
Early State Concept in Anthropological Theory

Peter Skalník

*University of Pardubice
and University of Hradec Králové*

ABSTRACT

The contribution introduces a panel of six papers. Its aim is to assess the concept of early state both within the body of the overall anthropological theory and among the theories of political anthropology. The status of the early state concept is still best to be comprehended as part of the neo-evolutionist paradigm and as an extension of post-Marxist theorising. However, the question is to what extent is the neo-evolutionist paradigm recognized as influential within contemporary sociocultural anthropology and political anthropology in particular. How the theory of early state fares in the citation indexes and databases? The paper looks at the currently leading textbooks of anthropology, encyclopaedias, introductory texts on political anthropology as well as the major international collections, journals and monographs. The paper concludes that the power of the concepts is measured by their usefulness for ushering in new theoretical thought. The mere recognition of a concept within the contemporary context is not enough. Because the concept of the early state has been only very partially fulfilling these preconditions the conclusion is that it at best has been a catalyzer for some scholars in overcoming their theoretical stalemate while others have managed without it in building theory of political anthropology and of politics in general.

PART I

A CONCEPT THAT ESCAPED GENERAL ACCEPTANCE

The early state as a concept has emerged with the publication of *The Early State* in the fall of 1978 although it was used earlier

in some anthropological writing (Skalník 1973; Wright and Johnson 1975). Ever since it has been used by anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and area specialists. However, anthropologists dominated both in its creation and its usage. Therefore I shall concentrate on the examination of the place the early state concept has occupied in anthropology. Thirty years in social sciences is a fairly long time for finding out to what extent this concept has taken root, got accepted and became a currency in the discipline. By examining encyclopaedias, major reference volumes, textbooks and studying literature in university courses around the world, one can get a picture and see this concept as part of a new anthropological paradigm. In this contribution I shall limit myself to anthropological literature with few extensions reaching neighbouring disciplines. I shall try to be as impartial as possible and to avoid any self-celebratory exercise to which the 30th anniversary of a concept might seduce one. In the second part of the paper I shall critically look at the five theoretical papers published in this special section.

INTERNATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND HANDBOOKS

The Social Science Encyclopedia (Kuper and Kuper 1985: 821–822) has an article ‘Origin of State’ written by Michel Izard. Although the author does not refer to the ES concept he puts Claessen and Skalník 1978 and 1981 into Further Reading. Krzysztof Kwaśniewski, the author of political anthropology entry in the Polish *Słownik etnologiczny* (Staszak 1987: 37–38) refers to Claessen (1984) and his idea that early state systems have chance to mature only if positive changes take place in social, economic, legitimation and bureaucracy spheres. Kwaśniewski also puts Claessen and Skalník 1978 and 1981 into Literature.

Marc Abélès, currently one of the world's most influential political anthropologists, in his article ‘Etat’ (state) published in *Dictionnaire de l’Ethnologie et de l’Anthropologie* (Bonte and Izard 1991: 239–242) refers to Claessen and Skalník 1978 while identifying early state with traditional state stressed that it possesses certain traits typical also for stateless societies. In another article on political anthropology Abélès however skips the early state altogether (Bonte and Izard 1991: 579–583). In my article on political system in the same dictionary I mentioned that rigidity of old differentiating between types of political systems was not removed

by the introduction of new concepts such as early state and I refer to Claessen and Skalník 1978 (Bonte and Izard 1991: 583–585).

Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology carried an article on chiefdoms and nonindustrial states by the archaeologist Gary Feinman (1996). There the author refers to *The Early State* as an evidence for the preponderance of the neo-evolutionary usage of the term ‘state’ initiated by Fried (1967) and Service (1975). But his exposé does not further operate with the ES concept. Feinman uses ‘nonindustrial’ and ‘ancient’ epithets; only towards the end of the article he suggests that ‘the rise of early states remains a key unanswered research question’ (Feinman 1996: 189–190). It is noteworthy that Feinman contributed to the recent special issue of SEH marking the 30th anniversary of publication of TES with a paper on ‘variability in states’. There he remarks that ‘[O]ne of the most impressive aspects of *The Early State* as an intellectual contribution is the breadth of influence that the book had had across disciplines over the past decades’ (Feinman 2008: 55). It seems that Feinman over time has arrived at a more positive appreciation of the ES concept.

Michel Panoff and Michel Perrin (2000), in their several times updated pocket dictionary of ethnology, refer to the existence of Seaton and Claessen (1979) book without any further elaboration. So does Klaus Hesse in his entry ‘Der Staat’ in the *Wörterbuch der Ethnologie* (Streck 1987) when he lists *The Early State* and *The Study of the State* among the ‘newer’ contributions to the theory of the state and its origins.

The massive *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Tim Ingold, carries an article by Timothy Earle on ‘political domination and social evolution’ (Ingold 2002: 940–961). No mention of early state concept is regrettable and can be explained only by author's intention because it is entirely impossible that Earle, a specialist on complex chiefdoms, would be ignorant of its existence.

INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIONS

The very first reference to the early state concept seems to be a kind of self-mention by Henri Claessen in his introduction to the Seaton and Claessen's collection (1979). There he first cites my contribution to the volume dealing with the dynamics of early state

development in the Voltaic Area (Skalník in Seaton and Claessen 1979, summarizing my 1973 CSc. dissertation) which stresses the importance of interdisciplinary approach to the origin and development of the state and mentions the publication of *The Early State* as an evidence of this approach with historical emphasis (Seaton and Claessen 1979: 20, 23). Claessen's own contribution to the 1979 volume however examines what he called 'balance of power in primitive states' without mentioning the early state concept. After the appearance of the two volumes edited by Claessen and Skalník a series of international volumes followed which were all orchestrated by the unabated energy of Hans Claessen as members of the 'early state club' fondly called him¹. Quite logically the concept of the early state was central to these volumes and contributions which pointed elsewhere were not taken into account in them. Because the early state concept was taken as granted in those collections we do not need to dwell on them here. Rather it is interesting how other significant international collections treated the concept under scrutiny.

The Transition to Statehood in the New World edited by Grant Jones and Robert Kautz appeared mere three years after *The Early State* but the editors already mention the concept in their introduction. Discussing Haas' chapter in the volume the editors argue that Haas focused 'more upon the early state than upon its evolutionary predecessors or processes that led to its emergence' and that he dismissed differentiating into pristine and secondary states because 'early states in general will manifest similar characteristics, regardless of their historical status (a position taken to considerable extremes by Claessen and Skalník 1978)' (Jones and Kautz 1981: 6). One year later Haas himself published his monograph *The Evolution of Prehistoric State* where he did not operate with the concept of the early state, evidently because he coins his own term, *i.e.* prehistoric state.

Arthur Tuden, one of the editors of *Political Anthropology* (Swartz, Turner and Tuden 1966) has compiled with a colleague another anthology of articles on political anthropology towards the end of his career (McGlynn and Tuden 1991). In their extensive introduction, the editors never mention the early state concept although they discuss contributions to the emergence of the state from evolutionist, neo-evolutionist and processual viewpoints.

However, bibliography includes TES, probably because Donald Kurtz, a regular participant in the international discussion on the early state concept, has a contribution in the volume where he refers to TES (on Kurtz see below).

More than a decade later Russian neoevolutionists Nikolay Kradin and Valery Lynsha entered the international discussions from Vladivostok by publishing *Alternative Pathways to Early State* (Kradin and Lynsha 1995). They gathered a host of Russian and American authors, both anthropologists and archeologists, in order to assess the multilinearity in the development of political centralization. Russian scholars, prompted by their own vast research centered for decades on finding the alternatives to the preoccupation with Marxist class analysis, found inspiration in *The Early State* volume (some of them actually authored chapters in it). But as a new generation emerged around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it appeared to it as a necessity to revise the unilinearity of the early state concept itself. On the one hand these then young scholars promoted an alternative theory of political anthropology called *politogenesis* by their guru Lev Kubbel', on the other hand they discovered parallels to the early state in what they later called *early state analogues*. Kradin calls for a combination of the vertical typology of inchoate, typical and transitional early state with a horizontal approach. In this vein, for example, the late Kubbel' suggested that the state may have emerged in three ways: military, aristocratic and plutocratic. We will return to this problematic below.

In 1998 *Archaic States* edited by archeologists Gary Feinman and Joyce Marcus appeared as another response to *The Early State*. In their introduction editors argue that they decided 'to focus on archaic states, those that arose early in the history of their particular world region and were characterized by class-endogamous social strata with royal families, major and minor nobles, and commoners' (Feinman and Marcus 1998: 3–4). With exception of Possehl who uses the early state concept in his search for explanation of non-state social complexity of Indus Valley civilization there are otherwise no references to our concept in the more than 400 pages volume. Possehl (in Feinman and Marcus 1998: 266–267) quotes four 'direct influences on the formation of the early state: (1) population growth and/or population pressure; (2) war,

the threat of war, conquest, or raids; (3) conquest; and (4) the influence of previously existing states'. This is followed by a quotation from p. 642 of *The Early State* where Claessen and Skalník state that these factors cannot replace the 'essential conditions' of economic surplus and rudimentary social stratification. While Possehl relates Carneiro's theory of state formation to the early state theory he further explains with references to Claessen and Skalník's summary chapter that social stratification was codified in early states, conquest though important 'was not well represented in their sample', population growth and/or pressure 'was found to lead to more complex political organizations' but urbanization was a factor playing 'a decisive role in the formation of the early state'. Possehl found that 'the role of trade and commerce, especially in the formative contexts of early states, was poorly handled by Claessen and Skalník' but the case studies in the *The Early State* volume indicated that trade and commerce together with raids, warfare and conquest can serve as 'stimulants to the growth of more complex management and governmental institutions' (*Ibid.*: 267).

The Russian *tour de force* as far as the early state concept is concerned has finally set in with the appearance in print of a collective volume of essays *The Early State, Its Alternatives and Analogues* originally published in the journal *Social Evolution and History* (appearing since 2002). Leonid Grinin, the editor and publisher of the journal, has proved to be a very skilful theorist who proposed and developed the theory of early state analogues. In order to overcome 'methodological deadlock' in the study of formation of complex political organization Bondarenko and Grinin suggested that 'we reject the idea that the state was the only and universal possibility' and 'recognize that there were alternative pathways, other than transformation into early states' (Grinin 2004: 89). If eventually all societies develop into states, then the transition towards the state started from different levels of pre-state complexity and the mentioned analogues might have disappeared even before they ever reached early state level. Grinin, in a series of articles, chapters and books, which we will not review here, showed that social evolution is the main concern of Russian specialists on the early state and related subjects. One can still discern the preoccupation with early state as part and parcel of Marxist discussions about socio-economic formations that dominated the Soviet thinking about social evolution (Grinin 2004).

TEXTBOOKS

First we will look at a sample of recent introductory textbooks of anthropology and then some specialized textbooks – introductions to political anthropology.

One of the most influential textbooks in the United States of America is Conrad Kottak's *Anthropology. The Exploration of Human Diversity* (1997). It has had already ten editions and many thousand copies were sold. It was adopted for undergraduate education by many U.S. colleges and universities. The special chapter on chiefdoms and states instead of mentioning the term early state refers to archaic states as being synonymous with 'nonindustrial' states (*Ibid.*: 275) and having characteristics obtained in complex chiefdoms as well. *The Early State* volume does not appear in the suggested reading either.

Alternative introduction to social anthropology by Angela Cheater pays special attention to state formation but does not mention TES volume (1986). In the Dutch textbook by one of the editors of TES, Henri Claessen (1988) mentions early state on many pages but the very concept of the early state as such was discussed only briefly in the framework of the multiple causes of the emergence of the early state. This has been expressed in the Complex Interaction Model of Sociopolitical Evolution (Claessen and van de Velde 1985). British textbook by Joy Hendry (1999) carries no reference whatsoever to the concept of ES. Chris Hann in his Teach Yourself manual mentions *The Early State* in bibliography but does not reserve any space to the early state concept. He discusses chiefdoms and directly moves on to the modern states. The only relevant quote is comparative: 'Just as early forms of the state grew out of chiefdoms, so even the most dramatic political revolutions of the twentieth century were inevitably built on pre-existing elements of culture' (Hann 2000: 130). Josep Llobera's invitation to anthropology deals with the state as early state within a chapter on the emergence of civilization but does not elaborate on the concept itself (Llobera 2003: 137).

Among the German textbooks of ethnology most influential seems to be that edited by Hans Fischer (1998). The chapter by Justin Stagl on 'Politikethnologie' refers only fleetingly to the ES volume without even mentioning early state concept. One of the insider contributors to the ES debate is Thomas Bargatzky,

the author of an introduction to ethnology, conceived as a science of 'urproduktiven' societies, mentions the 'early state' only in three places. In one of them he wonders whether the concept of the early state partly or fully overlaps with chiefdom or even substitutes it (Bargatzky 1997: 144). That may mean either that the editors of ES by skipping chiefdom in their analysis opened themselves to criticism by the champions of chiefdom as a universal concept, or that indeed at least some forms of ES are synonymous with complex chiefdoms.

In his widely used textbook, the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen mentions the early state concept in a connection with Polynesian centralized political system: 'The Polynesian system described by Sahlins was clearly a case of what Claessen and Skalnik (1978) have spoken of as "the early state"' (Eriksen 2001: 167). One may ask whether that is the adequate assessment of the ES concept. The Harvard anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (2001), in UNESCO-sponsored project of a state of the art in anthropology, written by him on the basis of texts supplied by 18 specialists from various countries, completely ignored the ES concept although he devoted a special 18 page chapter to 'Politics', relying evidently on the work of Abélès. Does it mean that both Herzfeld and Abélès consider the concept of ES as obsolete, perhaps because of its evolutionist scope and little reference to the present politics in the world?

From among textbooks of political anthropology the ratio between those which mention the concept of the early state and those which more or less ignore the existence of it and the paradigm is approximately fifty to fifty. The textbook by Ted Lewellen, professor of anthropology at the University of Richmond, was first published in 1983 has already had three editions and has been widely used in the United States (Lewellen 2004). Although Lewellen relies heavily on American authors such as Service, Fried and Cohen in the chapter on types of preindustrial political systems, when considering the question of the evolution of the state in the following chapter he opposes American and Dutch authors who 'have tackled the problem of the origin of the state with enthusiasm' while the British and French anthropologists 'tend to ignore evolutionary questions' (*Ibid.*: 47). Lewellen then discusses various theories about the origin of the state. This survey is concluded with

the section on 'The Early State: The Cross-Cultural Evidence'. The author approves that the *The Early State* ignores the distinction between primary and secondary states but argues that as the theories discussed in the volume 'were originally applied almost exclusively to primary states, it is difficult to appraise Claessen and Skalnik's evaluations, based as they are on evidence drawn from a different set of societies' (Lewellen 2004: 60). Lewellen stresses that 'no previous book has gone so far in classifying the early state' (*Ibid.*) but its conclusions 'seem anticlimatic' and wonders whether 'systems approaches have really added that much to our understanding' and did not result in 'loss of specificity'. Thus he concludes the chapter by the call 'to fill in the blanks in the model' by more research: 'the generalizations must be taken back to the archaeological digs' because theory 'must hold a middle position in anthropology, for ultimately everything begins and ends in the field' (*Ibid.*: 62).

One cannot but agree as most of early state theorizing was not anchored in the field findings of the theorists. Although archaeologists are not the only ones who do fieldwork on early states and their likes, it is increasingly the burden of archaeologists if the research into state formation would remain concentrated on the evolution of political centralization in pre-modern era. Should it remain so is the question as cross-cultural comparisons do not necessarily succeed within one time segment and the excitement of political anthropologists is increasingly nourished by comparing past with present and vice versa.

Although written by a well-known American political anthropologist Joan Vincent *Anthropology and Politics* is rather a richly commented history of political anthropology than a textbook. Unfortunately this more than 500 pages book spends only 40 odd pages on the developments since 1974. The early state concept is only cursorily mentioned among the theories that emerged in the mentioned period. The two books edited by Claessen and Skalnik are referred to in a surprising context (Vincent 1990: 398):

Amin's 1976 formulation of unequal development inspired both an archaeological and an ethnological reconsideration of so-called early states. Much of it was brought together in two volumes (again resulting from the path-breaking ICAES meeting in Chicago) edited by Claessen and Skalnik, *The Early State* (1978) and *The Study of the State* (1981).

The theoretical impact of these volumes is ignored, the ES concept practically dismissed. Vincent is evidently more interested in the impact of Marxism on interpretations of politics in the late 20th century. The widely used reader in political anthropology edited by Joan Vincent does not comprise any text from the early state literature and concept is absent from this collection (Vincent 2002). So it is with another reader which refers to a plethora of state characteristics but manages without the ES concept (Nugent and Vincent 2004).

Marc Abélès published his *Anthropologie de l'État* in 1990. He included the two books edited by Claessen and Skalník into his bibliography but otherwise made no discussion of them. Although the book contains a long discussion of various theories of the origin of the state we would vainly search for any reference to the early state concept. One wonders whether the author only wanted to pay a lip service to the existence of books without taking them seriously as theoretical contributions? The answer is no as Marc Abélès and Henri-Pierre Jeudy in their introduction to a collective work on political anthropology credit the research on 'archaic states' (identified with early states) with the rejection of search for prime movers causing the emergence of early states (Abélès and Jeudy 1997: 7–8). Besides, they point out that '[A]s shown by H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalník (1978) the archaic state (*early state*) studied by anthropologists possesses certain characteristics which obtain in the stateless societies: politics and kinship are often closely intertwined, the ties of reciprocity and redistribution remain there still predominant' (*Ibid.*: 8, my translation).

The other textbook which has been widely used is also carried by the wave of near activism in political anthropology. That is *Power and Its Disguises* by John Gledhill, an author who is interested in unorthodox comparisons from the perspective of today's politics. The opening gambit of his chapter 3 dealing with 'the politics of agrarian civilizations and the rise of the western national state' reads as follows (Gledhill 2000: 47):

Debates about the 'origins' of early states may seem of limited relevance to contemporary political life, but it is less obvious that the same can be said about another dimension of political anthropology which deals with historical issues, the analysis of the great 'agrarian civilizations'.

Gledhill relies on the analyses of Michael Mann (1986) and John Hall (1985) who concentrated on the historical and sociological explanation of the Western hegemony rather than the variety of political forms which would include early states. This leads him to the central concern of his textbook and that is colonialism, the 'third world' states and society versus modern state. One can only admire the elegance with which the early state concept is bypassed in this influential text.

In contrast with Gledhill, the Russian archaeologist Nikolay Kradin came with a textbook (meanwhile two editions) which is predominantly neo-evolutionist but critical of dogmatic Marxist reconstructivism. As some other of his colleagues he considers himself follower of Lev Kubbel' and his theory of 'potestary-political ethnography'. Kradin (2004: 181–182) refers approvingly to the ES concept although he understandably introduces recent Russian literature which responds to the broad Marxist theorizing on the origin and early development of the state. His textbook also reflects the current Russian search for alternatives to the unilinear or bilinear thinking about political centralization (*Ibid.*: 183–192).

In America, another textbook has operated with ES concept even more approvingly than Kradin. As mentioned above Donald Kurtz participated in various ES volumes. He considers the work of the group led by Henri Claessen as the 'most comprehensive anthropological study of the state'. Nevertheless, he admits that 'the very idea of the state remains ambiguous' (Kurtz 2001: 175).

If we would like to conclude this section we can say that the concept of the early state has fared with only partial luck. In all categories of influential writings surveyed above we find its champions but also those who apparently do well without it. Why is this so? In my opinion it is due to the split of anthropologists into those who are interested in evolution and history and those who are stressing the present dynamics of politics. The latter group studies the state as it relates to the other states or to the population as divided into those who appreciate the usefulness of the state and those who are intellectual opponents of it. At any rate the origin of the state and its development in the past does not appear to these writers as important for the explanation of its role(s) today and in the future. Perhaps an exception could be those who study the postcolonial state, especially its neo-patrimonial manifesta-

tions. However, the analyses of such theorists as Patrick Chabal (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Chabal 2009) do not happen to need the early state concept². What concerns comparative politics are rather concepts of culture, religion, witchcraft or identity as they form and inform the state as it was imposed on Africa by colonial and post-colonial power-holders. At best these theorists are interested in chiefs and chiefdoms as they have been useful in various forms of indirect rule policies.

PART II

A CONCEPT THAT INSPIRES FURTHER RESEARCH

The very existence and apparent liveliness of the journal *Social Evolution and History* confirms the appeal of the early state concept among adherents of evolutionism and other kinds of historical approach to politics. The second part of this text serves as a commentary on the five papers that follow this one and that discuss and apply the concept to various subjects, both strictly theoretical and directed to the interpretation of data about particular continents.

Nikolay Kradin's article deals with the genesis of the state both in world and contemporary Russian literature. The impact of Marxism is evident but the author manages to avoid identification with those who just offer a non-dogmatic alternative while remaining in the Marxist framework. Kradin stresses the difficulties with establishing the unambiguous indicators of the state. Namely the decisive role of kinship, difficulties with difference between redistribution and taxes and rudimentary character of authorities in both chiefdoms and early states contribute to the confusion. Thus Kradin rightly concludes that 'the line of demarcation between the chiefdom and state becomes vague and amorphous on closer examination'. Let me remind the reader that this dilemma was avoided in TES by creating the category of inchoate early state which was clearly distinct from tribes which lacked political centralization. The price was the disappearance of the chiefdom category which in turn impoverished the richness of analysis. Truly innovative are Kradin's references to ethnographic data supporting the Montesquieu Law. Wherever in the world, West and East, the face-to-face communities of *polis* type, usually protected by natural barriers, have been able to practice direct democracy while

more numerous political units practiced monarchic or despotic type of politics. This prompted Kradin to promote the non-hierarchical societies as against the hierarchical, *i.e.* chiefdoms and states. Thus he is able to understand the 'protestness' (Eisenstadt) which led to democratic or anti-aristocratic showdowns in various parts of the world. In this perspective the polis type of polities was not identifiable with state. This not only demolishes Marxist precepts about the class character of the state in its nascent stage but points towards the coexistence of centralized state and state-like polities with well-organized polities based on diffuse authority. The fact that the state eventually triumphed worldwide does not disqualify the polis model which might, under specific global security guarantees become again political model in the future. Ernest Gellner in his posthumously published book discusses the need of limiting political sovereignty of state by a 'League of Nations with teeth' which would guarantee the free exercise of cultural idiosyncrasy (Gellner 1998: 143), and I would add, where applicable, also direct democratic practices. Kradin, preoccupied as others from a generation of Russian academics with the struggle against Marxist dogmatism, realizes that the absence of the state in at least significant periods of classical Antiquity does not exclude the existence of civilization in these stateless polities. Celtic civilization, polities of Eurasian pastoral nomads and perhaps also Indus civilization could be examples of developed statelessness. Further afield, the African and American chiefdoms and kingdoms, although rarely displaying the polis type of polities, are the examples of other controlling mechanisms of religious nature which curb successfully not only the power of chiefs and kings but also effectively hinder the emergence of the (early) state organization (Clastres 1977; Skalník 1996, 2004).

Grinin as if develops Kradin's ideas further in the direction of clearer understanding of multidirectionality of political processes, in his terminology politogenesis. In his article, as in many preceding publications, Grinin builds on his thesis about alternatives to the centralization of the (early) state type best expressed in his thesis about analogues to the early state. The complex early state analogues co-existed for long periods of time with the centralizing polities of the early state type. Grinin and Korotayev's article which is followed by Grinin's brings in many pieces of evidence

which on the whole point to the existence of 'complex late archaic early civilized societies' among which only some displayed the qualities which would agree with the definition of the early state. There is hardly need to repeat authors' argument. What is important is that primary, or initial, politogenesis becomes in their hands a varied process whereby politics only very gradually grows into a quasi-independent realm.

On the other hand the existence of many analogues to the early state makes the early state 'a special political form of society'. This has far-reaching theoretical consequences. The early state concept appears to have emerged as last embodiment of unilinear thinking in anthropology and other social sciences. The variety of stateless polities, indeed pluralism of pathways, forms and structures, was forced into a narrow evolutionary bottleneck streamlining *all* polities into the logic of the state as it exists today. In fact a Eurocentrist straightjacket of the modern state which seemingly dominates the scene since the accomplishment of colonial conquest was projected backwards by the search for the evidence of the evolutionary sequence viz. inchoate, typical and transitional early state. Grinin, Korotayev and their colleagues, by meticulous research of ethnographies and historical accounts, and in bona fide quest for further enrichment of the theory of the early state, in effect invalidated or falsified this theory. This is however the point which has an invaluable importance for further thinking about politics, whether by anthropologists or other specialists. Without dismissing social evolution as such the diversity of pathways includes faster *and* slower, indeed stagnating dynamisms. This seems to be valid for both archaic periods and present epoch of state formation. Because both early states had stateless rivals and present western type of modern states have to cope with failed states and various forms of stateless or anti-state bodies such as Al-Qaeda. The search for alternatives to the early state, begun by Kradin, Grinin and others in Russia, will however need expansion into the study of contemporary nation states and their rivals or alternatives. Without this the study of early state and its analogues will remain an antiquarian occupation whose importance for the understanding of contemporary politics will be doubted or openly dismissed. How otherwise to explain that a recent reader entitled *The Anthropology of the State* does not even mention the existence of studies of pre-modern state (Sharma and Gupta 2006).

That the appeal of the early state has continued to attract researchers is documented by two applied essays which are included into the present special issue. Leslie Gunawardana is one of the participants in the early state symposiums and volumes. His special interest has been for decades Asiatic mode of production and other issues related to the application of Marxist historical materialism to Asia. The thesis was that it is only the state which is capable of making land fertile in many parts of Asia by its construction and maintenance of extensive irrigation works. Although this was disproved in the case of ancient Ceylon/Sri Lanka, the conspicuous power of the state in Asia has remained an important research theme. Therefore it is in accordance with his scholarly trajectory that Gunawardana re-visits the cases cited as early states in various parts of Asia and concludes that variants or analogues to the early state are enriching the picture of Asian political centralization processes.

Martin Klein, similarly to Leslie Gunawardana, does not refute the early state as a concept but instead accepts it as a base for his further analysis. Specific interest here is slavery as a practice, as it appears, existing in all types of human societies, from primitive hordes to supranational enterprises of the 21st century. Thus slavery in African early states is a specific case when the heads of early states on the one hand need certain specialists who form their courts and function as a rudimentary bureaucracy but on the other the rulers must find methods of extraction of means for sustaining the bureaucracy. Social stratification is the motor of both these features and slaves appear to be essential there. As most slaves were often owned by the paramount or king they were source of added value in the process of political centralization. Being of foreign origin and thus neutral to the internal affairs of the realm, slaves were close advisors, army generals, spies and other confidantes of the ruler. The advantage of slaves was their loyalty to their master and therefore they were preferred to kinsfolk when the ruler officials whom he/she could depend on. Klein shows that although slavery was not an indispensable ingredient in the process of emergence of the early state but an important if not essential factor for their functioning in time, *i.e.* in their prevention of fission. However if the early or late early pre-colonial militaristic state depended too much on slaves their existence was unstable and brief.

There is no need to repeat Klein's reasoning here. As historian he is meticulous in his usage of data and one can only admire his mastery of them. As Africa is a contested field as far as the facile equation between chiefdoms/kingdoms and early states is concerned, Klein's analysis of the role of slavery in these centralizing polities contributes to a clearer picture of variety of indigenous political centralization.

CONCLUSION

The early state as a term has penetrated anthropological literature but as a concept it has established itself mostly in neo-evolutionist writing. Especially Russian neo-evolutionist ethnologists, archaeologists and anthropologists, while trying to break the straitjacket of dogmatic Marxism, have taken up the challenge of the early state concept in order to search for its proper place. 'Proper place' means that the early state ceases to be the only precursor of the modern industrial state as it is no more a successor of chiefdom or tribe. With the discovery of a vast variety of early state analogues neo-evolutionism finds its usefulness. Logically, more variety in anthropological study of the state gives birth to less of *-ism* ideology in the study of politics. By induction, the study of contemporary forms of the state worldwide also establishes rich variety and types which in turn cancel the wishful thinking of uniformity and unification. If rightly understood as a theoretical challenge the anthropological concept of the early state might facilitate a more efficient study of all states, their analogues and 'antilogues' in all continents by not only anthropologists but all other social scientists. The present selection of papers shows the direction which other than anthropologists might take as well.

NOTES

¹ The literature produced by Hans Claessen and the people around him comprise the well-known volumes in English but also a plethora of low cost publications in Dutch. I shall not discuss these volumes here because they mostly operate with the ES concept as given and also because the recent special issue of *Social Evolution and History* has done it (Claessen, Hagesteijn and van de Velde 2008).

² Chabal mentions *The Study of the State* in his bibliography at the end of his latest book but the reason for it is not the ES concept but the fact that the book has 'state' in its title.

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