
We Know too Much, We Know too Little

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Commenting on Robert Carneiro's paper is difficult. In many ways we know too much today for his generalizations to be useful. But, at the same time, we have not met his challenge to understand fully the local and cross-cultural relationship between warfare and the rise of the state.

WE KNOW TOO MUCH

There are many ways in which the essay is outdated. I will mention just a few major ones. To begin with, Russian anthropologists have outlined that such terms as the state only apply to a part of the spectrum of terminal social complexity (works are many but see essays in Grinin *et al.* 2004). Basing his theory on territorial states developed through conquest, Carneiro eschews two important alternate concepts, city-states, that rarely engage in territorial expansion, and the often overlooked *ethne* of ancient Greece, which were federations of communities with state-level centralization. These *ethne* were not the results of conquest, but the results of a shared and evolving sense of common identify, often centered on a religious sanctuary.

We also know that the assumptions that all intercommunity conflict is based upon the desire to possess and manage the resources of other cultures are not true. Good analysis of the role of conflict in different societies such as the early Maya and elsewhere has shown quite clearly that the major part of such conflict is grounded in raids for elite sacrificial victims and possible momentary tribute (Beliaev, Bondarenko, and Korotayev 2001).

This essay is also outdated in the manner in which it conceives of past culture. The picture, which Carneiro projects, is one of the past societies, but without people. As such, his references to issues

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such as ‘population pressure’ – a term fraught with difficulties – rest upon analogies to pressure cookers, rather than data which brings in human actors, data which has shown that people do not act like molecule of water, but through leaders who impact social units in definite ways. Instead of a pressure cooker analogy, it would have been more instructive, if he had shown how different people might have reacted to ‘population pressure’ and how these people and their agendas would have acted as transformative engines in past societies, especially in situations of stress.

WE HAVE NOT MET HIS CHALLENGE

Even though Carneiro's essay is too outdated to be of current use, his initial desire to isolate cross-cultural features of the relationship between warfare and the early state (which I would change to early social complexity) is still important. While I do not agree that warfare in circumscribed or even resource concentrated environments necessarily results in the development of the early state, warfare has been noticed to be concurrent – in a broad sense – with the rise of the early state in several cases. But revealing concurrence only takes us to a limited level. Carneiro's interest in the active relationship between warfare and the start of the archaic state challenges us to take the analysis of the relationship, even in cross-cultural work, beyond the level of identifying concurrences. But so far, we are working in the dark, because we have not been developing models which would allow this.

In light of Carneiro's advocacy, I would argue that we need to isolate structural models of cultures under study and try to isolate what structural changes warfare might engender. Such models would be based on the isolation of institutions and their contexts in the past, and a close look at the social strategies of actors within these contexts and in the creation of new institutions and contexts as well (see Small 2009, 2010 for examples).

Let us look at an example from work in Peru. As reported by Stanish and Levine (2011), the rise of the archaic state in the northern Titicaca Basin can first be seen in the interaction of several communities in a web which existed as early as 1500 BCE. Between 1400 and 500 BCE several villages in this region developed as regional centers within this net. The institutional network nodes were feasts, markets, and rituals. Around 500 BCE the character of

the region appears to have changed. The authors report a changed iconography on stelae, textiles, and pottery, which now highlights military success. Excavation at a sunken courtyard in the valley also unearthed trophy heads dating from 800–200 BCE. Survey of the region also identified contemporary sites which were built in defensible locations.

In association with these findings the regional system of the valley appears to be approaching one of consolidation around a few sites rather than many. Excavation in one of these sites, Taraco, has uncovered evidence of extensive destruction in a part of the site which was probably occupied by some of its elites. Excavation indicates that the occupants were more impoverished after the destruction. This episode at Taraco occurs at the same time as the site of Pukara becomes the dominant site in the region.

The authors conclude, quite rightly, I feel, that some sort of warfare through territorial expansion was correlated with the rise of states within this valley. But to understand how these prestate communities changed during a period of warfare, we need to construct a structural model of these societies and see if we can isolate structural changes during this period of conflict. I would recommend that this structural model be based on the isolation of institutions and their contexts in the past, and a close look at the social strategies of actors in creating and using these new contexts. The authors have mentioned markets, feasting, and ritual, but we need to know more about these. We need to know who might have participated in the markets, in the feasting, in the rituals. We need to know the ideological characteristics of these institutional contexts. Military iconography is important in understanding the change, but what was its contextual operation? Who wore those clothes, erected the stelae? What was their social strategy? What would be the force of these symbols within their respective contexts? What new institutions appear along with warfare and territorial expansion? Who was operating within those contexts and how did they relate to those already in existence?

In developing these structural models, we open up our investigations to a closer understanding of the relationship between war and the rise of the archaic state – the importance of which Carneiro recognized over 40 years ago. We have come a long way, in that we know too much to find Carneiro's generalizations currently use-

ful, but his challenge of understanding the importance of warfare and the appearance of state remains to be answered.

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