kings and queens in the powerful states of Mesoamerica, Peru, and Mesopotamia’ (p. 242). What emerges from these studies, then, is a form of *unilinear* evolution, distilled from various individual developmental histories.

Haas' introductory chapter is followed by one written by Carol Crumley who, Haas says, ‘challenges all our existing models of cultural evolution’. It was Crumley who introduced the term ‘heterarchy’ into anthropology, and who now proposes to inject into the arena such additional new terms as ‘torus attractor’ (p. 22) and ‘cognitive liminality’ (p. 28).

But ‘heterarchy’ still seems to be nearest to Crumley's heart. On several occasions she tries to convey its meaning to the reader:

‘... heterarchies are self-organizing systems in which the elements stand counterpoised to one another. In social systems, the power of various elements may fluctuate relative to conditions ...’ (p. 26).

Again, ‘Heterarchy describes the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential of being ranked in a number of different ways’ (p. 25).

And again, we are told that from a ‘heterarchical perspective’, ‘Power ... is counterpoised and linked to values, which are fluid, and respond to changing situations’. This Crumley calls a ‘definition’ of heterarchy (p. 24).

But by introducing this term into the study of political evolution does Crumley really enhance our understanding of the process? It seems to me that what Crumley is driving at with the concept of ‘heterarchy’, while obscure and elusive in her phrasing of it, is not altogether new. In fact, it can be expressed more clearly and simply in words already well established in the English language! And that once this is done, once the seemingly abstruse has been unmasked, we find behind the disguise, an old familiar face.

Next in the volume comes a chapter by Winifred Creamer in which she traces Pueblo political development from A.D. 1325 to 1540, the year the Spaniards arrived (p. 38). Here Creamer offers a fine, clear presentation of Pueblo demographic history based on a comprehensive survey of archaeological sites (p. 41), and concludes that a fairly steady growth of population characterized this region over the course of a thousand year.

Together, 65 large Pueblo village sites were encompassed by Creamer's survey, although no more than 30 or 40 of them were occupied at any one time. 'The smallest of these 65 sites', she says, 'include about 300 rooms and some sites include up to 3000 or more rooms. Together they represent what is probably the largest concentration of pre-European population centers anywhere north of the valley of Mexico' (p. 39).

As the Pueblos grew, small hamlets, built in close proximity to their fields, were replaced by larger nucleated pueblos located in defensible positions (p. 51). Warfare over land and other resources is attested to in various ways (*e.g.*, p. 53), and '[a] war cult and war leaders were part of Pueblo life' (p. 55). Moreover, warfare appears to have been the cause behind the aggregation of villages. Through ceramic analysis Creamer shows that certain regions of the Pueblo area were beginning to coalesce into larger political groupings – alliances certainly, and perhaps even confederacies for mutual protection (p. 45; p. 236).

From the analysis of her survey data, Creamer concludes that some degree of hierarchy among the coordinated Pueblo villages had developed, but no true chiefdoms had been established (p. 48). Had they been left to themselves, though, she thinks the Pueblos would have continued to develop. Their political evolution might well have culminated in chiefdoms had not the arrival of the Spaniards truncated the process (p. 58).

* * *

From the southwestern United States the volume jumps to southeastern Spain, where Antonio Gilman, in his chapter focuses on cultural development in that region during the Bronze Age. In a good thumbnail history of Spanish archaeology (pp. 64–67), Gilman shows how, starting out as diffusionary, interpretations of Iberian prehistory

have gradually become *processual*, and even *evolutionary*. Autochthonous development has pretty well replaced diffusion as the mechanism of choice in accounting for the trends noted in Iberian culture history (p. 59).

The politics Gilman is concerned with appear to be no more than chiefdoms. So far in this volume, then, we are dealing with *leaders* rather than *rulers*. How is the rise of these leaders, these paramount chiefs, to be explained? Under the category of *processual*, a variety of scenarios are still possible. Some, however, Gilman discounts at the outset. First of all, since in his excavations he found little or nothing in the way of ritual paraphernalia, he thinks that 'ideology' played at best a negligible role in this political development.

Warfare is mentioned by Gilman (p. 73), but is not suggested as a possible avenue leading to Bronze Age chiefdoms in southeastern Spain. As he did in his previous work in Albacete province, Gilman discounts the evidence of warfare as being relevant to the rise of chiefdoms. His attitude toward war is shown by his remarks about the findings of the Spanish archaeologist Ruiz Montero: 'In the Argaric [Bronze Age period] over three quarters of the metal objects catalogued by Montero are weapons and ornaments. This suggests', says Gilman, 'that the primary function of the industry was nonpractical' (Gilman, p. 69).

It appears, then, that Gilman regards weapons of war as 'nonpractical', a strange position for a historical materialist to take. Well, then, if warfare is to be ruled out, what would Gilman offer us in its place as a causal mechanism to account for the rise of Bronze Age Spanish chiefdoms? An 'approach, which in recent years has been gaining ground in our profession', says Gilman, stresses 'the exploitation which underlies permanent inequalities within a society...' These inequalities, he adds, were 'made possible because the development of intensive production systems permits the reliable collection of tribute' (p. 74). More specifically, Gilman tells us, 'the most promising economic cause of the social inequalities in southeast Spain is agriculture' (p. 74). And not just simple agriculture, but intensive agriculture, for, he argues, '[a]gricultural intensification would have provided leaders the leverage with which to become rulers' (p. 76).

Gilman goes on to say: 'In societies with extensive [that is, non-intensive] systems of production', on the other hand, the ambitions of

men who would be leaders if they could, 'are usually frustrated...' (p. 74). However, 'in societies with intensified agricultural production leaders succeed in establishing hereditary control: They become rulers and their followers subjects' (p. 74).

Gilman's economic interpretation of the rise of chiefdoms continues as follows: 'The development of intensive systems of cultivation would have changed the social structure of southeast Spain not because they demanded management, but because the capital investment such systems involved opened up the possibility of effective exploitation of the cultivators...' (p. 76).

In this passage Gilman appears to reject a managerial theory of chiefdom formation. Yet, listen to what he says a couple of pages earlier:

'... the individuals found in the wealthiest burials of the Copper and Bronze Ages would have been administrators [in other words, *managers*] whose services helped the general population to stabilize the uncertainties of production in the high-risk environment of southeast Spain. They would have organized the stockpiling and exchange of food to ward off local agricultural failure, adjudicated disputes over water and other scarce resources, and so on' (pp. 74–75).

Has Gilman, one wonders, settled in his own mind on which interpretation of chiefdom formation he really espouses?

Now, the nub of how chiefdoms arise – the problem that any theory has to solve – is how, precisely, does a one-village chief become a multi-village chief? Although ignoring it for the most part, toward the end of his chapter (pp. 77–81), Gilman does try to wrestle with the problem. But he fails in the attempt. His explanations of the rise of social complexity in Bronze Age Spain seem, in fact, to unravel. They become progressively more difficult to follow, including his last muddled effort (on page 81), and thus one is left to wonder just how *does* Gilman account for this important evolutionary step.

* * *

Kristian Kristiansen's chapter, the next in the volume, has two clearly distinguishable parts. In the first, he is intent on proving that throughout Scandinavia during the Bronze Age, in what are presumed

to have been chiefdoms, there were twin chiefs. He shows little interest at this point in *how* this unusual feature came to be – although he does look for distant parallels among the Hittites and the Minoans (p. 98). However, in a vague attempt to point to some element underlying twin chiefs, Kristiansen proposes ‘linking symbolic structures to social institutions’ (p. 86). When he reaches the second half of his chapter, though, Kristiansen completely shifts gears and forgets all about twin chiefs and their symbolic representation. Now he directs his focus on the really important aspect of inter-group relations in Scandinavia, namely, the war complex (p. 103).

While warfare was already present in Scandinavia a good deal earlier, a war complex featuring long swords, lances, and chariots was introduced into Europe from the Near East around the 19th century BC (pp. 98–99). The effect of this complex was to create a ‘new aristocratic warrior elite’ which superseded the ‘tribal warriors’ who in earlier times had employed only the bow and arrow, daggers, and battle axes as weapons (p. 99).

Nor was this new way of fighting merely a passing phase in the history of Scandinavia. It persisted. ‘Chiefly warrior aristocracies and warrior culture’, Kristiansen says, ‘remained an inherent feature of the social and ideological organization of European Bronze Age and early Iron Age societies throughout 2000 years, probably 3000 years’ (p. 103).

Kristiansen recognizes clearly the intimate relation that existed between warfare and chiefdoms. Indeed, he sees this connection as a general and far-reaching one, since he tells us that ‘historically known chiefdoms ... were characterized by systemic warfare...’ (p. 103). Nevertheless, I fail to find in his chapter any deep understanding, much less a clear explanation, of just how warfare was instrumental in the evolutionary process that created the first Scandinavian political leaders. Nor does he tell us how war, once well entrenched, helped turn these leaders into rulers (p. 100).

* * *

In the chapter that follows, Timothy Earle compares (as he has done before) the long-term development of chiefdoms in the three widely separated parts of the world where he has worked: Denmark, Peru, and Hawaii (pp. 113–123). This time, though, his account of the

process is not written with his usual clarity and crispness. Indeed, he is slow getting off the mark, the unfolding of his ideas being impeded by a style that is wordy and ponderous.

Things improve, though, when Earle arrives at his central thesis, which is this: 'The primary thrust of my argument is that social evolution in different natural and social environments follows contrasting pathways of development based on different possibilities for the central control of the economy, military, and ideology' (p. 112). And he accepts as his main theoretical challenge 'to understand the multilinear strands of social evolution' that reveal themselves under differing environmental and other conditions (p. 105).

In his treatment of the subject, Earle proposes to make use of a distinction – first introduced by Richard Blanton – between chiefdoms based on 'personalized networks' and those involving 'corporate groups'. (The two types appear to correspond closely to Colin Renfrew's distinction of 'individualizing chiefdoms' and 'group oriented chiefdoms' [p. 112].) The first, Earle sees as being exemplified by Denmark, the second by the Wanka of Peru, and both by Hawaii.

Again, as in other chapters in this book, we see warfare manifesting itself on every side. Earle cites extensive evidence of it from Bronze and Iron Age Denmark (pp. 114, 116); he portrays the Wanka of highland Peru as consisting of warring hill-fort chiefdoms (p. 117); and with regard to Hawaii, he speaks of 'The chiefdoms, created by conquest...' (p. 124).

Still, Earle does not seem to be entirely comfortable with warfare as the salient mechanism of chiefdom formation. At one point (pp. 111–112) he seems to say that paramount chiefs are chiefs because they control long distance trade. But then at another, referring to his Danish research, he says, rather inscrutably, 'Although a system of status rivalry [involving warfare?] must surely have characterized Thy at this time [2400–1200 BC], status positions [including that of paramount chief?] could not be consolidated because the means to materialize them were not controllable' (p. 113).

Altogether, while the variety of 'landscapes' (a newly-emerging concept) are invoked to account for the differences in the way chiefdoms arose in the three areas of the world in which Earle has worked, no clear presentation is made of the step-by-step process by which chiefdoms arose in any of them.

* * *

When we come to Patricia McAnany's treatment of the Maya, we have finally crossed the great divide between leaders and rulers, between paramount chiefs and sovereign kings. Employing seven categories of analysis first proposed by K. C. Chang (p. 128), McAnany goes back to the Neolithic level of culture to find the seeds of Maya kingship. '[K]ingship', she says, 'was born in the hearth of village life' (p. 126), which she calls 'the crucible of kingship' (p. 130), for here already we begin to find such tell-tale forerunners of exalted political status as differential burials.

Beginning on page 128, McAnany's chapter presents a nice succinct account of the evolution of Maya polities, making good use of epigraphic, iconographic, and architectural evidence. In this account she traces the transition from the leaders of Formative times to the rulers of the Classic period. She notes, in passing, the multilinearity that is a leitmotif of the entire volume. To cite but one example of contrasting evolutionary features, McAnany points out that while Maya rulers were frequently lionized on their monuments, such evidence of monarchical grandiloquence is lacking in contemporary monuments from Teotihuacan.

Here once again warfare rears its head, evidence of it being found among the Maya in great profusion (*e.g.*, p. 138). Moreover, more than a suggestion is made that it may have been instrumental in the rise and subsequent growth of Maya polities. For example, McAnany tells us that 'Without question, Classic Maya rulers were represented as warriors. Their military exploits (including the taking and sacrifice of captives) were amply recorded on murals and in stone' (p. 136).

Shortly before the end of her chapter, McAnany enunciates an intriguing proposition which, if verified, may turn out to be a hitherto unrecognized cultural law: 'There probably is an inverse correlation between the number of workers needed to build a structure and the number of individuals who enjoy sanctioned access and use of structured space' (p. 146).

* * *

Gary Feinman returns to the theme of multilinearity, focusing on exemplifications of it. In his theoretical analysis, he is drawn to polar

types (p. 160). He, like Earle, makes use of Blanton's now-familiar (if poorly-named) concepts of 'network' and 'corporate' types of political structure. In the former, a single individual plays the predominant leadership role, while in the latter, power and authority are shared by several members of the ruling elite (p. 155 and *passim*).

The region of the world Feinman deals with is Mesoamerica, which he thinks nicely exhibits the polar types he employs in his analysis. As an example of the 'network' type of polity, he cites the Maya, with their kings who, as McAnany pointed out, boasted of their exploits and trumpeted their exalted status on countless stelae. The 'corporate' structure, on the other hand, is exemplified, Feinman believes, by Teotihuacan, which, while having a larger and more complex state than any Maya polity, nevertheless did not use its monuments to celebrate the accomplishments or high status of its rulers. As another example of an evolutionary 'anomaly', Feinman points to the fact that while the less evolved Maya had a system of writing, the more evolved Teotihuacan did not. But while noting such developmental irregularities, Feinman makes it clear that his aim is to *expand* evolutionary interpretations, not *supplant* them (p. 173).

A further distinction Feinman draws has to do with *centralization* and *hierarchy*, noting that the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. There can be hierarchy without centralization, that is, without the concentration of supreme authority in the hands of a single individual (p. 172). And he adds that not only can 'hierarchical formations ... exist without a high degree of centralization', but also that they can occur without a 'blatant expression of economic stratification, strong descent rhetoric, or highly personalized leadership' (p. 172).

Feinman sees the difference between Maya and Teotihuacan political organization as one of kind rather than of degree (p. 161). Still, while laying emphasis on the polar concepts of 'corporate' and 'network' types of political organization, he nevertheless acknowledges the existence of hybrid cases which exhibit features of both. In fact he observes that over time the same society could change from one type to the other (p. 173). He even concedes that in Classic times Teotihuacan may have been organized differently, since a society's form of political structure is not something fixed and immutable, but one that responds to changing conditions (p. 174).

* * *

Beginning with the Late Preceramic period, circa 2700 BC, the central coast of Peru saw the rise of polities which pretty clearly can be labeled as chiefdoms. These polities had the further distinction of having been reared on a largely non-agricultural subsistence basis. They arose and evolved here, Brian Billman tells us, because the central coast of Peru had the optimal combination of fishing resources and irrigable land for such a development. In this regard, the central coast was superior to sections of the coast both above and below it: to the north, el Niño periodically disrupted fishing, while to the south, the narrowing of the littoral reduced the availability of irrigable land (p. 202).

Environment aside, ideology plays a major role in the way Billman thinks the chiefdoms of coastal Peru arose. He reasons as follows: 'Arguably, ideology, particularly in the form of charismatic leadership, is at the start of all political organizations regardless of the power bases ultimately controlled by emerging leaders. In the initial stage of political formation charismatic leadership can inspire men to go to war or families to contribute economic resources' (p. 185).

The imposing architectural remains on the Peruvian coast that date from this period are significant in this regard. Billman says of these remains: 'Public architecture and large storage facilities at Alto Salaverry ... and other Late Preceramic period sites, may be a manifestation of status striving and coalition building by early leaders. In this scenario, early villages and public architecture on the central Andean coast were the result of political activities by aspiring elites' (p. 197). More specifically, Billman believes that for political leaders of the Initial Period, 'public monuments and rituals undoubtedly served to legitimize their authority and the extraction of surpluses and enabled them to disseminate their political ideology to local and regional populations' (p. 198).

Digging deeper, Billman seeks an economic basis to the early chiefdoms of coastal Peru. He seems to view the paramount chief of such a polity as basically an *economic* rather than a *political* leader, one who has gained control over the 'basic resources' of the group (pp. 180, 181). He fails, however, to tell us *how* a chief gained this control in the first place (pp. 180, 181).

In any event, though arising along the Peruvian coast during the Late Preceramic period, and relying mainly on fishing for their subsistence, these early chiefdoms soon found their circumstances changed. With the coming of full-scale agriculture in the succeeding Initial Period, the major settlements of these polities were moved inland from the coast. This was done so that greater use could be made of the irrigable land now needed for cultivation (pp. 191–192). Control of the irrigation system (as Karl Wittfogel argued long ago) heightened the power of political leaders during the Initial Period (p. 198).

Billman minimizes, if he doesn't actually dismiss, military force as a major factor in the emergence of these coastal chiefdoms. Accordingly, he writes that '[s]urprisingly, military power and conflict do not appear to have played a significant role' in the rise of these chiefdoms, adding, however, that 'subsequent research may disprove this notion' (p. 203).

In fact, Billman does not see warfare as a significant element in the political development of coastal Peru until the close of the Early Horizon period, around 400 B.C. (p. 199). From this point on, he admits, 'Conflict and military power clearly were important in the formation of subsequent Andean states, most notably the Moche and Inka states' (p. 203). Once warfare came on the scene, Billman sees it as a major factor in augmenting and solidifying Andean states, noting that '[i]n addition to economic power, the authority and power of the palace sector rested on the king's role as a war leader and on his control over a large, well equipped standing army...' (p. 217).

* * *

In his chapter on the early states of Mesopotamia, Gil Stein takes issue with the prevailing view that Sumerian city states were tightly centralized around the temple and the palace. This notion, he says, is derived largely from written records, and such records come almost exclusively from those very palaces and temples, and thus give a skewed picture of the nature of the Sumerian state (p. 220).

Instead of the traditional view, Stein portrays Sumerian civilization as being a good deal more decentralized (pp. 213–214). In fact, he sees an enduring tension between the central state government and the hinterlands (pp. 215–216). Though nominally under the control of a city

state, the settlements located in these peripheral areas were, in fact, more or less independent of central control. Citing data from his own excavations, Stein shows that hinterland communities, lying at some distance from the urban centers of Sumeria, often produced goods for their own use rather than for the palace or the temple, which had their own production specialists (pp. 222–226).

Turning to warfare, Stein finds it to be a recurring phenomenon in the history of Mesopotamia. ‘The Sumerian city states of the Early Dynastic period’, he tells us, ‘were constantly at war with each other, as we can see from massive defenses, numerous finds of weapons, and depictions of warfare... [T]he growth and spread of powerful royal dynasties in the Early Dynastic period is probably connected with their role as military leaders in the warfare between rival city states...’ (p. 211).

* * *

In the final chapter of the volume, Jonathan Haas attempts a summary and interpretation of the preceding chapters. Although he recognizes that each culture presented here by its investigator had its own particular and distinctive course of development, Haas himself clearly sides with those who are not ready to settle for uniqueness, but who seek broad, cross-cultural regularities underlying or overarching this uniqueness. In his introductory chapter, Haas wrote that ‘there are remarkably similar social and cultural phenomena that crop up again and again around the world and these similarities, these patterns of evolutionary change, constitute grist for the mill of transformational approaches’ (pp. 12–13). In his summary chapter, Haas repeats this conviction, adding that ‘there are cross-cultural commonalities in the trajectory toward increased centralization in political systems,..’ while at the same time acknowledging that ‘societies follow many different routes in proceeding along that trajectory...’ (p. 235).

And indeed, in keeping with the multilinear perspective of this book, we are introduced in these pages to a dozen or more different ‘routes’ that prehistoric societies have followed in the course of their respective evolutions. And we see the various steps they have taken along the way. Not every step in this progression, though, has been of equal importance. Some have signaled more momentous changes than others. ‘Ceding ... village autonomy to the leadership of [multi-

village] chiefs’, says Haas, ‘stands as one of the pivotal transformations in the evolution of culture’ (p. 35).

The achievement of leadership over many villages by a paramount chief is only the first of these pivotal transformations. The next major advance was ‘the shift from leaders to rulers...’ (p. 242). This change witnessed the emergence of monarchs and monarchies, of politically centralized and complex societies. Despite the fact that we may be able to trace the trajectory of this continuous process from beginning to end, the final stage was categorically and qualitatively distinct from its starting point. ‘A politically centralized society’, says Haas, ‘is not just an egalitarian society grown bigger and more complex; it is a profoundly different kind of society from its egalitarian evolutionary antecedents’ (p. 11).

The evolution of human societies, from simple villages to complex states, continues to hold an endless fascination for archaeologists. The factors that produced this transformation are many and varied, but all are not necessarily of equal weight. And almost every archaeologist represented in this volume has his or her favorite set of determinants of this process, even if they are not always spelled out clearly but only vaguely suggested. However, almost all authors seem to agree that, *at some point* in the course of political evolution warfare became frequent, intense, and important. They disagree, however, as to when – that is, at what stage – warfare assumed such prominence, and just what its consequences were.

At the beginning of this book (p. 9), Haas argued that archaeology is better suited to study cultural evolution than is ethnology. And earlier in this review I quoted him as saying – correctly, I believe – that during the last two decades the ‘intellectual responsibility for studying the evolution of complex cultural systems has shifted almost entirely [from ethnology] to archaeology...’ (p. 9). In this ‘changing of the guard’, though, something has been lost. I say this because in the work of a good many archaeologists I find a tendency to *excogitate* – in most cases unconvincingly – how chiefdoms and states arose. Many archaeologists indicate, with unwarranted assurance, what this process *must have been like*. They give voice to their various predictions instead of immersing themselves in the ethnohistorical literature on chiefdoms and drawing from it solid evidence and illuminating clues as to just how those polities arose.

Ethnology and archaeology are sister disciplines. One cannot dispense with the other. When the aim is to forge a robust and profound understanding of the course of political development, neither of the two disciplines can 'go it alone'. Archaeologists can unearth and display the *facts* of their excavations. They can lay bare the material remains of extinct chiefdoms and states. But if they ignore, or pass lightly over the rich substance to be found in ethnographies and ethnohistories, they will form but a very incomplete picture of how these polities evolved.

Archaeologists need ethnologists to help guide them through the intricate processes they are trying to decipher. If enlisted as allies, ethnologists can assist archaeologists to fill in the gaps in their knowledge and to elaborate and strengthen their theories. And this assistance archaeologists will surely need when, inevitably, they exhaust their own resources and reach the limits of what the spade and the trowel can reveal.

NOTE

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Announcement

*The Early State,
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