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## The Early State, the Polis and State Formation in Early Greece

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### **THE GREEK POLIS, THE EARLY STATE, AND EVOLUTION**

The question that brought me to the study of the Early State is that of the origins and early development of the Greek polis as a state. At the time (1977), the emergence of the polis, implying inherent tendencies towards democratization and the restriction and eventual abolishment of monarchical positions, was approached in the scholarly literature then as a process that was nearly natural and thus, within the context of the Greek culture at least, self-evident. The essential, in my opinion, questions of the creation of power structures which implied the origin of the state or a state like society, were not asked. My main question was, and still is, how a power structure might originate, respectively be created, within a community, consisting of formal institutions to which a community of free citizens subjected themselves out of free will, respectively were forced to subject themselves (or did not see to have another chance). Unlike ancient historians and other students of Classical Antiquity, (evolutionist) anthropologists and (prehistoric) archaeologists did explicitly pose the questions of the origin and development of political power. Thus, I joined the 'Early State Society'<sup>1</sup>, expecting that their approaches and the answers they found could be a lead for my studies of the same problems in respect of the early Greek polis.

Ancient Greece is conspicuous by its absence from among the 21 case-studies of *The Early State* (Claessen and Skalník 1978). Is that justified? Did the Early State evolve or can Early States be pointed out in the course of Greek history, the Dark Ages, and the Archaic and Classical periods?<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it has been questioned whether the typical form of social-political organization that is characteristic of ancient Greece, the polis, can be considered as a state (van der Vliet 2005). And, the other way round, can we speak of 'politics' in the Early State dominated by its sole ruler at the top and in the centre, as we can speak of poli-

tics in the Greek polis, and in the way we are accustomed with it, as a system of collective decision-making on matters relating to the common interest? These and related questions confront those who want to study the political systems of classical Greece in the perspective and departing from the Early State concept. The focus of the Early State is its centre at the top, where we find a ruler. In the polis, the centre is empty, in the midst of the circle of citizens, who are (in principle and theory) equals, and on the same level as they are. The polis is made up by its citizens, who are both its constituent parts and form it. Its frame is made by its institutions and laws. Like the Early State, the polis is a stratified society, the defining distinction being that between the free and 'equal', who are economically self-subsisting and independent, and the (chattel) slaves, who can be bought and sold. The free citizens are not the majority of the population, while actually among them a small minority of wealthy opposed the majority of *mesoi* (those of the middle, the middling) and poor. The homologue of 'extended kinship relations' in the polis is the *oikos*, the 'house' or 'household' of the citizen, the (landed) possessions on which he subsists, including his farm animals and slaves, and the others who belong to it, his relatives with whom he lives and who are dependent on him and his *oikos* – his wife and children, and occasionally a sibling or old father.

The best description or definition of the polis as a state is that of a 'citizens-state' (Runciman 1990; Hansen 1993b and most recently 2006; van der Vliet 2005). Berent, who denies the statehood of 'the' polis, including even classical Athens, underrates that aspect which in my opinion is essential, that of the structural exercise of legitimate power through institutions (Berent 2006). I am, however, less interested in the precise definition of various stages in a classification than in the development and change of political systems, that is the processes of their internal dynamics, which means, in respect of the Early State in particular, or emerging states in general, the analysis and study of state formation and the further evolution of the state. In that respect two evolutionist models have been proposed about the time that the idea of the 'Early State' appeared which have set the debate of the following decades. The first is the one proposed by Fried, who emphasizes the evolution from a ranked to a stratified society but who elaborates less on the rise of the state within a stratified society (Fried 1967), and the second the one proposed by Service, who emphasizes the transition from chiefdom to state, which, in his view, is expressively seen as a break (Service 1975). This second model in particular creates room for the Early State concept. In agreement with Weber's definition the connection of the state with the legitimated monopoly of enforcement (Weber 1976: 516) also in the Early State approach this con-

nection distinguished the state from a stateless society. I agree that this is fundamental, and that this approach also fruitfully can (and should) be applied to the study of the state and state formation in the Greek polis. On the other hand, however, regarding the Greek polis Fried's model seems to suit better the developments in early Greece, but especially in respect of the particular moment and process of state formation within a stratified society it is much less specifically elaborated and thus offers a less clear direction of research than Service's views. Besides, I do not think that the debate whether the Dark Age society preceding the polis and from which the polis emerged and which ancient historians commonly indicate as the 'Homeric' society, should be defined as a 'big man' society or one of chiefdoms, brings us much further (see on the Homeric *basileus* in particular Ulf 1990 and van Wees 1992; chiefs *e.g.*, Ferguson 1991, and for the stressing of big manlike features *e.g.*, Donlan 1982, 1999). The matter is complicated by the fact that studies of the last decades have demonstrated that the impression given by Finley of the Homeric society as primitive or weakly developed (Finley 1967), must be seriously corrected and readjusted. Besides, the polis has been called a 'dead end' in the perspective of the evolution of political systems and the state (Runciman 1990). Whether that view is justified, remains a matter of debate and depends on what is considered as 'evolution', but it cannot be denied that the polis obviously escapes from the cyclical pattern of growth, collapse or devolution and re-emergence which seems to be typical of quite a number of Early States.

Yet there are several reasons which, I think, justify the choice of the 'Early State option' as a point of departure of the study of the origin of the state in the polis. First, the subsequent stages of types of the evolution of the 'Early State' distinguished by Claessen make evident along which lines and by which processes in his view state formation takes place (Claessen 1978: 589–593). These are a concrete point of departure. Besides, they show how the entire process is based on the general aspects of legitimation of political power (social inequality), formalization of social and political relations, and changing economic relations. Second, the early State concept suits well the study of processual developments as propagated then by the 'new archaeology', like the study of processes of social stratification, of the complexity and centralization of settlement systems (in line with Central Place Theory), and patterns of the distribution of both common goods and status goods (cf. the Early State Module: Renfrew 1975: 12–21). Third, we should not overlook the fact that 'kings' are explicitly spoken of in the (proto) history of the Greek polis, in particular in the traditions relating their early history. Early State-like features thus may have not been completely absent in early Greek society.

That brings me to my fourth argument, that there is nothing, in principle, against looking for 'Early State features' in the history of the Greek poleis. The explanation of their absence, weakness or ephemeral character may be illuminating and clarifying. It is just the 'comparer l'incomparable' (Détienne 2000a) that deepens our insight, pointing out what is specific and particular in various cultures and periods, and thereby making general developments and features better visible.

The central question for me is and was, however, expressly not the construction of a typology, but rather the process(-es) of state formation, that is the dynamics of societal evolution, how one form of social-political organization changes into another one. In this respect we think in the first place of processes of centralization and hierarchization as a result of increasing societal complexity. Recently and increasingly, however, other ways of societal evolution are pointed out which are alternatives to the evolution of centrality and hierarchy and which, in my opinion, best can be characterized as 'corporate strategies' or 'institution building' (Blanton *et al.* 1996; Blanton 1998; Feinman 1995; on 'heterarchy' Crumley 1995). Within this general evolution I emphasize the distinction of more specific processes. At the time I mentioned 'structural differentiation', 'institutionalisation', and 'formalisation' (van der Vliet 1980). As for the last, I now would prefer 'bureaucratization', or rather make use of Weber's terms of the '*Vergesellschaftung*' of '*Herrschaftsbeziehungen*' (Weber 1976: 570). The discussions in the 'Early State Society' at its first meetings emphasized the central importance of a fourth process that of legitimation, defined as the social process whereby legitimacy is acquired. That was the theme of our second meeting (Hagesteijn and van der Vliet 1981), and has dominated many subsequent discussions. The continuity of legitimate power, that is the transfer of political positions to successors by institutional means, thereby confirming the continuity of the institutions, is essential in this respect.

That does not alter the fact, that if we want to study a pathway, we must be clear about where to depart from and where to go to. That brings us back to the matter of the definition of types and typologies, and thus to the discussion what makes a state differ from a chiefdom, an 'inchoate' Early State from a 'complex' chiefdom (as, for instance, a 'huge [Polynesian] theocracy'), and so on. In the line of this argument is the problem of the 'steps and slides', as Claessen once called it (Claessen 1981), the question whether social evolution, respectively the formation and evolution of states, occurs gradually or with discontinuous ('qualitative') bounds from one stage to another. A general answer to this question cannot be given. The course of history is often whimsical, and that what in

one society has been the result of a gradual evolution, in another one may have happened suddenly.

### **CITIZENS-STATES VERSUS SOLE RULERS**

An essential and ever returning question during my involvement with the 'Early State' studies was that of how much the Early State concept might or could be helpful to the study of the emergence and early evolution of the polis-state. In other words, the question also is how far the Early State concept can be applied to the early Greek polis. In this respect I have always pointed out, that the relation of polis and state is a complicated one (recently van der Vliet 2005), that a polis as such is not by definition also a state because not every polis can be called a state in our terms, and that, also within the general frame of the polis, there were states in ancient Greece that were no poleis. On the other hand, however, we should not do too much hair-splitting about that matter. There can be no doubt that the poleis in the classical period which were greater than mere villages were in effect states. As for myself, when speaking about the early evolution of the polis as state, I prefer to describe the process as the formation of the polis and the emergence of the state, the latter being both the consequence of and embedded in the former. The polis is formed by its institutions, which in their turn endowed office-holders with state like power; the process is one of an evolution in tandem; a kind of process, which, I think, occurs frequently in societal evolution, but which to my knowledge has never been studied for its own merits. I define a state by the presence of a political (administrative) organization that disposes of the structurally legitimated power which enables it, if necessarily, to use an ultimate monopoly of force (that is, it cannot be in any way legitimately resisted by force) to coerce the people into obedience.

At the head of an Early State we find a monarchical ruler, male or female. The ruler is surrounded by his advisors and assistants, high title-bearers and office-holders forming a hierarchy which is not always clearly and consistently ranked. That is: a hierarchy or ranking order exists, but its actual order may depend on context. The society of the Early State consists of *at least* two social strata, that of the rulers and that of the subjects or common people. Often, however, more than two social strata can be discerned. The administrative structure of the Early State partly is formed by positions which are ordered and ranked in respect to each other, but are simultaneously to a high degree (especially in inchoate Early States) based on personal and kin relations. The political economy of the Early State is characterized by redistribution. In particular in less developed Early States the levying of tribute and taxes occurred mainly ad hoc and unsystematically. In the majority of Early States a common and generally accepted means of exchange is absent, and contributions are

consequently made *in natura*, and not unusually in the form of labor prestations. The administrative apparatus of many Early States is small. The dominant ideology of the Early State is based on the idea of reciprocity, of a mutual relationship of ruler and subject or power-holders and ruled, while actually this relationship is asymmetrical in that sense that what the rulers gave in return for the material prestations from the side of the subjects was mostly of an immaterial nature.

The Greek polis-state was a 'citizens-state'. The mutual relations of the citizens were dominated by a strictly egalitarian ethos, which, however, did not exclude the presence of sometimes considerable and important differences of wealth (usually in land) among them. Wealth often determined the degree of political influence (both formally and informally) of various categories and individual citizens and their entitlement to office-holding, which was by rotation or by turns. Besides, it must be emphasized that citizenship was the exclusive prerogative of the adult, male citizens. Citizenship was acquired by birth, in the male line. Women, the young and of course the slaves were excluded from it. The system of slavery common in ancient Greece was chattel-slavery and the majority of slaves were bought and imported from outside the Greek world. The normal way for an (unfortunate) citizen of a Greek polis to become enslaved was by being sold as a prisoner of war, but also there was a strong moral obligation on one's fellow-citizens to redeem prisoners of war. There was a strong and expressive, ideological as well as actual, connection between being a citizen and being a warrior, on foot and heavily and uniformly equipped, every man possessing and bringing his own arms, and fighting together in tight formations.

In the greater poleis the number of citizens was in the range of thousands. I think that as far as the greater poleis are concerned an estimate of between 6,000 and 10,000 gives a reasonable impression, with the exception of Athens. Classical Athens was much greater, with a total number of male and adult citizens in the order of 45,000 of whom 15,000 were 'hoplites', heavily armed citizen-warriors. The political institutions of a polis consisted of a popular assembly of, in principle, all adult male citizens, a number of annual office-holders (not uncommon on an equal footing forming boards) and a 'council' of a few hundred (80–500; varying per polis and in time) which was also periodically, that is mostly annually, renewed. The ideological principle of political citizenship was 'to rule and to be ruled in turn'. The other political tasks of the citizen(s) were to deliberate and to give counsel (and to decide, on all matters concerning the polis), and to give judgment (as a member of a jury-court on one's fellow-citizens as office-holders and their qualities and reliability in civil suits, etc.). The citizen was supposed to be able to sustain himself and his family independently, as a landowner, and the economic centre of the

polis was its market (the *agora*), which, however, was essentially a closed internal market, also for the goods that were imported. Coins, which were struck by the individual cities and bore their marks, were the general means of exchange. One was a citizen on one's own costs, which required the possession of sufficient means, in particular land. The polis got its regular income from fines, the taxation of imported and exported goods and, whenever possible, war booty. In times of emergency extraordinary contributions were demanded from the citizens, and the performance of regular and costly tasks was on a regular and annual basis distributed over the rich, who were obliged to perform them.

The details may vary from polis to polis, but the principle was everywhere the same. The dominating ideology among the citizens was egalitarian and stressed their, in principle, political equality. The political decision-making process with the routine of: proposal by individual citizens, proposal by the at that moment presiding section of the Council, decision by the Council, acceptance or rejection by the popular assembly, shows the pattern of ripples in a pond in which a stone has been thrown, not that of a pyramid with a top and a basis, but rather that of a flat pancake. It resembles the system of a 'sequential hierarchy' as it is described by Johnson (Johnson 1982). There is no centralized hierarchy with a top at the head of the administration, but boards of equal office-holders. These boards are not hierarchically ranked but function besides each other, like in a heterarchical system. The citizen, in sum, takes a part in the polis, which is a commun(al)ity – *koinonia* – of which he, as a *politès*, is one of the constituting parts. Inherent to the political system of the polis were elements and rules to prevent that one man might acquire a dominating position. Politicians were driven by ambition, and thus the over-ambitious and uncommonly influential fellow-citizen was looked upon with extra distrust, and when necessary treated that way.

#### THE ARCHAIC TYRANNIS

In the discussions on the 'Early State' time and again I had to observe that 'my' Greeks were different. It is revealing that Greek classical states which most remind of the Early State, Sparta and the tyrannies, were considered by other Greeks as different or in certain aspects strange (the kingship among the Spartans), or even as the negation of the polis (the *tyrannis*). A *tyrant* was a sole ruler, and *tyrannis* implies the possession of personal power and the power to coerce. Originally, however, the word did not have the strongly negative connotations which were later attached to it. Its origin is not Greek (probably from Asia Minor), which is significant; it means 'sole ruler', and *tyrants* might call themselves with the Greek word for 'king': *basileus*. They did not dispose of extended networks of kin and hierarchically ranked kin groups to support their rule

because the Greek kinship system did not have a basis for it. They did not control a system of redistribution dominating the economy of the society and the means of subsistence of their subjects. They could not claim for themselves exclusively, divine or semi-divine descent, or a position that was sanctioned by the gods. The rule of a *tyrant* was personal, structurally unstable and most tyrannies did not survive the second and certainly not the third generation of rulers.

When approaching the polis in the perspective of the Early State studies, I thus first concentrated on those monarchical aspects and developments which in the political systems of early Greece were most reminding of the Early State. But even then the conclusion had to be, that much of what Early States elsewhere had in common, was absent or could not be demonstrated in early Greece. Partly that may be explained by the much smaller territorial size of the Greek political units, but partly that must have been the result of the cultural peculiarities of ancient Greek society. Besides, in this respect we must take into account that the evolution of early Greek political systems did not occur in a historical vacuum. They were preceded by the states (perhaps 'real' Early States) of the Mycenaean Late Bronze Age, which had complex settlements, palatial strongholds, an administrative apparatus of specialized scribes, an economy controlled by the palace, and rulers. This society had collapsed or disappeared in the course of the 12<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., but it has left its traces in later periods, in particular in the person of the *basileus* as a local chief or headman.

When focusing on the monarchical features of early Greece the archaic *tyrannis* turns out as the most obvious object of study. The traditions of earlier kings in ancient Greece apart from the *basileis* of the Homeric epics which are a separate problem, belong to an obscure past and have been recorded, or constructed, in a much later period (Drews 1983). The archaic *tyrannis* was a rather common phenomenon in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. A *tyrant* seized the power over the polis. Their rule was – at least afterwards – considered as 'illegal', but that does not mean that it also was 'lawless'. It was legitimated, as any form of successful rule is, and it has been too often overlooked that its legitimation is a legitimate and even essential object of further study. The historical importance (influenced, I must admit, by the perspective of the Early State studies) I attach to the *tyrannis*, is that the rule of the *tyrants* provided existing institutions and offices with the legitimated and ultimately monopoly of power, in the sense of Weber's definition. It enabled them to function backed by a structural *exercise* of power and thus to become permanently accepted, as a consequence of which they remained functioning as a 'state' after the *tyrant* had disappeared. Perhaps the conclusion, that it had been the *tyrants* who had created the state



(as an abstraction) in the polis goes too far – there have been poleis which evidently did not have the experience of an archaic *tyrannis*, but yet developed as a state, – but I think it cannot be doubted that their role has been an essential one in the process. The short duration of most tyrannies emphasizes their structural weakness.

In particular in that respect, the question of the study of the stability of the *tyrannis*, the Early State concept proved directive. Its use leads to the essential questions how the ruler(s) was (were) able to generate support from society with the help of which he was able to construct an administrative apparatus (*e.g.*, through kin as well as personal relations), how the economic or material means to base his rule upon could be acquired, and, finally, that what in my opinion is the most basic aspect, how all that was legitimated. The ancient Greek tyrannies showed in all these aspects some correspondences with that what might be expected on the basis of the Early State model, but yet the differences were much greater. The construction of the Greek form of personal rule also in respect of its previous history and the social positions from which it had originated rather resembled big man systems than chiefdoms (in the way in which these both forms at the time were distinguished from one another). To this the strong collective and communal forces should be added which were directed to keep power positions in check by expressive regulations. In archaic Greece state formation seemed to have occurred against the state. For these reasons I have spoken of the ‘anomalous origin of the state’ in ancient Greece (van der Vliet 1986). Compared with the situation in archaic Greece the traditions of the regal period in early Rome seems to be much closer to the Early State model (van der Vliet 1990), although now I would express myself in this respect with more caution than I have done. Yet, the problem remains that the Greek polis as a communal political organization, which besides is not the same as acephalous, is difficult to classify within the range of big man, chiefdom, Early State. Its rule by collective gremia and equally ranked and collegial office-holders makes it apart, but also similar forms of rule by councils and assemblies are not uncommon in the historical and anthropological data set, as it has been pointed out, in the perspective of Greek history, by Détiene (2000b). Departing from the two binary (ideal typical) oppositions of, on the one hand, sequential and simultaneous and on the other centralized or integrated and segmentary organization, I have proposed a model of a field in which various pathways of political evolution along different lines could be constructed and wherein also the evolution of the Greek polis could be placed and described (van der Vliet 2000).

Among the classical poleis Sparta has always been considered as different and peculiar, and, perhaps not by chance. Sparta among the classical poleis also seems to be most close to the Early State model (although

recently the peculiarity of Sparta has been persuasively contested: Ruzé (2003). The presence of a (double) kingship in Sparta which was far from politically ruled out or impotent, contributes strongly to this view, as well as the comparatively extended size of the Spartan territory and the manner Spartan society was stratified. Besides, it is interesting that the model presented by Service to explain how a settlement system in a differentiated environment may become hierarchically structured and centralized as the basis of state formation, essentially corresponds with a similar model constructed by Bintliff for Lakonia (*i.e.* the original Spartan territory) (Service 1975: 75–78, and fig. 1; Bintliff 1977: 449–480). In the same line the similar, but seemingly slightly different situation in neighboring Messenia did not facilitate the emergence of a similar settlement system there. That might explain why in Lakonia a state was formed (Sparta), but not in Messenia. The Messenians were conquered and made subjects by the Spartans in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

### COMPLEXITY

The basis of state formation seems to be the development of societal complexity (Claessen and van de Velde 1985; Claessen 2000). An Early State cannot exist and state formation cannot occur without a sufficient societal infrastructure. I have always departed from that premise. For studying those and related aspects in my period we are mainly dependent on the results of archaeological research and analytical archaeological studies of settlements systems, exchange patterns of both status and other goods, and processes of social stratification (in particular when they can be observed through burial gifts and burial customs), and technological developments. Under the influence of the new archaeology these studies were becoming usual in prehistoric archaeology inside and outside Europe, but it did take a long time before the classical archaeologists of Greece followed suit. Only recently, in the last decade, these approaches have become common ground there, stimulated in particular (but not only) by the work of Snodgrass and Morris (Snodgrass 1980; Morris 1987, 1998, 2006), and as a result of recent excavations which have produced an enormous quantity of new data which are studied systematically in a modern way (*i.e.* concerning social differentiation and stratification in burial customs and settlements, the subsistence economy, etc.; for a recent survey see Dickinson 2006; Deger-Jalkotzy and Lemos 2006). On my part I have looked for the evolution of differentiated, tiered, and centralized (hierarchical) settlement systems, departing from central place theory and in particular related to the environmental situation and the opportunities which that offered for its exploitation. On the basis of historical sources I thus made a model of the settlement system and the settlement hierarchy of Attika, the country of the polis of Athens, about

500 B.C., which is shortly after the fall of the *tyrannis* in Athens (van der Vliet 1994). I did observe tiers and differentiation, but, to my surprise, no clear evidence of an integrated settlement system with Athens as the central place of Attika as a whole. Besides, I am now convinced that the data I have used reflect the situation of a century later, what makes the absence of an integrated settlement system yet more surprising and interesting. On the other hand, Athens in this way seems to suit better the general Greek pattern. A polis which is the central place of a settlement system formed by more than two tiers is a rarity. Most poleis, however, possess territories the size of which does not allow the development of complex settlement systems. I think the complexity of the Greek classical settlement system should be sought in its entirety, that is, in the economic specialization and differentiation and complementarity of the various poleis in respect of each other.

The Greek political thought equals the presence of a monarchical ruler, a *tyrannos*, with the absence and even the negation of the polis as the political community of citizens (McGlew 1993). The representation of the Athenian legendary king (*basileus*) from a distant past, Kodros, on a fifth-century cup as a citizen-warrior is characteristic in this respect (van der Vliet 1984). There is nothing that distinguishes him, in size or stature, clothes or paraphernalia, from his fellow-citizens. The ideal of the polis was expressed through the concept of '*eunomia*', which means less 'having good laws' than 'good order', and which implies a harmonious and balanced society of free and equal citizens. It is the basis of the legitimation of politics and rule in classical Greece. In the study of state formation and the Early State the question of their legitimation, as defined as the social process whereby legitimacy is acquired, holds a key-position. The Greek polis was founded on its laws which guaranteed justice, and which, although they were sanctioned and guaranteed by 'the god', had been formulated by human beings. Even the smallest polis based on its laws is stronger than the mighty city of Niniveh, a Greek poet said (on law-giving: Osborne 1997; Hölkeskamp 1999; van der Vliet 2003). That aspect perhaps most expressively shows the peculiarity of the ancient Greek political culture, and whereby the Greek polis most evidently distinguishes itself from the monarchical Early State, with its sacral ruler or ruler of divine descent. But in the study of both the central importance of legitimation is obvious.

The differences of the Early State and the Greek polis are structural. They concern related elements, and thus should be considered as systematic. That systematic difference allows me to use the evolutionistic stairway of which the Early State is a part, to get a better understanding of the origin of the early polis and its development into and as a state. It is justified to ask the same questions in respect of the evolution of both (kinds of)

political systems. Thereby I think in particular of subjects like the evolution of complexity and state formation, the raising of the material support for the political system and its means of power on the one hand, and on the other the legitimation of this power and its exercise and consequences, the aspects of state and territoriality, of size, density and spread of the population, the role of symbols and cults, the organization of feasts, ideas and ideals of kingship, justice, and law-giving, the importance of warfare, and so on. Perhaps the idea of the Greek polis as the negative mirror image of the Early State is not such a bad point of departure.

### COMPLEX INTERACTION

The Complex Interaction Model that has been elaborated by the Early State studies has made the interaction of the various factors and complexes of factors which influence and determine processes of state formation also in ancient Greece, well comprehensible (van der Vliet 1991). Although strong criticisms are being raised at the reality and the value and utility of this kind of systemic and systems theoretic models and approaches<sup>3</sup>, criticisms which are certainly partially justified, that does not alter the fact that this model does what a model is expected to do: the argumentative directing of the formulation of problems and questions. Thus the model of complex interaction gave me in my study of the emergence of polis and state in archaic Greece the most handles and directions. Its most renewing insight is, in my opinion, not so much the system theoretic connections it postulates (see for instance Renfrew 1972: 15–44), but in particular its emphasizing the role of the societal format. In my own research I found also the element of the interaction of (material) exploitation and (immaterial) legitimation most useful. Besides, legitimation and politics are mutually connected, but they have also their own and independent dynamics. The latter also applies to the aspects of cults and the organization of feasts, and warfare. They are connected with each other, but that does not imply that the whole is a closed system.

At the end of the Dark Age or the beginning of the archaic age in Greece a distinct shift in the pattern of the settlement system seems to have occurred. The preceding period shows a variety of settlement types – while in some places or in some regions there was continuity from the Mycenaean period (until  $\pm$  1050 B.C.), and in others an interruption characterized by the absence of traces of settlement, wherein I am at least unable to recognize an evident pattern or system. Besides, there is evidence of a relative great mobility of population, in that way that settlements were left after a few generations of occupation, while elsewhere new settlements were established. On other places, yet, habitation was continuous. From the 8<sup>th</sup> century on we observe a concentration of greater numbers of people in settlements which are ‘polis-like’, that is, on somewhat

higher locations from where the surrounding flat territory (sometimes, but not always, with mountains at the back) could be controlled and exploited (Snodgrass 1993, but see now Dickinson 2006). These centers of habitation (many later poleis), however, were not central places in hierarchical and tiered settlement systems. They were, like peer polities (Snodgrass 1986), on the same level besides each other, and the only stratification was sometimes (but, again, not always) formed by the presence of dispersed farmsteads in the surrounding country. It is highly probable that this evolution went together with population growth, which did not, however, stretch or even reach the limits of the carrying capacity (and the available technology) of the land.

Simultaneously a shift in the subsistence economy occurred (esp. Snodgrass 1990 on the basis of the results of the excavations of Nichoria). The importance of agriculture increased in respect to that of husbandry, in particular that of cattle, which was until then the basis of wealth and functioned as a status good. That was a relative shift, but one of its consequences was that more land in the immediate surrounding of the settlements was used for agriculture, while the pastoral activities thus were driven more to marginal areas and areas further away. At the other side of the watershed neighboring communities thus met and confronted each other – and that must have been the cause of increasing armed conflicts, or at least of their changing nature. In the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> century a new art of warfare appeared, of great numbers of warriors on foot who were equally and similarly well armed and fought in tight formations. The evolution of warfare was not without consequences for the internal political relations inside the early poleis, because the small group of ‘aristocrats’ lost its exclusive status as elite-warriors. There were several nobles in every polis and their mutual relations were determined by strong status-rivalry and ambitious competition. They did not, however, have the means to control the economic life of the community by way of redistribution. Exchange of goods and products occurred on the basis of reciprocity on the *agora*, first the place of assembly, and later also the market (Tandy 1997). On the other hand it is very well possible that the presence and concentration of several nobles in one polis or in one place stimulated their mutual rivalry and competition for status, with on the other hand the consequence that as a group they strengthened and accentuated their social position of economic and political dominance facing the *dèmos*, the people (cf. Coupland 1996). But without support from or by the *dèmos* the individual noble was, in the end, isolated and powerless.

Every ambitious noble, of course, strove, individually, to become the first with a clear distance from the others, and, of course, there were some who succeeded. But he who carried himself too far above the others, who arrogated too much power and influence and thus became behaving arro-

gantly and haughtily, would have to reckon with facing the other nobles united against him. He might turn the *dèmos* against them, and in that way, a tyranny could be established. But things were not always that simple. The political dynamics of the developments in the early polis was determined by the interaction of several forces within a space formed by more than two dimensions. They were defined by the mutual relations between the nobles and the superior individual among them, between the collective nobles and the *dèmos*, and the *dèmos* and the high-rising individual who stood above his equals – in that way, that he who rose too high might also find both the other nobles and the *dèmos* combined against him. That formed a field (or rather a space) wherein several forces worked simultaneously in various directions (but mostly not in opposed directions), like the parallelogram of forces (vectors) in mechanics, which easily can be extend/expanded into a three and more dimensional space.

### REGIME BUILDING

An important aspect, and one that tends to be relegated to the background in comparative studies, is that of the individuality and autonomy of 'culture'. I see 'corporate strategies of institution building' as an alternative to centralization and hierarchization. Deliberately I formulate the problem of the development of poleis and states in archaic Greece (the 8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) as 'the formation of the polis' and 'the emergence of the state', whereby I mean, that in the construction of (political) institutions and rules whereby the polis was formed, the 'state' (as the institution of rules and the regulation of institution) actually (already) was embedded, and subsequently only crystallized out to become the instrument of power of the polis as state. Besides, I am not so much interested in the kind of political system (a polis, an Early State, a chiefdom), but how it works and functions, in what it 'does', and how and whereto it is being used. On that basis I will try to understand, finally, how it changes, through its functioning and the use of it, by its internal dynamics, but also its interacting with external influences. Politics is, concretely, both purposeful and specific acting, and, often very effectively, not acting (*e.g.*, how Lorenzo de Medici acted as a 'sphinx': Padgett and Ansell 1993). Politics also is neither an isolated field nor a closed black box, but continuously interacts with what happens in the society which surrounds it. What politics is about and how politics is used as an instrument to achieve some aims and how that is being done, is a matter of political culture, which, again is not isolated but is partly embedded in the culture, representations, values and expectations of the society of which it is a part.

The decisive moment in this development arrives when it is possible to mobilize the 'polis' as such to collective, political action. Originally the meaning of 'polis' is only 'town', the physical place with its build-

ings. In the archaic age it also becomes 'we, the community of the polis' and then the word 'polis' acquires a symbolic load and power of expression that make that people can identify themselves with their polis. The word functioned in a similar way as the semi-material, semi-immaterial symbol of the flag of the nation state with which we are accustomed. The appeal to 'our polis', 'we, the polis' enabled the mobilization of the citizens into collective political action, to defend and preserve their safety and community, and in particular to end and solve the internal conflicts and strife which tore the polis apart and threatened its existence. 'Polis' thus was connected with a call for justice. I want to emphasize that I think that this, and the evolution of the institutions of the polis on which I come to speak hereafter, was not a gradual process drawn out over a long period of time wherein it might be a matter of debate what came first and what later, but rather a sudden 'out crystallization' that occurred within the lifespan of one or one and a half generation, and wherein various aspects were interconnected. Anyhow, it resulted from conscious and directed/purposeful actions, albeit not with the explicit intention of constructing a polis by its institutions.

The 'institutional' polis resulted from law-giving of various kinds. We must, however, not imagine that process in modern, legalistic or state terms. A solution was sought for actual problems and conflicts, a ruling formulated – and written (but obviously not always or everywhere); the latter facilitated by the presence now of an (alphabetic) script. We should not assume as self-evident, however, that these written rules functioned as an authority which was referred to in the way we are accustomed to use written laws. The ancient Greek culture for a long time remained mainly an oral culture. The early Greek laws are conspicuous by their variety and apparently unsystematic nature. What they have in common is the regulation of procedures, like, in the political sphere, the limitation of the period an office could be held, which did if not explicitly than certainly implicitly guarantee a system of office-holding by turns. A common characteristic of these early archaic laws also is the suspicion of individual power positions they testify of, and the restriction of the expression of ambition and status. In this context, however, I am not concerned with the contents of the individual rules, but rather with the question how they could be established and warranted.

Using a comparative perspective we may look for analogous situations, which, I think, can be found in how in international organizations institutions are being build as the result of a common and communal enterprise and to the outcome of which also the powerful are bound to subject themselves. The construction of such an institutional frame has been called 'regime building' (Ruggie 1998). A 'regime' is defined as 'a set of mutual expectations, rules and regulations, organizational plans, energies,

and financial commitments that have been accepted by [a group of states]'. And: '[r]egimes, ...are constituted by convergent expectations, shared principles, and norms, that is they are inherently intersubjective in nature' (Ruggie 1998: 56, 85). Ruggie calls his approach of regime building 'social constructivism'. Thereby he aims at avoiding the one-sidedness of on the one hand the Hobbesian and Macchiavellistic approach (cooperation only as far as it is in the interests of each participant) and on the other the neo-liberal (cooperation only so far as it appears that the common interest reaches).

The essence of regime building is its collective or 'corporate' nature. It is a multilateral process, because there is not one party which dominates the process and subjects the others to its will. Consequently, the institutions resulting from it also have a multilateral character. This process departs from common goals and aims. That implies that for this common enterprise to have at least a minimum of success, its goals must be rooted in shared values. That is fundamental. The enterprise is based on, on the one hand, common interests or at least a shared perception of common interests, and on the other mutual dependence, or at least the shared perception of mutual dependence. In other words, the two points of departure of this approach, which is called 'social constructivism', are intersubjectivity plus an 'idea-tional approach', which is, departing from ideas. A strong perception of common obligations among the partners both towards each other and towards the community in its entirety, must dominate.

Those who are powerful and relatively (the word relatively here must be underlined) independent of the others have to comply with the interests of those who have less power, and be aware that in the long run cooperation (and thus making concessions at occasions and in situations where normally, that is considering only the pure relations of power, they would not have made them) also is in their own interest. A next time it may be their turn to profit from the cooperation. The force of the system, Ruggie states, is apparent rather from its 'transordinate' than from its 'superordinate' character. How it functions results from 'communicative dynamics among knowledgeable actors'. Similarly, the importance of the function of reputation and status is apparent, because trust (and suspicion) is based on them, but which also ask for confirmation, in the practice of the working of and the working with the 'regime'<sup>4</sup>.

#### **HALLPIKE'S APPROACH**

The materialization of a 'regime' into a 'state' requires the 'investment of the institution with power', like the law must 'have teeth' (Hoebel 1954: 126). In archaic Greece several factors contributed thereto, which it would go too far to discuss here in detail. But it is essential for the entire process that people identify themselves with 'their' collective identity.



Thereto the word and idea of 'polis', as a symbol, was a fundamental instrument. A second point is how the building of a 'regime' is founded on a shared, social, value system. This question and observation led me, a little to my surprise, to the approach of Hallpike (Hallpike 1986). It would go too far to discuss extensively Hallpike's 'principles of social evolution' here, but a few points must be mentioned and emphasized. Hallpike justly rejects social-Darwinist and deterministic and functionalist explanations of the origin of the state, although he (but not only he) does not answer the question how functionalism must be defined and delineated precisely – how to distinguish, for instance, efficient from functional? Every societal evolution results from human actions. And human actions usually are conscious and directed. But that does not alter the fact, that often directed actions can and do have unintended consequences, as Anthony Giddens has repeatedly emphasized. Another point stressed by Hallpike is, that one form of social organization will be more efficient than another, and that such is apparent through practice. Without wanting to take a social-Darwinist or functionalist position Hallpike (if I understand him correctly) observes that the presence of a state offers such an efficient solution to all kinds of occurring problems, that we should conclude that the evolution of a state is a common pattern of the evolution of human societies (if the required material means are available). He points out, that states have originated in very different cultural environments. His approach favors the study of the evolution of cultural diversification, and later, eventually, convergence rather than the general and specific processes of state formation. He thus focuses on what he calls the 'core principles' of a culture.

At this point my study of the formation of the Greek polis and the emergence of the state in the process, emphasizing the importance of shared social values and the awareness of a common, collective identity as the foundation of 'regime building', comes close to Hallpike. But the problem with his approach from 'core principles' when we 'ascribe' them to various cultures, is their resulting 'heterogeneous quality' (Hallpike 1986: 371). Besides, he does not deal explicitly with ancient Greece. Yet, I think, we may deduce from his case studies what according to Hallpike the 'core principles' of the ancient Greek culture might have been. When I filled them in, to my surprise the 'polis' automatically appeared. But that also gave me the uneasy feeling, that what I had been doing was deducing from the model what I had put in it before.

Returning to the theme of the study of the Early State, I will depart from a few critical notes at Hallpike's study in general. First, I miss in his approach the emphasis on an aspect of the evolution of social-political systems that regularly returned in our debates, the observation that the process is reversible, that an Early State may 'devolve' again into the less

complexity of an evolved chiefdom, or, more drastically, may collapse and disappear. In this line follows the observation that the evolution of such social-political system may conform to a cyclic pattern. My second note or general critical remark concerns that Hallpike overlooks or under-rates the necessity of the legitimation of the exercise of power which the presence of a state presupposes. That is connected with the fact that there must be some exploitation of material means to provide the state, and its apparatus, with the necessary means of subsistence. In particular, this is obviously lacking in Hallpike's study of the emergence of the Jimma state. Its power appears to be based too easily on the existing social relations and values. I am well aware, however, that similar criticisms can be raised against the concept of 'regime building'. In respect of the study of legitimation the direction has been set by Beetham in his revealing study of the legitimacy of power (Beetham 1991).

### OUTLOOK

It might go too far to state bluntly that there were no 'Early States' in archaic Greece. But as I have tried to demonstrate, the difference between the polis and the Early State is systemic and structural. And thus we can use the Early State concept as a negative mirror. Perhaps the conclusion is justified, that the absence of the expected phenomenon creates more analytical clarity than its presence. Besides, we need this kind of ideal types. If we want to study a process of change, we must before define unambiguously both the stage at the beginning and that at the end. To me it has appeared that in this respect the concept of the Early State is very well suited for the study of state formation in general. In conclusion, the main themes of my study of the (early) polis in the perspective of the Early State, can be summarized as follows: the formation of the polis and the emergence of the state in the process; the construction of an institutional frame of political power relations ('regime building'); its legitimation; and more concrete: the infrastructural development (settlement system and hierarchy: 'polis' and '*chora*') and social stratification and social-economic inequality and complexity, the role of the 'great man' and its counterweight made by a political and social (communal) field of forces; the centrifugal and centripetal forces (colonization and the evolution of warfare), and the keystone: the call for justice and law-giving.

Every debate on the Early State should result into at least one suggestion how to continue the discussion. I have two. The first is the theme of 'power'. The discussions in the 'Early State Society' consistently have been directed by a *predominantly* one-sided and negative approach of the phenomenon of power, influenced by our own cultural background and values. Power is used to coerce the unwilling, but the exercise of power by force is not a characteristic of strong states (Jackman 1993). Power and

the exercise of power need legitimation. But there are also other, positive concepts of power, in different forms, for instance in African cultures (MacIntosh 1999 referring to Arens and Karp 1989). 'Magic' (between inverted commas) can be used to make a greater power 'do something'. More generally and more positively: power is a means to achieve things. Power results from cooperation. In the same line is Parsons' view of power as something in which investments can be made and that subsequently gives a profit, like money capital (Parsons 1969: 353–369). As far as the ancient Greeks are concerned, however, I must disappoint in this respect. A short and impressionistic survey shows that the Greek words for might and power rather have the connotation of (physical) force and the coercion of unwilling and the rule over a population of subjects. Besides, the power of an individual person as a powerful individual (a king) is seen as something dangerous and threatening, as something that is 'crooked' and even may be associated with deformity, something that must be kept under control, and the bearer of which can be associated with the scapegoat, who is expelled. On this subject is an interesting study by Ogden (Ogden 1997).

My second suggestion concerns the theme of 'egalitarian tendencies [in Early States]'. Our approach in the series Early State studies has been predominantly top-down. We dealt rather with the centralization of power, the legitimation and the reach of the exercise of power, the intermediate levels between ruler and people, but not or much less explicitly with forces and tendencies to control and restrict the (exercise of) power; much about the ruler or king, but next to nothing about his 'council'. Do we not overlook that what from the outside appears as monocratic and monarchical rule, inside is the result of joint debate and consensus reached by compromise? Recently Richard Blanton argued in favor of this approach in the context of 'archaic states' (Blanton 1998; on checks on monarchical power Hans Claessen kindly pointed out to me Beattie 1959). He could refer to an article by 'egalitarian behavior' and 'leveling mechanisms' by Boehm (Boehm 1993). Unfortunately, all the examples given by Boehm are from stateless societies. In his comments to this article Barclay even remarks, that they are disappointingly few, and he adds, that it should be possible to find many more, mentioning Tonga as an example (Barclay 1993). That brings us directly in the midst of Early State studies<sup>5</sup>!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 'Vroege Staten Club'. My translation is based on the anthropologically well known phenomenon of 'Secret Societies'.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Archaic Age' is used for the period between 800/750 B.C. and the 'Classical Age' of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. because the elements

which are typical of classical Greek culture (like the polis) then begin to appear. Conventionally, we speak of a 'Dark Age' (but now no more so dark) between the sub-Mycenaean period, after the destruction or abandonment of the Mycenaean palaces and the Archaic Age ( $\pm$  1025–800 B.C.). The so-called 'Homeric society', if ever one existed, is dated by various scholars variously in the later part of the Dark Age or the earlier one of the Archaic Age. Besides, I use the term 'early Greece' rather vaguely but intentionally so for the entire period, or an unspecified part of it.

<sup>3</sup> These are directed against the autonomous dynamics of individual 'subsystems'; their overlooking of culture as an autonomous and decisive factor, and in particular: the closeness of systems models, and in its line the criticism of unilinear evolutionism, a way of approach that tends to teleology and even may be deterministic, what we in our discussions on the Early State always and expressively tried to avoid.

<sup>4</sup> I have elaborated on the theme of regime building and institutionalisation in my paper for the proceedings of the colloquium on 'Current Issues in State Formation: the Mediterranean and Beyond', Chapel Hill, October 17–19, 2003: 'The early Greek polis: regime building and the emergence of the state'.

<sup>5</sup> It has been an arduous way with many turns, and several times I had to correct my views seriously. Thus I am glad, in the end, that the book I had in mind to write for Croom Helm twenty years ago on the origins of the early Greek state, has never materialized. Yet, at the time Croom Helm already announced its publication and consequently it is mentioned in the bibliography of a general work on ancient Greece (Grant 1987: 370). So do not look for it, it does not exist.

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