

MODELS OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

From the inside looking out

In Chapter 1, I pointed out that the idea of social evolution has been an integral part of Western thinking since the eighteenth century. Different criteria (whether material or not) have been used to divide human societies into successive types, or stages, in the evolution from 'simple' to 'complex' societies. The early practitioners of archaeology and anthropology used technology as a direct measure of the evolution of societies. Although the proto-anthropologists were studying non-Western societies such as the Bushmen, the Australian Aborigines and the Indians of the American north-west coast, their view of them was as survivors, as fossils from earlier stages of evolution (e.g. Sollas 1911). This present was their past. During the first half of the twentieth century, the interests of the two disciplines diverged, as anthropologists rejected what they viewed as 'conjectural history' in favour of fieldwork-based studies of these societies as they are now. Archaeology continued to focus on technology and subsistence as criteria for defining successive stages of social evolution, most notably in the work of Gordon Childe (1936, 1942 and 1951). But the direct inference of past social organization remained a minority activity among archaeologists, located on a higher rung of the ladder of archaeological inference (Hawkes 1954).

The re-birth of social evolution within North American anthropology in the 1950s also renewed the links between the study of the present and of the past. From the perspective of archaeology, ethnographic analogy and the direct inference of social organization from material traces of the past were two of the central activities of North American processual archaeology (e.g. Binford and Binford 1968). Although this impact of neo-evolutionism in anthropology upon archaeology now seems a long time ago, part of the history of our discipline, it is still the important starting point for the topic of this book. The concepts of neo-evolutionism permeate archaeological

thought in the English-speaking world. Whether one agrees with them or not, they have formed the basis of much archaeological practice during the last four decades. During the course of this chapter I will trace changes in neo-evolutionary thinking, as well as the effects of critiques from historical materialism and practice theory. My aim is to show how our concepts of society and social change vary, and have varied, along with ideas as to the appropriate units and scales of analysis for their study. A secondary aim is to place these changes within the broader context of the approaches to archaeology discussed in Chapter 2. My focus throughout is on Anglo-American archaeology: unlike Chapter 2, I am now on the inside looking out.

Introducing the fall guys

Although North American neo-evolutionism began with the work of Leslie White and Julian Steward (for discussion see Trigger 1989: 289–94), I want to focus attention here on two of the books most cited by archaeologists: Elman Service's *Primitive Social Organisation* (1962) and Morton Fried's *The Evolution of Political Society* (1967).

For Service, social organization comprised the structure of a society (its constituent groups, whether residential or non-residential) and the network of interpersonal relations which were 'regulated' or 'influenced' by statuses ('recognised social positions' which were achieved or ascribed) held by individuals. Each of these statuses was associated with what was regarded as 'appropriate' behaviour, or a role. After speculating on the origins of social organization, Service used the ethnographic record to define four types of society, presented in order of their evolution, from hunting and gathering bands, through agricultural tribes and chiefdoms to states.

Band societies were defined on the basis of kinship, and particularly the nuclear family, which was the basic unit for any division of labour, and by the absence of any separate political, legal or religious groups: for example, the economy 'is not separately institutionalised, but remains merely an aspect of kinship organisation' (Service 1962: 108). The number of people in a band ranged from thirty to one hundred or more, with an average density of one person or fewer per square mile, although such densities would vary according to the seasonal availability of food. Service recognized some variation among band societies, such as his distinction between patrilocal and composite bands, and he speculated that the patrilocal band

occurred earliest in human evolution, given that it had a simpler social structure. The exceptional nature of hunter-gatherer groups such as those on the north-west coast of America suggested to Service that the band level of social organization might not have been universal during the Palaeolithic.

'A band is only an association, more or less residential, of nuclear families, ordinarily numbering 30–100 people, with affinal ties loosely allying it with one or a few other bands. A tribe is an association of a much larger number of kinship segments that are each composed of families. They are tied more firmly together than are the bands, which use mostly marriage ties alone . . . the few intermarrying multifamily local groups that were the *whole* of band society are now only a *part* or aspect of tribal society' (Service 1962: 111). Such larger population aggregations owed much to the adoption of an agricultural subsistence and increased sedentism, and in turn required more non-residential groups (e.g. clans, lineages, secret societies) to hold tribal societies together. Such groups made use of ancestry, ritual and mythology to achieve this goal. Egalitarianism and the absence of political hierarchies, with situational leadership based on personal qualities, were characteristics shared with band societies. Residential groups were economically self-sufficient. Once again, Service recognized variation in the ethnographic record, and distinguished two 'highly generalised polar types of social structure', namely lineal and composite tribes (Service 1962: 118).

As with the relationship between bands and tribes, there was usually a further increase in population density between tribes and chiefdom societies. The size of the individual residence groups increased, and the greater density as a whole was underwritten by greater productivity. The chiefdom was, in Service's own words, a more 'complex' and 'organized' type of society, with economic, social and religious activities being centrally controlled. Regional or ecologically based specialization and redistribution of produce were both under central control and, according to Service, were 'selected for' by what he called the 'total environmental situation'. Centralized control was in the hands of chiefs, with ascribed statuses, rules of succession and affiliation and sumptuary rules or taboos which gave them distinctive identities (e.g. through distinctive dress or ornaments, ritual positions, etc.). Chiefs were able to mobilize human labour for a variety of public works, such as monument construction, irrigation works, etc. Within the fabric of chiefdom societies was an increase in hierarchy and inequality: 'when chieftainship

becomes a permanent office in the structure of society, social inequality becomes characteristic of the society, followed finally by inequality in consumption' (Service 1962: 149).

The final stage of social evolution was reached with the emergence of the state society, which was distinguished from the chiefdom by two essential characteristics: these were the use of legitimized force to establish and maintain the authority and power of the leadership ('repressive controls based on physical force' Service 1975: xi), and the specialized, bureaucratic government which was present at the service of leaders.

Given the title of his book, it is not surprising that Morton Fried (1967) placed emphasis on the role of political factors in the evolution of society. His four-stage typology, like Service's, traced the evolutionary process from hunting and gathering to state societies, but he disagreed with Service over the intervening stages. Fried's first stage was that of egalitarian society, in which there was 'the social recognition of as many positions of valued status as there were individuals capable of filling them' (1967: 52). But whatever prestige individuals accrued as a result of their status, this did not result in the exercise of greater power. Leadership was based on authority rather than power, and was situational rather than fixed in particular individuals. Division of labour was mainly by sex. Access to basic resources was communal. Population densities were low, and the basic units were nuclear families and bands of small numbers of such families. According to the ethnographic record, egalitarian societies tended to live in marginal areas, were often mobile, and included all the hunting and gathering societies that Service called bands.

The second stage in Fried's typology was that of ranked society, and made no distinction between Service's tribes and chiefdoms. For Fried, there was no need for a tribal stage. 'Such a stage explains nothing but does divert attention from more important questions: How does ranking begin and how does it undergo adaptive radiation? How does stratification get started and how does it catalyze societies? How does it reinforce itself, and what are its effects on other societies?' (1967: 173). Some tribal societies, as studied by Service, were the result of acculturation and not representative of a past stage in political evolution. In Fried's ranked society, 'positions of valued status are somehow limited so that not all those of sufficient talent to occupy such statuses actually achieve them' (1967: 109). One means by which such ranking could occur was according to the proximity of families to a common ancestor within a descent group.

Such families could preserve or enhance their ranking by marriage alliances with other high-ranking families, and by strategies such as competitive feasting.

While high-ranking families and individuals had 'regular and repetitive' authority (1967: 134), they had little ability to enforce the obedience of their followers. Whether high-ranking or not, all members of society had equal access to basic resources, and there was only limited evidence for lesser participation in subsistence activities by high-ranking families and individuals such as chiefs. The division of labour continued to be by age and sex and craft specialization was limited. Redistribution was administered by chiefs. Residential communities were of larger size. Population densities were larger than in egalitarian societies, and generally supported by an agricultural economy. Like Service, Fried speculated on the reasons for the transition between successive social types, including such factors as ecological diversity, redistribution, the problems to communication posed by population growth, and the organization of labour for activities such as irrigation.

Fried's third stage was that of the stratified society, 'in which members of the same sex and equivalent status do not have equal access to the basic resources that sustain life' (1967: 186). Status differences are now grounded in economic differences. Such differences provide the basis for increased warfare, as compared with ranked societies. But, like Service, Fried viewed the final stage, that of state society, as marking the ultimate exercise of power. 'A state is not simply a legislative, an executive body, a judiciary system, an administrative bureaucracy, or even a government . . . a state is better viewed as the complex of institutions by means of which the power of the society is organised on a basis superior to kinship' (1967: 229). Thus state society was class society. The difference between stratified and state societies was somewhat blurred: Fried proposed that 'once stratification exists, the course of stateship is implicit and the actual formation of the state is begun' (1967: 185).

Although Service and Fried disagreed about the intermediate types of society, they were united in many of the characteristics they attributed to hunters and gatherers and early agriculturalists, as well as to state societies, they arranged societies from simple to complex and they speculated on the causes of evolution from one type of society to another. They were not the only anthropologists to engage in this neo-evolutionism. Credit must be given to Oberg (1955) for introducing the term chiefdom, and to Sahlins for his studies of tribal societies (1968) and for his proposal that tribal societies

evolved into chiefdoms, based on detailed knowledge of Melanesian 'big man' and Polynesian chiefdom societies (1958): here two types defined for different parts of the Pacific region were viewed as epitomizing successive social stages.

Sahlins and Service (1960) also joined forces to edit a volume of essays on cultural evolution. They defined two forms of evolution. General evolution consisted of those processes of change towards greater capture of energy, higher levels of social integration and greater freedom from environmental constraints that are visible from the earliest societies to those of the present day. In contrast, specific evolution marks out the changes of individual cultures and regional cultural sequences, and, of special relevance here, from one stage of social evolution to another. They specified the processes of specific evolution (e.g. adaptation) as well as proposing laws which might govern the transition of societies from one evolutionary stage to the next (e.g. the law of evolutionary potential). Unwittingly, along with their fellow neo-evolutionists in anthropology, they had set an agenda for research that was to have a greater impact in archaeology than in their own discipline. Somewhat ironically Service (1967) had already accepted Fried's criticisms and discarded the terms bands and tribes (replaced by egalitarian societies), as well as chiefdoms (now hierarchical societies, including what he had previously called primitive states), before their use became widespread within archaeology.

Neo-evolutionism: setting the archaeological agenda

The concern with general evolution in the work of Leslie White and the specific evolution of Sahlins, Service and Fried, along with White's belief in the adaptive basis of culture, were embraced by Lewis Binford in what became known as new/processual archaeology. Binford (1968) argued that there were no inherent limitations on the potential for inference from the archaeological record. If we wanted to make inferences about past social organization, as well as technology and subsistence, then we just had to overcome our 'methodological naivety' (Binford 1968: 23). Neo-evolutionism, with its types of societies, each with a set of specific characteristics, helped to put social inference back on the agenda of archaeological methodology (Drennan 1992: 59). After all, stage typologies had been part of archaeology since Thomsen's Three Age system in the early nineteenth century, and archaeologists were used to thinking in this evolutionary way.

The archaeological agenda which was set by neo-evolutionism consisted of two main areas of activity: the identification and study of social organization and social types (known from ethnography) in the archaeological record, and the development of theoretical arguments to understand the process(es) of social evolution. The first of these involved archaeologists in addressing their 'methodological naivety', whether by the analysis of settlements (site hierarchies, intra-site patterning), mortuary contexts, or material culture (e.g. pottery styles). After the initial, innovative case studies (e.g. Binford and Binford 1968, in which ethnographic analogies were drawn from Sahlins 1958, and Fried offered comments) and cross-cultural analyses (e.g. Saxe 1970; Binford 1972), the inference of social type and social change became embedded within regional research projects in both the Old and New Worlds. In the process, the original types of Service and, to a lesser extent, Fried, were refined or subdivided. While Old World archaeologists, as we shall see, engaged in social inference from the archaeological record, they played less of a role in the development of neo-evolutionary theory. Taken as a whole, and whatever one thinks of it, the neo-evolutionary agenda has continued to be active in archaeology up to the present day.

It was Colin Renfrew who grasped the nettle of archaeological inference, trying to identify chiefdoms in the archaeological record of western Europe. Using Service's definition of a chiefdom, Renfrew listed twenty characteristics of this type of society (e.g. redistribution, ranking, central places, specialisation, public works, etc.) and tried to identify them in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Wessex (1973a, 1974), Neolithic Malta (1973b, 1974) and the Early Bronze Age in the Aegean (1972, 1974). Renfrew's aims were quite clear: to focus attention on the neglected area of inference of social organization in archaeological data, and to use a concept derived from ethnography to discern new patterns in that data, and to ask new questions of that data. The chiefdom, along with ethnographic analogy in general, was a conceptual tool to be used in archaeology.

Apart from the impetus that his use of the chiefdom concept gave to the study of the archaeological records of Wessex, Malta and the Aegean, Renfrew used both the archaeological and the ethnographic records to identify two types of chiefdom. Group-oriented chiefdoms were ones in which 'personal wealth in terms of valuable possessions is not impressively documented . . . the solidarity of the social unit was expressed most effectively in communal or group activities' (1974: 74). Examples were found in Polynesian ethnography and in Late Neolithic Malta and Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Wessex (Figure 3.1). In

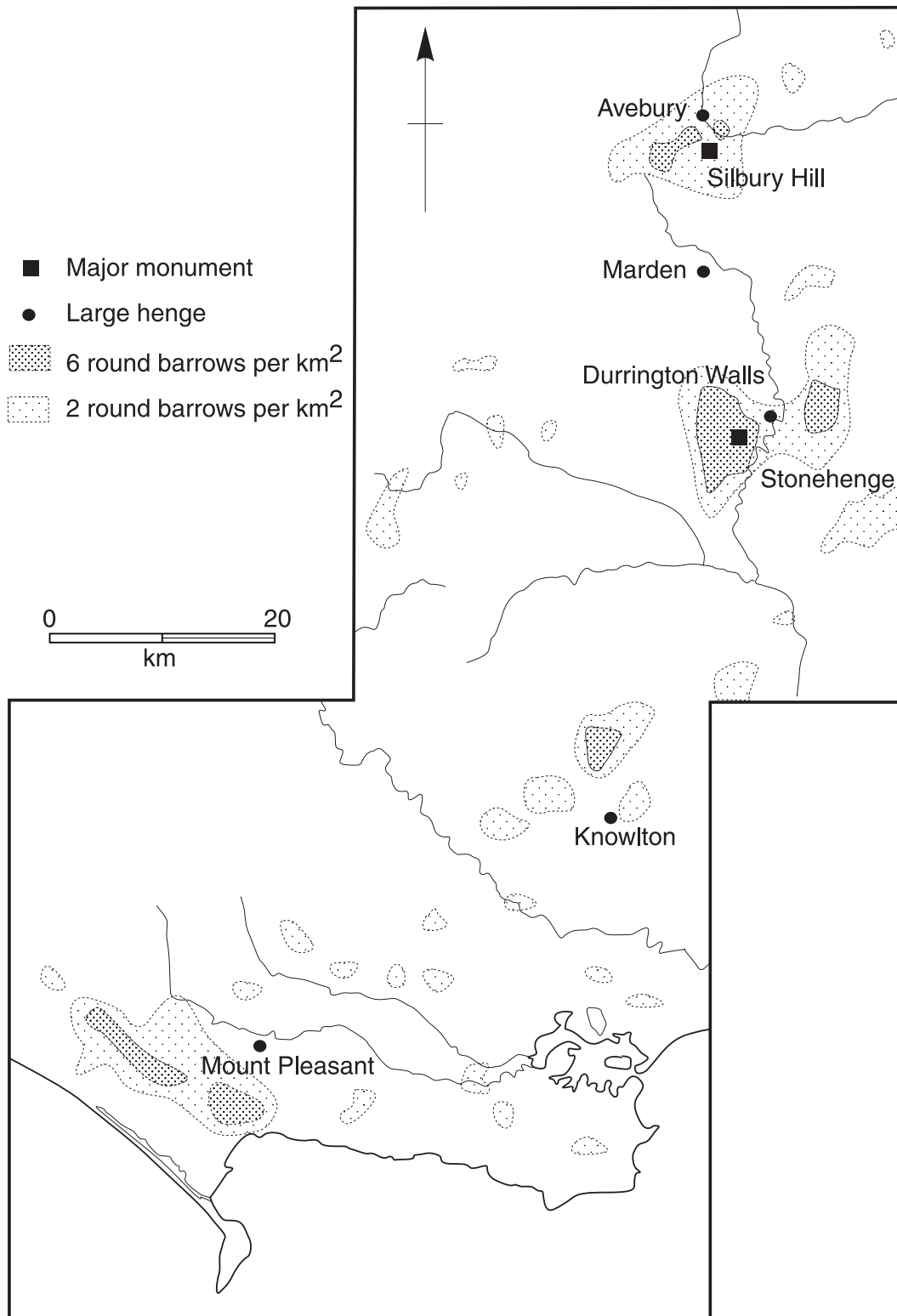


Figure 3.1 Group-oriented chiefdoms shown by the spatial concentrations of ritual monuments in Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Wessex (adapted from Renfrew 1973a: figure 5).

contrast, individualizing chiefdoms were 'societies where a marked disparity in personal possessions and in other material indications of prestige appears to document a salient personal ranking, yet often without evidence of large communal meetings or activities' (1974: 74). Here examples were found in the archaeological record of Bronze and Iron Age Europe. In addition to identification of these types of chiefdoms, Renfrew noted problems for future research on social change, whether in the ethnographic or archaeological records: for example, 'why do competition and competitive display become so striking a feature in certain kinds of tribal or chiefdom society?' (1974: 84).

I begin here with Renfrew's work on chiefdoms for the reasons that (1) it is clearly laid out and readily comprehensible and (2) it highlights trends in neo-evolutionism which were to remain on the archaeological agenda during the next two decades. The identification of social types, such as chiefdoms, in the archaeological record has continued in both the Old and New Worlds. Good examples are found in the work of Peebles and Kus (1977) or Creamer and Haas (1985). The definition of material correlates of chiefdoms, tribes, or states depended, of course, on what were perceived to be the defining characteristics of these social types, as seen in the ethnographic record. At the same time, the process of trying to fit these social types to the archaeological record raised problems, or drew attention to variation that departed from the ideal type. All of these changes, and examples of archaeological practice, took place in a context of debate over the extent to which social types could be discerned in the present, let alone in the past.

Rather than follow through the use of neo-evolutionism in archaeology on a chronological basis, I prefer to situate archaeological practice within the context of changing ideas and critique. In the following sections, I attempt to do this by summarizing trends in the theory and practice of the study of past societies during the last three decades. In this way, the diversity of current theory and practice is made clear.

True to type?

It has been pointed out, on more than one occasion, that social types are ideals, or generalizations, through which some order is brought to the world of empirical reality. They are attempts to represent reality, rather than reality itself (Yengoyan 1991). According to this line of argument, the typologies are heuristic devices, or concepts for use, in the way defined above by Renfrew. A lot, then, depends on

the criteria which are chosen to define individual types, and whether they vary continuously (that is, quantitatively) or dichotomously (that is, they are present or absent).

The ethnographic record has revealed many examples of societies that do not fit Service's social typology. For example, the Iroquoians had hereditary chiefs in what was otherwise a basically egalitarian society: the political authority of such chiefs depended on their generosity, wisdom and self-restraint, rather than on their ability to give orders (Trigger 1990). Big-man/tribal and chiefdom societies in Melanesia and Polynesia respectively are known to have traits typical of both these ideal types (Chowning 1979; Douglas 1979; Earle 1987: 282). The range of variation within Melanesian societies has been extended since Sahlins's (1958) classic work, to include 'great men' as well as 'big men' societies, thus complicating any proposed evolutionary sequence in the direction of hereditary inequalities (see Lemonnier 1991; Liep 1991). Characteristics of Hawaiian societies at the time of European contact included a lack of the monopoly of force (i.e. chiefdoms), as well as large populations and kings (i.e. states) (Cordy 1981: 28). Such examples raised questions about the definition of, and differences between, these types, as well as the range of variation that is allowed within each type.

One response to these problems is to create more types, to subdivide existing types to take into account empirical variation. We have already seen one example of this in Renfrew's (1974) distinction between group-oriented and individualizing chiefdoms. In the same year Ross Cordy (1974) published an analysis of the Hawaiian Islands, in which he defined two other types of chiefdom. Simple chiefdoms were 'societies with minimal rank, having one rank or status level and one chiefly redistributive level (the paramount)'. Populations numbered up to two thousand, and chiefs had little coercive power and were not yet removed from labour. Complex chiefdoms were 'stratified or incipiently stratified societies with two or more chiefly rank or status levels and two or more chiefly redistribution levels'. Populations were now much greater (up to one hundred thousand), chiefs had powers of coercion, there were more decision-making levels in society, and the chiefs were removed from subsistence labour. These chiefdoms were present in Hawaii at contact.

Ten years later, in an influential paper, Henry Wright (1984) defined the same types of chiefdom. More recently Nelson has proposed a division between collaborative and coercive chiefdoms (1995: 615). The prize for the most types of chiefdoms goes to

Carneiro (1998: 37, note 1), who has defined them according to local environmental/demographic conditions (impacted, dispersed, riparian and insular) and evolutionary stages (minimal, typical and maximal, as well as simple, compound and consolidated).

Types of states are more extensive, and have a longer history, than types of chiefdoms. Cherry (1978: 413) listed nearly two dozen types, including pristine, secondary, archaic, feudal, tribal, segmentary, theocratic, secular, militaristic, pre-industrial and city states. Compared with chiefdoms and states, typologies of bands and tribes are almost non-existent. This is, perhaps, recognition of the increasingly marked variation in social and political complexity, and its material expression, in chiefdoms and states. A simple typology can no longer contain all the variation seen in the empirical records of ethnography, archaeology and history.

Feinman and Neitzel (1984: 40–3) have shown how different traits have been used in the classification of human societies into types and sub-types, beginning with Lewis Henry Morgan's stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization, which were defined on the basis of their subsistence and subdivided on the basis of their technologies. Alternative schemes to those of Service and Fried for 'intermediate-level' societies have been devised on the basis of the ethnographic records of Polynesia, South and Central America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Feinman and Neitzel (1984: 42) drew attention to the classifications of Goldman and Sahlins for Polynesia. Whereas Sahlins used environment, redistribution and stratification to define four types (numbered 3, 2B, 2A and 1), Goldman used political authority and succession to define three types (traditional, open and stratified). However, as Feinman and Neitzel showed (1984: 43, table 2.2), there is no automatic correspondence between the societal types of Sahlins and Goldman when it comes to the analysis of individual Polynesian societies.

Like any exercise in classification, we choose the traits, or attributes, on which our typologies will be based. The choice of these traits, in turn, depends upon the problem(s) under study. Also we cannot assume that change in any one trait is sufficient to define the transition from one type to another, or be sufficient to identify the presence of a particular type. For example, Service placed great emphasis on the presence of redistribution in chiefdoms, arguing that such societies developed in response to ecological diversity: chiefs emerged to administer and integrate the specialized economies of different regions, so that all the population had access to subsistence goods, in spite of localized differences in production.

However, Earle's seminal study of Hawaiian chiefdoms (1978) showed the absence of such economic specialization and interdependence. Rather than integrate subsistence production, the chiefs pursued political strategies and competed to mobilize goods, support and labour. Altruism was not a trait of political leaders! This view of chiefs received support from elsewhere (e.g. Taylor 1975 on Africa, Helms 1979 on Panama). Clearly redistribution cannot be assumed to identify a chiefdom, or provide a mechanism for the development of this type of society.

The presence or absence of one trait that defines a type of society would be an example of a dichotomous variable. Critics of neo-evolutionism argue that the stage typologies of societies proposed by Service and Fried were examples of the use of dichotomous rather than continuous variables. The greatest support for this criticism came from the review of the ethnographic literature for North, Central and South America presented by Feinman and Neitzel (1984). Their focus was on 'middle-range' societies, omitting mobile hunters and gatherers and what they called 'bureaucratic' or 'petty' states (1984: 46), although they were not clear about the criteria by which state societies are defined. Four major attributes which have figured in ethnographic and archaeological studies of 'middle-range' societies were selected for study: the functions of leaders, social differentiation, the structure and complexity of political organization, and demography. The degree to which these attributes vary with each other was also studied.

Economic functions were not the only functions of leaders; these functions varied in number in each major area, and redistribution was not their central function. Instead redistribution increased in importance among those leaders with a larger number of functions. Feinman and Neitzel distinguished between weak and strong leaders, on the basis of the number of their functions. It is the 'strong' leaders who undertake redistribution, which, along with external trade, gives them the means to increase their power (1984: 56).

The ways in which status is marked in the ethnographic record (e.g. residence, dress, multiple wives, treatment at death, special food, servants/slaves) were shown to vary in such a continuous way that social types could not be identified and ranked and stratified societies (in the terms of Fried) could not be distinguished. There was some support for a correlation between status markings and the number of leadership functions, but this was not universal. Considerable variation was also found in patterns of succession to leadership positions.

Variation was also seen in the numbers of administrative levels in the sample of pre-state societies, which were shown to have a strong correlation with the degree of status differentiation. Surprisingly, perhaps, the numbers of administrative (or decision-making) levels correlated only weakly with the functions of leaders.

Lastly, Feinman and Neitzel studied demography by using figures for maximal community size in the Americas. A strong correlation was observed between these figures and the number of status markers of leaders, but this was not the case with the functions of leaders or the number of administrative levels. Once again, there are complex relationships between these variables, and one cannot be predicted from the others. Maximal community size was also continuously distributed. The same observations were made for total population size, which varied continuously and correlated strongly with the number of administrative levels and weakly with the functions of leaders and status differentiation.

The overall conclusion of Feinman and Neitzel was that the diversity of these four attributes of pre-state societies in the Americas 'was continuous rather than discrete and no clear societal modes or subtypes were readily apparent' (1984: 77). Other scholars (e.g. Cordy 1981) had anticipated this conclusion. Subsequently Leonard and Jones (1987: 207–10) found no support in ethnographic analyses of variation in community organization, settlement pattern and class stratification to justify the definition of Service's societal types. In his examination of South-east Asian ethnography, Hutterer (1991) also pointed out that linguistic, ethnic and other variables in this region of the world do not correlate well with each other.

These criticisms of neo-evolutionary stages of society, as well as their use, have spanned the last three decades. While the social types of Service, Fried and others were refined, subdivided or rejected, other North American archaeologists decided to rethink the theoretical basis of societies and social change. Rather than identify traits of chiefdoms or states in the archaeological record, as was attempted by Renfrew, they turned their attention to the processes of social change. Theory was used to build a comparative approach to the study of society.

Too much administration and not enough politics

It has often been observed that the processual archaeology of the 1960s was deeply rooted in cultural ecology. Both human and animal populations exchanged matter and energy with their

environments. Culture, in Leslie White's famous words, was 'the extrasomatic means of adaptation' for human populations. Subsistence and the economy, mediated through technology, were the means by which cultures adapted to their environments. Following Julian Steward, social organization and ideology were relegated to the status of dependent variables in cultural change.

In an influential paper Kent Flannery (1972) argued that a successful cultural ecology had to take into account a further exchange, that of information, between populations and their environments. While an emphasis on techno-environmental factors was being reasonably successful in the study of 'simpler' cultures, such as hunter-gatherer bands, they were less successful in the explanation of early state societies. Equally unsuccessful were what Flannery called 'humanistic' studies of information exchange in such societies: these focused on art, religion, writing, and so on, but failed to consider exchanges of matter and energy (e.g. subsistence). If cultural ecology was to work, then it had to combine these approaches and examine all three kinds of exchanges with the natural and social environments.

But were exchanges of matter, energy and information of equal importance in the emergence of state societies? Flannery came to the following conclusions: 'the most striking differences between states and simpler societies lies in the realm of decision-making and its hierarchical organisation, rather than in matter and energy exchanges' (1972: 412). Human societies were one example of 'living systems' (cf. Gall and Saxe 1977), and therefore suitable for ecological analysis, but information processing assumed a greater role than in natural systems. States were political phenomena, with centralized governments, economic stratification, and professional ruling classes with a monopoly of force. Hence the study of states in these terms involved a focus on decision-making, and on the development of societies with complex structures, which were both centralized and subdivided into more parts. Decision-making hierarchies developed in response to the needs for greater information communication and regulation.

This approach was developed by Henry Wright and Greg Johnson, who defined a state as 'a society with specialized administrative activities' by which control was exercised (1975: 267). In this way politics were subsumed under administration and decision-making. Two forms of specialized decision-making/administrative activities are defined.

First there is a hierarchy of control in which the highest level involves making decisions about other, lower-order decisions rather than about any particular condition or movement of material goods or people. Any society with three or more levels of decision-making hierarchy must necessarily involve such specialization because the lowest or first-order decision-making will be directly involved in productive and transfer activities and second-order decision-making will be coordinating these and correcting their material errors. However, third-order decision-making will be concerned with coordinating and correcting these corrections.

(Wright and Johnson 1975: 267)

In addition to this hierarchy of control, with its bureaucrats perched on top of local administrators and primary producers, the actual processing of information is also specialized: 'the effectiveness of such a hierarchy of control is facilitated by the complementary specialization of information-processing activities into observing, summarizing, message-carrying, data-storing, and actual decision-making' (1975: 267). Efficient control of information processing and decision-making became the basis of state societies.

The use of information theory to formulate this decision-making approach to complex societies was further developed by Johnson (1978, 1982). He proposed a model for the development of more complex societies as a response to the needs to process more sources of information and to coordinate larger numbers of activities. Horizontal and vertical specialization in decision-making were organizational responses to these needs. Following Flannery, he argued that, rather than a continuous model of social change, there were critical thresholds in the needs for information processing (cf. Kosse 1990; Upham 1990a). These thresholds related to the scale of the social system, one measure of which was the population size of organizational units. Characteristics of more complex societies were 'selected for' as responses to such problems of information processing. The development of hierarchical structures was argued to be an exercise in 'problem-solving' (Reynolds 1984: 188).

One important threshold in social evolution was that between the chiefdom and the state. Thus chiefdoms were defined as having one level of decision-makers above the primary producers, while states, as we have seen, had two or more levels of such decision-makers. This distinction was somewhat complicated by the recognition

that complex chiefdoms could have more than one level of decision-makers above the primary producers (Steponaitis 1978; Feinman and Neitzel 1984). In these societies there are higher- and lower-ranking chiefs, with political control based on tribute flows. For Wright (1977) there was a further, critical, distinction: while chiefdoms and states were both centralized decision-making organizations, chiefdoms lacked the internal administrative specialization or bureaucracy, as well as the coercive control of, state societies.

How can decision-making/administrative levels be defined in the archaeological record? The most widely used measure has been the number of size levels (normally in hectares) in a settlement hierarchy (Figure 3.2). For example, Wright (1977) defined the states of Mesoamerica as having large centres dominating three or more levels of a settlement hierarchy. In this case there were three levels of decision-makers over the primary producers at the bottom of the hierarchy. In a subsequent, comparative study of early state societies, Wright (1986) proposed the existence of up to five levels in the settlement

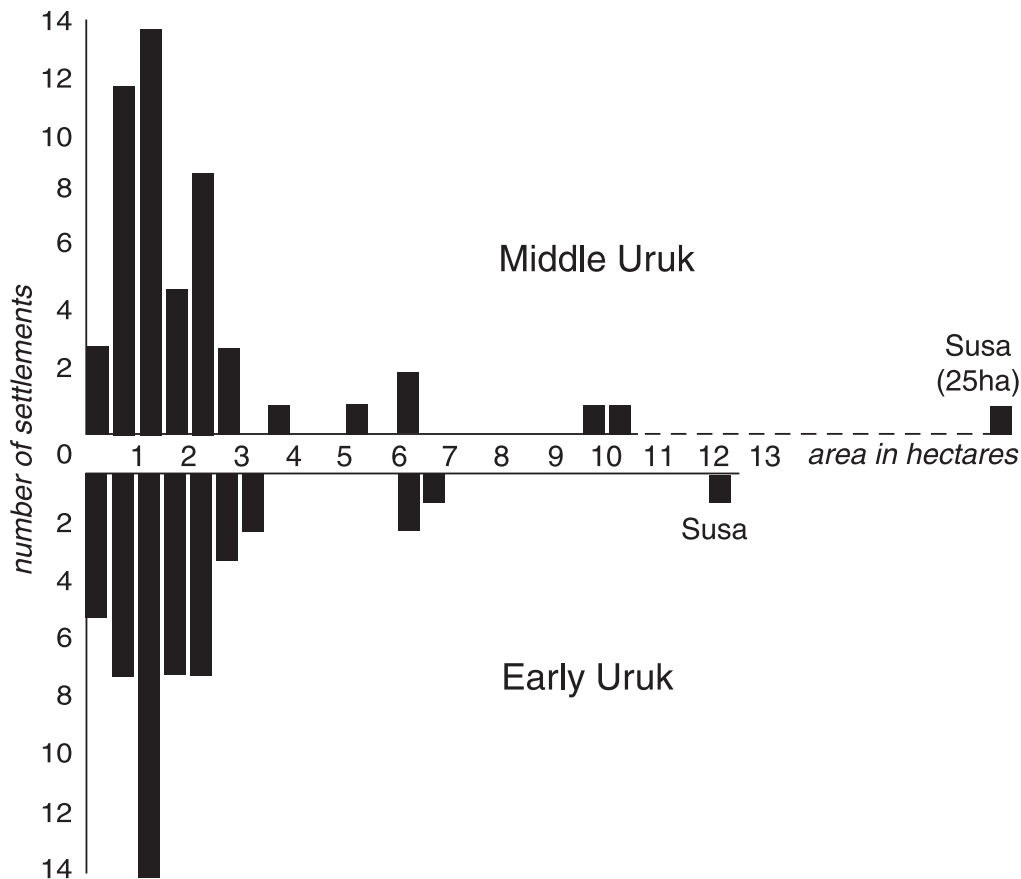


Figure 3.2 Three-level (Early Uruk) and four-level (Middle Uruk) decision-making hierarchies based on site areas in the Susiana Plain, Mesopotamia (adapted from Flannery 1999: figure 2.1).

hierarchies of Mesopotamia and of the central Andes. For chiefdoms, Peebles and Kus (1977) identified three levels of decision-making for complex chiefdoms such as Moundville (cf. Earle 1987 for a general review of chiefdoms and Steponaitis 1978 for a study of the spatial patterning of settlement hierarchies).

The sizes of settlements have often been related to the sizes of the populations inhabiting them. The relationship between the organizational complexity of a society and its size has also been the subject of debate, as population has been used as a measure of that size, and therefore become a contender for the prime mover in social evolution. Johnson's caution in taking population size as *the* measure of the scale of a society (see above) would seem to be justified, given the varied results of work by Feinman and Neitzel (1984) (see above), Drennan (1987) and Upham (1990a) (see below).

This emphasis on decision-making enabled the redefinition of social types such as chiefdoms and states in terms of politico-administrative rather than economic features, emphasizing information processing rather than matter and energy exchanges. Organizational complexity was seen as a response to the problems posed by information processing in larger social units. Increasing levels of decision-making, efficient means of processing information and integrating social units, specialized bureaucracies were all 'selected for', in terms of their adaptive advantages. These examples of increased complexity solved problems. Political control was equated with administration, rather than with exploitation and repression. The emphasis on settlement hierarchies and the size and scale of social units found a ready field methodology in surface survey, and stimulated an interest in the role of population variables in social change. At the same time, it was difficult to identify decision-making hierarchies where there were dispersed settlement patterns (e.g. Polynesia-Cordy 1981: 35).

Given this change within neo-evolutionism, and the changing theory and practice of social inference in Anglo-American archaeology by the mid-1980s, let us now look at four conference publications from the period 1987–91. What do they tell us about changes in the archaeological analysis of past societies by this time? Were there mutually exclusive approaches to the study of society and social change? Did neo-evolutionism survive the weight of criticism within Anglo-American archaeology?

Four conferences and a funeral?

Taking the four conferences in order of evolutionary stages, we begin with Susan Gregg's *Between Bands and States*, an edited volume published in 1991 from a conference held at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale in 1988. The focus of the book was on 'sedentary, small-scale, non-hierarchical societies' or tribes. One of the main aims of the book was to use archaeological data to evaluate Morton Fried's claim that modern tribes, as studied by anthropologists, developed as a response to the impact of state societies. Thus the major period of tribal formation occurred during European colonialism and imperialism, in the last five centuries (see also Wolf 1982). According to this argument, tribes could not have existed as an evolutionary stage in the past. Case studies encompassed sedentary hunters and gatherers, as well as small-scale agriculturalists, in the Old and New Worlds. Rather than the result of acculturation, contributors argued that tribes were, in Gregg's words 'a stable and enduring sociopolitical form' (1991: xviii). Although the pressures of advancing European states did affect small-scale societies, it was argued that such similar resource and territorial pressures have occurred at other times in the past (e.g. Bentley 1991 on the Early Bronze Age in Jordan).

In addition to the characteristics of tribal societies (e.g. decision-making by consensus, extensive social networks which transmit materials and information and counter environmental risks, see Braun and Plog 1982), a number of papers focused on the means by which egalitarianism is maintained through time in hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies. Keene's study of an Israeli kibbutz raised the issue of resistance to change, inequality and social evolution. As he noted, this concept seemed to be absent from archaeological debate: 'it might be worthwhile for archaeologists to think critically about how easily prehistoric subjects are allowed to slide into ranked or stratified social formations, adopting the "benefits" of domination with no muss, no fuss, and no struggle' (1991: 390).

The theoretical focus of contributions to Gregg's book was very much based on cultural evolution and cultural ecology, with a lot of space devoted to relationships between human societies and their environments. The central importance of adaptation and selectionism was firmly advocated by Braun (1991), while Keene (1991) presented the bases of an alternative perspective.

Timothy Earle's edited book *Chieftdoms: Power, Economy and Ideology* (1991b) was the outcome of a School of American Research Seminar

in Santa Fe in 1988. According to Earle, the aim of the seminar was 'to understand the processes that underlie the origins and development of complex stateless societies', or chiefdoms (1991c: 1). Elsewhere Earle referred to chiefdoms as 'intermediate-level societies, providing an evolutionary bridge between acephalous societies and bureaucratic states' (1987: 279). Clearly the chiefdom was still regarded as a concept of value for studying social evolution. But its definition now focused on power and political strategies, rather than ecology and adaptation: a chiefdom was 'a polity that organizes centrally a regional population in the thousands . . . some degree of heritable social ranking and economic stratification is characteristically associated' (Earle 1991c: 1). Chiefs engaged in competitive strategies to obtain and maintain power, rather than emerging to act for the benefit of followers in solving ecological or economic problems (as was proposed by Service).

Earle proposed ten political strategies that he argued were used to create and maintain chiefdoms (1991c: 5). Strategies 1–2 focused on gaining economic power through giving, feasting and prestations, and improving the infrastructure of subsistence production. Strategies 3–6 combined internal force and external warfare to extend political power. Finally strategies 7–10 were ideological means of control, including appropriation of existing legitimacy principles or the creation or appropriation of new ones, as well as the use of long-distance wealth exchange to access the exotic symbols by which chiefly identity is created. Examples of these strategies in action were cited from the contributors' case studies on long-term change in the archaeological records of Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain, Scandinavia and Iberia, Greece from the collapse of the Mycenaean state to the emergence of the city state, pre-contact Polynesia, the Mississippian period of the south-east of North America, and the pre-Columbian record of Mesoamerica, Central America and northern South America.

Differences of opinion were expressed between contributors as to the relative roles of these strategies in establishing differences of power. For example, the American pre-Columbian record showed little evidence for the role of economic control (strategies 1–2). Regional polities seem to have been created, 'in part' by 'an ideology of religiously sanctioned centrality symbolized by the ceremonial constructions and exchanges in foreign objects of probable sacred significance' (Earle 1991c: 8). In contrast, Earle and Gilman argued in their papers that differences of power may be ideologically sanctioned but must have a materialist basis in 'the control over labour through control over subsistence' (Earle 1991c: 8).

This led contributors to discuss the material conditions that were deemed important in the success or failure of chiefly political strategies. Nine such conditions were natural productivity and potential for intensification, regional population density, existence of external markets, natural circumscription, concentration of productive resources, proximity to needed non-food resources, proximity to avenues of trade and communication, social circumscription, and structured preconditions of hierarchy (Earle 1991c: 10). The main focus here was on the ability of chiefs to generate and extract a surplus, the restrictions on the options of producers and how this affects the ability to mobilize a surplus and direct it towards political centres. Environmental conditions were not independent of social systems, but interacted with them in a dynamic way.

The contributors to the seminar stressed variation in chiefdoms. Differences existed, as we have seen, in the political strategies used to create and maintain regional polities, and in the material conditions in which such strategies were exercised. Differences in the types, forms, structures and evolution of chiefdoms were proposed. Earle (1991c: 3) followed Henry Wright, Vincas Steponaitis, Ross Cordy and others in distinguishing simple from complex chiefdoms, based on their regional population sizes (low thousands vs tens of thousands), levels of political hierarchy above the local community (one vs two), and the extent to which they had 'graduated ranking' as opposed to 'emergent stratification'. Feinman (1991: 230) followed Wright's definition of a chiefdom (see above), but argued that just because two societies share 'structurally similar political forms' need not imply similarity in economic organization, kinship, demography or other variables. A chiefdom was 'a sociopolitical form' and not 'a type or class of societies which (by definition) all share the same specified set of societal attributes' (1991: 230).

Kristiansen (1991: 17) subsumed chiefdoms under a more general category of tribal societies and argued that there was a major organizational difference between these as a whole and states. In tribal societies, 'economic and political processes are organized along kinship lines' and 'control, embedded in kinship, has not transformed social groups into classes' (1991: 21). Although hierarchy and exploitation may have existed (cf. Earle 1991c, Gilman 1991), this was part of a 'progression' towards their 'formalization' in state societies. Thus the more complex chiefdoms were regarded as archaic states, as were all stratified societies: structural changes such as enforced tribute/taxation and economic exploitation meant that these societies only lacked the bureaucracies of fully state societies

(1991: 18). Not only did Kristiansen differ from the other contributors in this characterization of social evolution, but also his emphasis on structural change contrasted with that on the correlation (or lack of it) between variables such as population size and levels of decision-making.

Drennan (1991: 284) contrasted the political strategies of chiefdoms in the Basin of Mexico/Oaxaca valley, where resources were mobilized for public monuments that served as communal ritual areas, and central Panama/Alto Magdalena, where mobilization was focused on status competition between chiefs. He also noted differences between areas in which the emergence of chiefdoms took the form predicted in a model of peer polity interaction, and those in which one political centre dominated. Steponaitis (1991) pointed out that Mississippian centralized chiefdoms of south-east North America AD 800–1700 had a range of different political forms, and differences in their scale and degree of centralization, as well as different regional trajectories. Kirch (1991: 144–5) contrasted the evolutionary trajectories of chiefdoms in the Marquesas Islands of east Polynesia with those which developed towards what some have argued were archaic states in Hawaii, Tonga and Tahiti: the material conditions in the latter areas were markedly higher population densities and intensified subsistence production. Once again the boundary between chiefdom and state societies becomes blurred.

Taken as a whole, the volume edited by Earle retained the concept of chiefdom, although stressing the variation in such societies in the ethnographic and archaeological records. Concepts such as chiefdoms were used as tools for thought, concepts to enable comparative analysis. They were no longer defined in Service's terms. Such societies were unstable and cyclical, they could centralize or fragment and they did not automatically evolve into states. Indeed the chiefdom/state boundary caused dissent in the real world. Chiefdoms were defined in terms of political strategies rather than ecology and adaptation, of chiefly exploitation rather than beneficial management. As Gilman put it, 'elites manage the social system in their own self-interest, not for the common good' (1991: 147). This was a world of conflict and control (either over staple production or wealth exchanges – see Earle 1987) rather than consensus. The use of ideology as a strategy of political control was discussed in terms of the creation of sacred landscapes and the use of mortuary rituals to symbolize individual positions and warrior status (cf. Earle 1987: 298–300). Debate occurred over the materialist basis of power. The scale of analysis of power was generally at the regional level.

One of the contributors to Earle's volume, Drennan, also co-edited a book on *Chiefdoms in the Americas*, the outcome of a symposium for the 45th International Congress of Americanists in Bogotá in 1985 (Drennan and Uribe 1987). The focus was on long-term sequences of change seen in the archaeological records of North, Central and South America. Several of the themes which were at the centre of Earle's book recurred here: these included the utility of the chiefdom concept, variability among societies called chiefdoms, the degree to which variation in human societies (especially in terms of increasing complexity) is continuous, the extent to which variables such as population density and organizational complexity are correlated, and the use of political strategies by chiefs.

I want to focus attention on the issues raised by the four papers in the last part of this book, grouped together under the title of 'theoretical considerations'. Drennan began by examining the relationship between population size and density on the one hand, and social, political and economic organization on the other (1987: 307–9). He came to the same conclusions as Feinman and Neitzel (1984), whose data he used, along with three archaeological sequences in Mexico and Guatemala: there was no 'tidy pattern of growing regional populations, steadily increasing population density, and greater concentration into larger and larger centers that many scholars have come to expect to correspond to sequences of developing social complexity' (1987: 319). There was marked demographic variation between chiefdoms and this 'fails to correspond neatly to various aspects of variability in complexity of organization within the chiefdom class' (1987: 319). It was the archaeological record of long-term change which offered more potential than the ethnographic record in tracing the variation in, and evolution of, the social forms grouped together as chiefdoms. For Drennan, the chiefdom concept was still of use as a starting point for description and comparative analysis of archaeological data.

Upham rejected the use of ideal types of society and followed Feinman and Neitzel (1984) in using the term middle-range society to refer to all the different forms of pre-state sedentary groups (1987: 347–9). Rather than defining traits, Upham's interest was in what he calls 'the processes involved in the development of organizational complexity' (e.g. population growth and aggregation, organization and management of labour, agricultural intensification, surplus production, development of productive specialization, etc.: 1987: 347–8). This followed in the tradition of North American archaeology in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Like Drennan, he

re-analysed Feinman and Neitzel's (1984) data on demographic variables and their relationship to organizational complexity. However, he reached different conclusions to Drennan, arguing that 'the size of the total regional populations appears to be a determining factor in the organizational complexity of middle range societies' (1987: 355). Using the example of 'tribal' societies presented by Braun and Plog (1982), Upham proposed that demographic processes and adaptation to environmental risk and uncertainty were two of the more important causes of the development of organizational complexity (1987: 362). In doing so, Upham followed North American cultural ecology and moved from correlation to explanation.

In contrast to Upham, Spencer supported the use of terms like chiefdom, and argued for the cultural evolutionary sequence from bands to tribes, chiefdoms and states. One type did not evolve inevitably into the next (e.g. there are chiefdoms which do not evolve into states), but a given type evolved from its immediate predecessor (e.g. a state from a chiefdom). Such evolution was marked by a break, rather than by continuous development. The definition of a chiefdom itself has evolved from Service's focus on the economic to Wright's use of political and administrative criteria, generating specific observations (e.g. settlement hierarchies) to be searched for in the archaeological record. The key to Spencer's theoretical perspective on social change lay in selection: 'successful reproduction of the chiefly political order requires that it survive the operation of selection, which in turn demands that the elite pursue social, religious and economic strategies that are compatible with chiefly decision-making principles' (1987: 377). Such strategies included alliance formation, surplus mobilization, long-distance prestige good exchange, sanctification of authority, institutionalized social differences, etc.

Spencer's cultural evolutionism, with its emphasis on selection as the means of social reproduction, found its direct opposite in the historical materialism of Zeidler, who presented a critique of Braun and Plog's (1982) influential paper on tribal societies: essentially they denied the potential for change generated within tribes (or any other societies) by individuals and groups engaged in social production. This focus on internal causes of change in specific historical contexts tied in with Marxist criticisms of the use of biological evolutionary theory and concepts in the analysis of human societies.

The historical materialist concept of society, then, maintains a clear methodological distinction between the mechanisms

of biological evolution and those of social evolution. It is argued that the complexity of human consciousness and the social learning process in human societies effectively set them apart from other biological organisms, such that their *social systems* do not necessarily evolve in accordance with strictly biological models.

(Zeidler 1987: 330)

Social transformation was argued to be qualitative and discontinuous. Zeidler addressed the criticism that a Marxist perspective cannot be operationalized in the study of past societies by proposing relevant analytical units and their material indicators (e.g. processes of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption; inferences on labour processes, the labour force, etc.) in the archaeological record (1987: 333–6). As is clear from the sources cited by Zeidler, historical materialism was the basis for influential works on archaeological theory in Central and South America (see Chapter 2).

Another School of American Research seminar, which took place in 1986, was edited for publication by Steadman Upham as *The Evolution of Political Systems* (1990b). The focus was on small-scale sedentary societies, defined by Haas as ‘those societies in between the relatively simple band organisation characteristic of many known hunting and gathering societies and the centralised, hierarchical and bureaucratic state’ (Upham 1990b: xvi). What Earle and others would call chiefdoms were subsumed within these so-called middle-range societies. Here we see the beginnings of political inequality when, as Hastorf (1990: 147) put it, ‘certain people claim (a) power over others’ decisions about labor, access to production, resources or circulation of certain goods, (b) influence on behaviors and communications between members of the group, or (c) authority over information and special knowledge.’ Although such inequalities have been studied in both the archaeological and ethnographic records, the bias here was toward the time-depth offered by archaeology (cultural anthropologists are outnumbered 8:2 by archaeologists). The range of theoretical positions was slightly broader than in the Earle volume, and Marxist perspectives were more explicitly recognized in a separate section of the book.

As in the volume edited by Earle, the contributors agreed that a rigidly typological approach ignores and obscures the kinds of variations seen in present and past societies. At the same time, the focus of the conference was on societies between the levels of one type, the band, and another type, the state. Following the example of

Feinman and Neitzel (1984), some contributors tried to understand how individual variables interact with each other to define recurrent patterns and to suggest processes by which social change occurred. Upham focused on what he calls four 'axes of variability', namely demographic, economic, social and political (1990c), identifying population density thresholds which appear to be associated with major changes in the organization of societies, such as the emergence of more centralized political leadership. The search for such correlations between variables was also marked in Netting's contribution, which examined the relationships between population density, agricultural intensity and land tenure in the ethnographic record: while such relationships clearly exist (e.g. Netting 1990: 59–61), there is no automatic requirement for political centralization among societies practising intensive agriculture.

A further similarity with the Earle volume lay in the emphasis on political strategies, on control and conflict, and on the critical question as to how the autonomy of local groups and villages was given up. The extent to which political power and inequality is grounded in economic control was once again debated. Hastorf argued strongly that political and economic inequality were not necessarily associated one with another. She cited examples of societies with clear differences of wealth, but no political stratification, and proposed the 'decoupling' of political and economic inequality, at least as far as the beginnings of such inequalities were concerned.

At this stage, leaders are more concerned with symbols of power, opinion changing, and the negotiations of their social position (often giving out as much as they take in) rather than with control of economics. That is, they are engaged in appropriating social legitimation rather than material power.

(Hastorf 1990: 148)

People may, of course, resist the strategies of emerging, or even established, leaders, as was pointed out by both Trigger (1990) and Bender (1990).

Evidence of theoretical cleavage was more marked in this volume than in those of the other three conferences discussed in this section. The perspectives of Marxism and neo-Marxism intruded more forcibly, with more extensive citation of such literature in archaeology and anthropology, and even some anxiety to allay the possible fears of a North American audience over the use of the word 'communism' (Lee 1990)! This perspective formed the basis of papers by Trigger,

Bender, Lee, and Saitta and Keene (1990), while it was acknowledged and criticized by Braun, who advocated a theoretical view based on adaptation and selectionism. It is interesting to note that advocates of theoretical positions as different as those of Plog and Netting, on the one hand, and Saitta and Keene on the other used the same analytical unit, the household, as the basis for study of inequalities in production and labour organization. Although one might imagine that a different theory would dictate the use of different analytical units, this does not appear to be the case in practice here.

This observation is a good point at which to begin summing up these four conference volumes. Given that they were all conceived and published in North America, it is no surprise that cultural evolution and cultural ecology constituted the dominant theoretical approaches. Where historical materialism was introduced into the study of social evolution, it tended to be by Europeans or Latin Americans. Some archaeologists retained a belief in the existence of types of society, while recognizing variation and subdivisions within individual types, such as the chiefdom. Others rejected the existence of any social types as either useful or realistic, preferring more neutral and inclusive terms such as 'middle-range societies'. Whether evolutionists or not, there was widespread consensus that the study of such societies now had to focus on political strategies concerned with the creation and maintenance of power differences, with resistance, conflict and control, rather than simply ecological adaptation. Major differences of opinion existed over the use of biological evolution as an analogy for social change.

But, and this is a big BUT, the research on long-term change in the archaeological record, reported in these conference volumes, revealed the collection of data on variables relevant to different theoretical perspectives. These variables included agricultural production and intensification, surplus production, the organization of labour, demography, exchange and settlement hierarchies. Analytical units ranged from the small-scale, in the household, through the society or the social formation to the pan-regional world system. Neither the theoretical approaches nor the practice of archaeology could be argued to be completely exclusive, as individual archaeologists have come to grips with criticisms of their positions, as well as the implications of the data produced by their research and that of others. As far as social evolution was concerned, the world of archaeological theory and practice in the late 1980s was most certainly different from the 1960s, when cultural evolution permeated Anglo-American archaeology. Cultural evolution was not dead in the late

1980s, but the influence of historical materialism was becoming more prevalent. It is to this influence that we turn in the next section.

By the left, quick march!

Historical materialism has been a major intellectual and political force for the last one hundred and fifty years. Like other bodies of theory, its popularity has vacillated within the social sciences, as has the extent to which adherents to other theories have looked to it for inspiration. Good reviews of its practice and influence can be found for both anthropology (Bloch 1985) and archaeology (McGuire 1992). While Marx's analysis of society began with capitalism, it was always historical in character, as he attempted to show that capitalism was a product of history. But the part played by analysis of prehistoric societies was minimal, given the state of knowledge of such societies in the mid- to late nineteenth century. This did not stop the application of Marxist analyses to prehistoric societies, as we saw in Chapter 2, but this was very restricted within the Anglo-American world until the last three decades.

It is not my intention here to present a detailed exegesis of Marxist thought. The reader is best directed to any one of a series of commentaries or biographies (e.g. Berlin 1939; McLellan 1973, 1975), as well as to key publications by Marx himself (1973), Marx and Engels (1970, 1998) and Engels (1972). While scholars disagree about the interpretation of specific passages and works, and about the evolution of Marx's thought, given the piecemeal and delayed record of its publication, there are central ideas which run through it and provide the basis for the subsequent tradition of historical materialism. These begin with a materialist philosophy and methodology, which assert that the production and reproduction of life are the foundations of historical and social analysis. This materialism was developed as a counter to the Hegelian idealism that permeated nineteenth-century German philosophy. It directed attention to the analysis of production and of the organization and exploitation of surplus labour, especially by control of the means of production (as seen in capitalism). Change was generated by processes internal to society, namely contradictions between the forces and relations of production. Such contradictions and internal conflicts were central to change, as opposed to system maintenance or adaptation, and class was the key social unit of analysis. The environment constrains but does not determine. Change occurs within specific historical

contexts, while the interests of the ruling class are maintained not only by physical coercion, but also by an ideology that represents its interests as those of all classes within a particular society.

With the notable exception of Gordon Childe, historical materialism played a limited role in the study of social change in Anglo-American archaeology before the 1970s. While a handful of classical Marxists looked back to original texts (as they became available in translation), it was the work of what became known as neo, structural or Western Marxist anthropologists in France which provided the decisive impetus (Bloch 1985; McGuire 1992, 1993; Trigger 1993). Scholars such as Godelier, Meillassoux, Terray and Althusser wrestled with what they perceived as the limitations of Marx and Engels's analysis for precapitalist societies, and rejected the way in which a five-stage unilineal history of society (primitive, ancient/slave, feudal, capitalist, communist) had been imposed upon Soviet anthropology and archaeology. At the same time they rejected the functionalist view of society used in British anthropology. For some, such as Terray and Althusser, the unit of analysis of precapitalist societies was the mode of production, more than one of which could be present in a society. For others, such as Rey, the concept of class was extended to apply to all societies, given the evidence for exploitation claimed to be present in non-capitalist and non-state societies (e.g. elders over juniors, men over women). The determination of the superstructure (e.g. ideology) by the economic base was also debated. Althusser gave greater weight to the social relations of production than to the forces of production, while Godelier rejected economic relations as the motor of change and argued the case for factors which would be placed in the superstructure by classical Marxists (e.g. religion, kinship, politics) as determinants of social change.

This resurgence of Marxist and Marxist-inspired thought in anthropology was by no means the result of activity by a uniform school of thought. But it was the authors mentioned above, along with the German critical theorists such as Habermas, who inspired British archaeologists in the period from the mid-1970s until the mid-1980s to draw significantly upon historical materialism (for reviews, see McGuire 1992, 1993; Trigger 1993). The centres of this activity were in University College London and Cambridge, although it was only in UCL that the label 'Marxist archaeology' was justified. Seminal papers on the importance of social relations in the development of farming by Bender (e.g. 1978, 1985) and on the epigenetic, or prestige-goods, model of social evolution by Friedman and Rowlands (1978) were widely cited and stimulated further

research. For example, Kristiansen (1982) focused on contradictions between social relations and economic production from the Neolithic until the Iron Age of northern Europe. Social change was discontinuous, rather than continuous, and followed a series of evolutionary and devolutionary cycles. The scale of social reproduction was at the regional, rather than the local level, tying in with a broader interest in world systems models. Friedman and Rowlands (1978) brought together structural Marxist and other anthropologists and archaeologists for a seminar on the evolution of social systems. The first edited book on Marxist archaeology was published in 1984 (Spriggs 1984), and in the same year the themes of power and ideology were debated in another Cambridge volume (Miller and Tilley 1984).

By the mid- 1980s ideas, concepts and models derived from historical materialism were diffusing widely through Anglo-American archaeology. As has been pointed out by Trigger, not all the authors who embraced this tradition were Marxists, opinion among Marxists was divided, and some wanted to dissociate themselves from the political commitment of Marxism: it is in this context that Trigger refers to 'the disembedded and free-floating nature of Marxist ideas in Western society' (1993: 174). In addition to the explicitly Marxist contributions to the four conferences held between 1985 and 1988 and discussed in the previous section, the spread of these ideas is seen in the focus on political strategies, on domination and resistance, on conflict, on ideology, and on prestige goods. If the 1970s was the decade of administrative models, the 1980s was one of political models.

The concepts of power and ideology featured prominently in such models. Miller and Tilley (1984: 5) followed Foucault rather than Marx in making their distinction between two forms of power:

By *power to* we refer to power as an integral and recursive element in all aspects of social life. *Power over*, by contrast, can be specifically related to forms of social control. While *power to* can be logically disconnected from coercion and asymmetrical forms of social domination and does not, therefore, imply *power over*, the latter sense of the noun power must always involve *power to*.

Everyday relations were power relations: as Paynter and McGuire (1991: 13) put it, such power is 'the capacity to alter events'. This capacity may be exercised by coercion or persuasion. The principal

method of persuasion discussed by theorists has been the use of ideology.

The use of ideology for domination and legitimation, for hiding the real nature of social relations, has been discussed in historical materialism since Marx and Engels's (1970) introduction of the concept of 'false consciousness'. The interests of the ruling class, those who exercise *power over*, are represented as those of all members of society. This is known as the 'dominant ideology' theory and has been subject to criticism recently. Following Abercrombie *et al.* (1980), many now argue that multiple ideologies exist in societies, and that such ideologies provide a means of resistance as well as domination.

Much of this discussion relates to the function of ideology, rather than defining what exactly it is. As much as there is any consensus in the social sciences, most authors refer to ideology in terms of the aspects of culture which are concerned with the relations of power between groups within society. Such ideology may take the form of specific ideas, or what are called 'worldviews', which are associated with particular groups or classes. But what then matters is how these worldviews are expressed and symbolized in the material world, and become the object of human action.

The extent to which these concepts of power and ideology have diffused through archaeological theory and practice may be seen by comparison of two recent books. Earle (1997) acknowledges his education in cultural ecology, and his early research would probably lead him to be classified as a processual archaeologist. But comparison of his three major field research projects in Hawaii, Denmark and Peru reveals a focus on power, including ideology. For Earle, ideology is 'a system of beliefs and ideas presented publicly in ceremonies and other occasions. It is created and manipulated strategically by social segments, most importantly the ruling elite, to establish and maintain positions of social power' (1997: 149). Earle's specific interest is in how these ideas are 'materialised', that is how they are given physical expression (cf. DeMarrais *et al.* 1996). Given Foucault's emphasis on the built environment as a means to express and contextualize power, it is not surprising that Earle examines the materialization of ideology through public ceremonies, often associated with sacred landscapes, and through artefacts symbolic of power, whether they be exotic, esoteric or coercive (i.e. weapons). Ideology is seen by Earle to have played a dominant role in the development of chiefdom societies in Denmark, whereas it was less important than physical coercion in his Peruvian study area and

preceded investment in economic power in Hawaii. It is somewhat confusing for archaeological typologists (see Chapter 2) that an avowedly postprocessual book on the site of the Cahokia period societies of the Mississippi valley, from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries AD (Emerson 1997) cites exactly the same theoretical approach to power and ideology as Earle, along with Earle's means of giving ideology material expression.

This should not, of course, suggest that all differences are merged in some kind of theoretical stew. For Hodder (1996a), the approach to ideology adopted by Earle and his co-workers (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996) elevates control of materials over that of their meanings, which can be understood in different ways, as well as manipulated according to sectional interests. How are new systems of meaning, along with new power relations, adopted? Elsewhere Hodder (1986) criticized papers by Bender, Friedman and Rowlands and others for underplaying the role of ideology, neglecting the meaning of material culture in particular historical contexts, and failing to explain the emergence of new ideologies. For Hodder, materialist is clearly not a term of endearment!

Debates also exist within Marxist anthropology and archaeology. Trigger (1993: 176–81) has grave anxieties about key tenets of neo-structural Marxism, proposing that areas of agreement between this and classical Marxism are fewer than areas of disagreement. He disputes what he sees as an overemphasis on social relations and non-economic factors in precapitalist societies, as well as the claim, propounded by Terray, that classes and exploitation exist(ed) in all societies (e.g. Saitta 1992). This runs counter to ethnographic observations on the acquisition of prestige in small-scale societies through non-accumulative strategies such as giving and feasting. Gilman (1989, 1998) shares these concerns, especially about the idealism and relativism of some avowedly Marxist authors. Both he and Trigger see a greater kinship between classical Marxism and processual archaeology than between the former and neo-structural Marxism. Trigger (no friend of processual archaeology) is led to ask: 'When does the label *Marxist* cease to have meaning? I believe that idealist explanations, and therefore much (but not all) of what passes as neo-Marxism, forfeit the right to bear that name' (1993: 186).

The final area of debate concerns the ability of historical materialists to operationalize their key concepts in the archaeological record. This criticism from non-Marxists (e.g. Wenke 1981) was addressed by Zeidler (1987, see above) with regard to production, distribution, exchange, the material forces of production (e.g. the objects of

labour, the instruments of labour), etc. Other key concepts include class, exploitation (e.g. Mays 1988: 216), the organization of labour (e.g. Bernbeck 1995), and property (e.g. Hunt and Gilman 1998).

Whether formally acknowledged or not, whether explicit or implicit, there is no doubt that historical materialism has helped to raise the profile of political strategies in studies of social change in the past. As we have seen, the roles of power and ideology were widely discussed. At the same time, the relative importance of, and interaction between, social relations and economic production were bones of contention, depending on one's theoretical position. Although reference was often made to the strategies pursued by 'élites' and 'leaders', as well as to the physical and ideological resistance of followers, analysis was still very much at the level of groups within society. The main exception to this, as we have seen, was the recognition that one form of power, *power to*, existed within the context of everyday social relations. It is these kinds of relations, and the roles of individual agents within social change, that were the next objects of study by archaeologists in the 1980s.

Practice makes perfect?

A focus of social analysis on individual action and strategies, as opposed to social institutions and structure, the small scale of everyday activities as opposed to the large-scale processes which are beyond individual control, has been known in different guises as 'action', 'practice' or 'structuration' theory in the Anglo-American world. An interest in factions, individuals, the pursuit of self-interest, and the manipulation of others, whether expressed symbolically or materially, as opposed to cultural norms and structures, was a minority concern within anthropology before the 1970s. Vincent (1978) traced the roots of this approach in the work of anthropologists such as Mair, Leach and Firth, but it was only really developed, by Barth (1966), Cohen (1974), Boissevain (1964), Turner (1957) and others, within the context of what became known as political anthropology in the 1960s. Ortner (1984) provided a good synthesis of the subsequent development of this approach. However, the two scholars with whom a focus on individual action is most associated during the last two decades have been the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1979). In what follows, I will focus attention on Giddens's theoretical contribution, and its effect on archaeological analysis of social change.

Giddens's structuration theory centres on the relationship between the actions of individuals and the larger-scale social structures of which they are a part. It is argued that all social actors, or agents, are knowledgeable about the social and natural worlds in which they live. This knowledgeability is not unlimited, and individuals are not necessarily able to produce the desired outcomes of their actions. There may also be unintended consequences of these actions. The character of knowledge takes different forms, depending on the degree to which individuals conceive of their actions in terms of conscious thought. These actions are carried out in the context of the everyday lives of individuals, what Giddens refers to as social practices. These practices enjoy what is called a 'recursive' relationship with social structure: that is, neither is determined by the other (e.g. structure does not determine agency), but 'the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices that constitute these systems' (1982: 36–7). The social system as a whole is produced and reproduced during the course of this active relationship between practice and structure. As Roscoe puts it, 'structure comprises a complex of rules and resources that shape but do not determine social action. Agents receive these rules and resources as "objective conditions", but rather than responding mechanically to them, they use them creatively to perform activities and achieve ends' (1993: 113). Social systems continue at the same time as they change.

This relationship between individual actors, social practices and the social structure (or Bourdieu's 'habitus', learnt through the process of socialization in daily life) was seized upon initially by the proponents of postprocessual archaeology in Cambridge (e.g. Hodder 1982a; Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b; Johnson 1989; Yates 1989), for which the work of Giddens and Bourdieu provided an essential theoretical plank. British archaeologists who also made use of this plank, although not necessarily styling themselves 'postprocessual', include, most notably, Barrett (1988), who made the study of social practices the object of archaeological analysis (cf. Shennan 1993).

During the last decade the concepts of agency and structuration have diffused through the Anglo-American archaeological literature. Although widely cited, there is little consensus on the meaning of agency (Table 3.1), nor on the amount of change that individual action can cause in social institutions, nor on the extent to which the individual is a social product of the post-Enlightenment period. The focus on 'individual narratives of lived lives and events' (Hodder

MODELS OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Table 3.1 Ten meanings of 'agency'

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- 1 Replication of unconscious cognitive structures.
 - 2 Social reproduction of, and resistance to, system-wide power relations through cultural actions.
 - 3 Constitution of individual subjectivity through diffuse power relations.
 - 4 Constitution of the individual as a psychological entity.
 - 5 The experience of individual action in creating a 'life story'.
 - 6 The imposition of form on material via socially situated creative activity.
 - 7 Intersubjective engagement with the material and social world.
 - 8 The creation of formal and social distinctions through expressive activity.
 - 9 The successful deployment of discursive and non-discursive technological knowledge and skill.
 - 10 The strategic pursuit of intentional plans for purposive goals, especially with culturally constructed ideas of personhood, class or cosmos.
-

Source: Adapted from Dobres and Robb 2000: 9

2000: 22) would seem to be of limited use to archaeology, given the nature of its evidence. In some examples the works of Giddens and Bourdieu are cited, but they do not provide the basis for model building or analysis (e.g. Blanton *et al.* 1996). Discussions of emerging social complexity now include reference to practice theory, including the wider range of authors cited above, and focus on the internal generation of social change. For example, Arnold (1995: 89) advocates approaches based on power building, consultation, manipulation, calculation, negotiation and factional competition as recognition that the development of social inequality is an active, rather than a passive, process. But the opportunity to be active, to employ political strategies, occurs under conditions of external stress. In this case human agency is claimed to be central to the theoretical approach, but it is a long way from Giddens and Bourdieu (neither of whom are cited).

In contrast Earle (1997) looks at the issues raised by practice theory for the study of social evolution among chiefdom societies. His study of ideology (see above) takes one of its starting points from Geertz's ideas about the creation and existence of culture through the enactment of public ritual. Using Bourdieu and others, Earle argues that 'cultural phenomena are not rules held in people's heads, but the daily actions of people habituated and instructed as they go about their routine lives' (1997: 148). Taking structuration theory on board, Earle enthuses that 'culture exists as a constantly moving objective world, experienced as it is created by its members' (1997: 149). At the same time, his approach to ideology is still

developed from the perspective of the ruling élite, and practice theory and structuration do not direct his analysis of particular archaeological sequences.

Clark and Blake (1994: 17) construct an influential model of the emergence of institutionalized inequality, based on 'self-interested competition among political actors vying for prestige or social esteem'. Following Giddens, they assume that social systems consist of 'regularized practices', which are not endowed with rationality or the ability to adapt. Social actors possess knowledge of the system and the constraints on it (e.g. past practices). The ambitious actors 'vying for prestige or social esteem' are males (itself a gendered bias – see Gero 2000) and known as 'aggrandizers', and their ability to promote themselves depends to a large extent on favourable environmental conditions and the long-term, unintended consequences of the cumulative actions. For Clark and Blake this approach shows social systems, through these individuals, acting on, rather than reacting to, ecological variables. They open up consideration of long-term change, which does not figure in the work of either Giddens or Bourdieu, in their proposal that the transition to institutionalized inequality requires the introduction of new social practices before structural change. Such practices have to be maintained for a sufficient (but unspecified) length of time so that they become 'habitual'. This raises questions as to the continuous or discontinuous nature of change within the structuration model, and the degree to which the recursive relationship between practice and structure is equally balanced. Criticism has also been made of such 'individualist' models, since 'the action of any one individual can have no historical consequence unless others participate in the moments of interaction' (Pauketat 2000: 117). According to this view, we should focus on the social practices of the many rather than the few.

This does, of course, raise the question as to how far in general practice theory, which has been developed within the context of synchronic studies, can be applied unchanged to the study of long-term change, using the particular kinds of data available to archaeology. Structuration theory has been criticized within the social sciences, and that critique, both positive and negative, has extended into archaeology (e.g. Last 1995; Meskell 1999).

There have also been attempts to build intellectual bridges between practice theory as a whole and both evolutionary and historical materialist approaches to the past. Shennan (1989, 1991) noted the criticism that structuration theory undervalues the constraints exercised by social structure upon social action, and that it fails to

account for the development of social institutions. But his main point was that the theory fails to account for cultural transmission, the persistence of human societies through space and time. For this, Shennan sought to establish a rapprochement between structuration theory and neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, arguing that they are complementary rather than antagonistic approaches to social change.

Earle (1991a) also pursued the same aim, focusing on individual choice and the transmission and transformation of human behaviour between generations. Choice has been viewed in terms of economic, evolutionary or cultural rationality, and Earle proposed a synthesis between these which took into account the arguments that (a) there is a biological basis to cultural transmission (cf. Shennan) and (b) individual choice is constrained by group association. Other authors have also tried to distinguish between short-term, human agency and strategies, and the long-term evolutionary mechanisms which select for the persistence of particular strategies over generations (e.g. Plog and Braun 1984; Spencer 1997: 230).

Construction of different bridges has been proposed between practice theory and historical materialism, given that the work of Marx provided one of the roots for practice theory. McGuire argued that 'we should seek our explanations for history in the real dialectical interplay of nature, structure, culture and agency in the specific cases we study' (1992: 143–4), but that this should be done at the level of the group rather than the individual (1992: 134), given the Marxist maxim that 'humans make history as social beings'. There is no room for methodological individualism (which focuses on the actions of individuals as the determinant of social change) in classical Marxism, although it has resurfaced recently in what has become known as analytical Marxism. However, Callinicos has provided an excellent critique of the primacy of individual action in this school of thought and a reaffirmation of the classical Marxist position: 'historical materialism specifies the structural capacities possessed by agents by virtue of their position in productive relations i.e. their class position' and 'it claims that these capacities, and also the class interests which agents share, have primacy in explaining their actual behaviour' (1987: 94).

Conclusions

Views of society and social change have clearly taken several forms during the last four decades. Neo-evolutionism, with its focus on social structure, institutions, statuses and roles, attempted to bring

order to the ethnographic record of non-capitalist societies. Proponents defined and redefined types of society, which were placed in an evolutionary sequence (with due allowance for debate over the originality of tribal societies). Processual archaeologists used these types to structure their study of past social systems. At the same time, the use of societal typologies was subjected to rigorous criticism, from both processual and non-processual camps. Within North American archaeology in the 1970s, the focus on ecology and adaptation in neo-evolutionary thinking gave way (although it did not disappear) to one on administration, as a theory of social evolution (especially towards state society) based on information processing and decision-making hierarchies was developed. *Homo economicus* had been replaced by *Homo bureauraticus*!

By the mid-1980s, and in spite of continued criticism, the societal types of neo-evolutionism were still embedded in archaeology. But now talk of chiefdoms, hierarchies, inequalities and social complexity was viewed in terms of power and political strategies, conflict, control and exploitation. Politics was no longer subsumed under administration. Within this tradition, opinion was divided as to the kinds of political strategies used by leaders and élites, as well as the material conditions of their existence, the processes by which complexity evolved, and the utility of neo-evolutionary concepts. Opinion was also divided as to the role of ideological, as opposed to material, factors in social evolution. This reflected the permeation of historical materialist thinking, mainly in the form of neo-Marxism, into Anglo-American archaeology. Some explored regional and even world systems of social reproduction, and the existence was recognized of both evolutionary and devolutionary cycles of social change. Debate ensued as to the role of non-economic factors in social change, as well as the existence (or not) of classes in precapitalist societies, and the degree to which essential concepts of historical materialism could be operationalized in the archaeological record.

Opposed to both neo-evolutionist and historical materialist approaches to society and social change, practice theory also 'hit' archaeology in the mid-1980s. Proponents focused on individual agency, rather than groups, classes and institutions, and advocated a non-deterministic relationship between agency and social structure. Continuity and change were no longer opposed to each other.

This history of different approaches to society and social change is important both in itself and as an example of the complexity of disciplinary change. Rather than a simple, linear sequence of approaches we see ongoing traditions of thought. Debate occurred

within and between these traditions. While they appeared initially to be mutually exclusive (as probably intended by their proponents as part of the process of self-definition), ideas and concepts were adopted in spite of the tradition boundaries. Paradigms were seen to be permeable rather than incommensurable. This permeation occurred when what may be regarded each time as the 'mainstream' came under attack from new approaches. Whether the result of internal variation, productive tensions, or the desire to explore new approaches as the productivity of existing approaches succumbs to the law of diminishing returns, the boundaries between traditions have been crossed by intellectual bridges. The agents of such engineering projects are individual archaeologists. The bridges they build may provide theoretical links (e.g. structuration and neo-Darwinism) and practical ones (e.g. operationalizing concepts such as property and exploitation in the archaeological record, and using common units of analysis, such as the household) between different traditions of thought. For some archaeologists (those in the mainstream?) this process is to be expected, as we look to develop the intellectual tools to study the past. There is no monopoly on wisdom. For others, this may amount to a process of homogenization, with the loss of distinct theoretical identities.

These ideas and scenarios need to be explored in greater detail within archaeology, to move us away from simplistic ideas of paradigm replacement. For now I want to move on from looking at approaches to the study of society and social change to scrutiny of key concepts such as 'egalitarian', 'inequality', 'hierarchy' and 'complexity'. In the next chapter I look at their definition, especially as dichotomies, and their use in the study of contemporary and past societies.

4

MATTERS OF TERMINOLOGY

Back to basics

In Chapter 1, I argued that the world in which we live is both complex and full of inequalities. Trends towards such complexity (which subsume inequalities of wealth, gender, etc.) have been the focus of interest among scholars since the eighteenth century, before the social sciences came into existence. Evolutionary sequences of society and culture have been proposed since then, whether based on living or past societies. Since the 1960s archaeologists have wrestled with concepts of society and social evolution (although some prefer the, to them, less loaded word ‘change’), as we have seen in Chapter 3. Disagreements in Anglo-American archaeology are clearly visible in definitions of society, in the motors of social change, in the form such change takes and in the scales of analysis which are required to study that change. At the same time, there are various terms that are used widely in the literature, and which have been mentioned in Chapter 3, but which have yet to be defined. In this chapter I will focus on the definition of such terms, and on their use in the study of both contemporary and past societies. I hope this will enable the reader to negotiate his/her way through a potential terminological minefield and to understand the obsession with the dichotomous thinking that pervades social thought. According to this, societies are either egalitarian or not, hierarchical or not, and simple or complex. I will begin with concepts of equality and inequality, egalitarian and stratified, hierarchical and heterarchical, before considering the concept of complexity.

Egalitarian relations and egalitarian societies?

If our world is complex and unequal, then it is no surprise to find speculation that the societies of our earliest ancestors were ‘simple’ and egalitarian. In other words, there was some ‘original state of

man', a baseline from which social evolution sprang. Whether this 'original state' was to be envied and admired or regarded as inferior to later stages of evolution became a matter of opinion. For some scholars, our earliest ancestors were 'noble savages', endowed with dignity in their simple state, while for others their hunter-gatherer descendants represented an 'original affluent society' (to quote Sahlins 1972), well off in the basic necessities of life, even if they lived on the margins of modern states and lacked their technologies.

This belief in the dichotomy between equality and egalitarian societies on the one side, and inequality and complex societies on the other, has a long ancestry in the social sciences. It was emphasized in an influential study of African political systems by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940). The authors defined three types of political organization among indigenous African societies. While hunter-gatherer groups, with their ties of kinship, were defined as one of these types, it was the opposition between the other two types, those of states and stateless societies, which has proved so influential. As Flanagan (1989: 245–6) has pointed out, stateless societies were defined by negative traits: they lacked the centralized authority and institutionalized hereditary inequality of state societies. Where positive traits were stressed, they focused on the segmentary lineages and situational leadership of African stateless societies. The key point is that the terms equality and egalitarian were not defined in themselves, but as the opposites of inequality and stratification. Analysis began with a dichotomy, and worked back from states to stateless societies.

But what do we mean by egalitarian, or equality? We could mean equality of opportunity, by which all members of society are born with the same opportunities to earn social position and wealth during the course of their lives. This, of course, is the ideological basis of North American society, in which the farm boy can rise to be president or earn a vast fortune, and all are equal before God and the law. Such a triumph for democracy may be due to unequal abilities, whether these are intelligence, hard work and effort, entrepreneurial flair or sheer deviousness and dishonesty. Not for nothing have two modern presidents of the United States of America been nicknamed 'Tricky Dicky' and 'Slick Willy'!

But individual abilities do not tell the whole story and must be placed in their social context. Although North America, along with other Western democracies, adheres to this equality of opportunity, and aspiring leaders advocate wider access to the benefits of education and health, it is clear that this definition of equality is an ideal

that fails to find support in practice. We are a long way from equality of opportunity for immigrants and ethnic minorities, for the homeless (what has become known as the 'underclass'), for women, and so on. The degree of equality in the conditions of life counts for more than any ideology of equality of opportunity. Democracy and universal suffrage allows regular opportunities to exercise one's vote, but this does not necessarily result in any change in the conditions of life. The right to vote may also be prevented or impeded, as was seen in the case of ethnic minorities in Florida during the last US presidential election.

In ethnographic contexts equality of opportunity and outcome may or may not coincide. While the !Kung Bushmen and New Guinea highlanders share equality of opportunity, this does not apply to outcome: the equality of outcome seen among the !Kung is less visible in the New Guinea highlands, where political and economic inequality may be achieved during individual lifetimes (Flanagan 1988: 166). It is important here to specify how equality or inequality are measured: Western scholars tend to use economic criteria, but social scientists have reminded us of other criteria valued in ethnographic contexts such as differential knowledge, access to the supernatural or the exotic, and different skills and abilities.

These issues show that distinctions need to be made between egalitarian social relations and practices, egalitarian societies (see Chapter 3) and egalitarian ideologies (i.e. egalitarianism). Flanagan (1989: 248) located inequalities and hierarchies of inequalities between individuals in the realm of everyday, interpersonal relations, or social organization, in contrast to stratification (the division of society into ranked, institutionalized categories of people such as classes and castes), which he argues is part of social structure. According to this argument, individual social systems can have elements of hierarchy and equality, depending on the criteria used and the daily practices of social life. 'There are no egalitarian societies', but 'there are egalitarian contexts, or scenes, or situations' (Flanagan 1989: 261).

What we may classify as non-egalitarian, or hierarchical, social systems may show egalitarian social relations, while so-called egalitarian societies exhibit different kinds of inequalities. There are degrees of equality and hierarchy. Even capitalist societies include egalitarian relations. These may be expressed and practised at different levels of society. They may often occur at local levels such as industrial or workers' co-operatives and communes of various kinds (e.g. Greenwood 1988 on the Basque region of Spain). Egalitarian

relations may be practised on the margins of state societies, in both the spatial and the social sense of the word. Salzman (1999) argues that there are differences in the degrees of equality and inequality in the social relations of pastoralist tribes, depending on the extent to which they are integrated into state societies. Such relations do not, of course, change the dominant, economic relations that structure capitalist society. As Donner (1988: 158) wrote, 'subsystems that are based upon egalitarian relationships may be valued by people who simultaneously participate in larger social systems that are based upon hierarchical and stratified social interactions.' Perhaps the best examples of this are the kibbutz communes of Israel, which are based upon the communal mode of production (Keene 1991). Some 3 per cent of the population of Israel live on kibbutzim, but they produce around 50 per cent of the country's agricultural produce, as well as 75 per cent of its industrial output. This is by no means a marginal activity. And yet, while being fully integrated into the capitalist world system, egalitarian social relations are practised within kibbutzim.

We return to the classification of societies (as we may count the kibbutzim for purposes of analysis) as either equal or unequal. In these cases there is clearly variation in degrees of egalitarian relations and practices in daily life, in spite of integration into, and subordination to, dominant, unequal economic relations. This variation and the problems posed by dichotomous thinking have been raised in other ethnographic and archaeological contexts. Plog (1995) notes the coexistence of egalitarian and hierarchical dimensions in the ethnographic records of Pueblo societies in the American Southwest. An egalitarian ideology stressed social integration through sodalities, while hierarchical relations were witnessed in differential control of scarce resources (especially prime agricultural land) and knowledge of ritual. Tensions and conflicts were just as much a part of Pueblo life as was integration.

McGuire and Saitta also argue that the ethnographic and archaeological records of Pueblo societies show them as being 'complex, communal societies' (1996: 201) which 'embodied both consensual and hierarchical social relations' (1996: 198). While the means of production were held in common, and surplus was collectively appropriated, individual Pueblo groups did not necessarily have equal access to property and resources, the labour of some groups was appropriated by others, and there were inequalities (including the exercise of power *to* and *over*) within and between groups. Rather than continue the search for unequivocal traits that allow us to

classify Pueblo societies as either egalitarian or hierarchical, we should recognize the complexity of real-life situations in which equal and unequal relations and practices are present. Each may also become dominant social relations in turn, as can be seen in the oscillations between predominantly egalitarian and hierarchical society among the Kachin (Friedman 1975), and in parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Keech McIntosh 1999a). The ethnographic record of the Americas has also been used to support the argument that short-term political unification of autonomous villages under the leadership of chieftains can occur in contexts such as increasing levels of warfare (Redmond 1998). The emergence of such leaders by no means implies that their position will become permanent and hereditary, nor that it will impose on all aspects of daily life.

In some contexts, as we have seen in Chapter 3, relations and practices of inequality are concealed behind an ideology of egalitarianism (defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'that which asserts equality'). For example, Mars (1988) showed how the emergence of élites in some Israeli kibbutzim since their creation in 1948 has been concealed by the predominant ideology of egalitarianism. Gerlach and Gerlach (1988) argued that the assertion of egalitarianism among the Digo tribe of Kenya was a means of concealing and coping with their history of hierarchical and stratified society (including the practice of slavery) under colonial rule.

Where they exist, egalitarian social relations do not define some idyllic state of innocence and happiness that requires no effort. As Rayner (1988) argued, there is no dichotomy between the rules and constraints of stratification on the one hand, and a kind of unconstrained, rule-less freedom of egalitarian relations on the other hand.

Egalitarian relationships are not simply non-hierarchical, but are achieved and maintained by the social and symbolic manipulation of often complex rule systems governing decision-making. Hence egalitarian systems of social organisation place costly demands upon their members for participation and vigilance.

(Flanagan and Rayner 1988: 2–3)

According to Rayner (1988: 21) the most frequent combination of such rules is between 'homogenizing' rules (e.g. communal ownership, rules of poverty), which promote strict equality, and

'equal-opportunity' rules (e.g. allowing uneven accumulation of personal property, but not inherited wealth), which promote equity.

Ideologies of generosity, reciprocity and sharing among small-scale, non-capitalist societies counter tendencies to the individual accumulation that might accentuate inequalities. Richard Lee (1982) has documented the variety of levelling devices used in everyday social relations among the !Kung Bushmen: these include joking, teasing, accusations of stinginess, praise for generosity, playing down the size of kills or the value of gifts, all within the context of social practices carried out in the open and not concealed from public view.

Circulating information to all members of a group, or an organization, so that decision-making can take place by consensus, is also costly in terms of time, resources and money. Great energy goes into the prevention of internal schisms by such circulation and communal decision-making, as Rayner (1988) shows in a study of the International Marxist Group in the 1970s. The costs of decision-making in relation to information communication have already been discussed in Chapter 3, with special regard to the emergence of social hierarchies when what are called critical thresholds of information processing are reached. That such an emergence of hierarchies is not an automatic consequence of scalar stress (as proposed by Johnson 1982) is supported by Keene's observation that such stress has not removed communal ownership of production and appropriation of surplus from kibbutzim (1991: 384).

It is important, then, to make distinctions between egalitarian relations, societies and ideologies, and to recognize that all societies may exhibit tensions between egalitarian and hierarchical relations. This is particularly important for our understanding of what Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (see above) called 'stateless' societies, which have always included a wide variety of social forms in which such tensions were present and acted out daily. Once this observation is accepted, the task of archaeological analysis becomes both more challenging and more realistic.

Inequalities and hierarchies

Inequalities are now recognized in all societies, from hunters and gatherers to states. They take different forms and are expressed in different ways. In spite of ideologies of egalitarianism among hunters and gatherers, there are inequalities in practices as basic as the sharing of food. This is often regarded as a means to ensure the

prevention of inequalities in access to nutrition, and as a means of pooling risk during periods of shortage. However, Speth (1990) showed how differences in access to nutrition can result from the sharing out of different parts of animal carcasses: the best hunters may have preferential access to the parts of animals with the best fat values at kill sites, while the same parts of their carcasses may vary in nutritional value according to seasonal variation in fat depletion. Taboos may prevent both children and women from access to proper nutrition during critical periods of their life cycles. Women may be kept undernourished as part of male strategies to maintain gender inequality. Such nutritional differences are also noted between different groups of hunter-gatherers: there are no common levels of stature, body weight, mortality, etc. There is even evidence among the N.Aché of Paraguay that supports the hypothesis that hunting ability leads to greater reproductive success (Kaplan and Hill 1985).

In such societies, along with small-scale agriculturalists, which have been broadly classified as egalitarian, band or tribal societies (see Chapter 3), inequalities centre on personal attributes, as well as age and sex, as males control the labour of females, or elders are superior to juniors. Among the !Kung there appear to be equal roles for men and women (e.g. the women participate in decision-making and have a predominant role in production), but the position of women in other hunter and gatherer societies varies (Lee 1990).

Godelier's (1982) study of the Baruya of highland New Guinea serves as a good example of inequalities and social hierarchies in agricultural societies. Godelier began by listing the personal attributes, or 'talents', which distinguish, and are used by, 'big men': these include magical powers, oratory, strength and courage displayed in warfare and ability and energy expended in agricultural production. Then he examined inequalities of gender. Males control the means of both production and destruction: women take no part in the ownership of land, tools for forest clearance, and weapons, nor in the manufacture of salt (for exchange), the pursuit of trading expeditions, and the possession and use of sacred objects. As Godelier said, 'Baruya women are thus subordinate to men materially, politically and symbolically' (1982: 11). Symbolic differences are also marked in the initiation ceremonies for males and females: male initiation may take up to ten years, whereas ceremonies for females only last a few weeks, and the latter include both instruction in, and representation of, female submission to men. Thus 'the role of male and female initiations is to produce, and at the same time legitimate, the general domination of men, of all men, whatever may be

their personal attributes, over women, all women, whoever they are' (1982: 15).

Other social hierarchies are also present among the Baruya. Selected males prepare and direct the initiation ceremonies. The males of particular lineages inherit the knowledge required by tribal tradition for these ceremonies. Inequalities are also evident in the ability to become warriors, shamen or cassowary hunters: in the case of warriors and hunters, the inequalities are between males and females, who are not allowed to participate, while women can be shamen, but of lesser status than male shamen (Godelier 1982: 23). Lastly, for both males and females, seniors enjoy superiority over juniors: for example the initiates are superior to non-initiates, and those in the later stages of initiation enjoy the respect of those beginning their initiation. At the same time, it should be noted that a boy who has been initiated then becomes senior to all of his elder sisters. The big men, great men and great women who receive the greatest attention in accounts of inequalities in highland New Guinea societies are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to assessing the full range of their social hierarchies.

In another highland New Guinea society, that of the Duna (Modjeska 1982), elder brothers possess secret knowledge and carry out rituals which are accepted as necessary for the reproduction of the fertility of a lineage's land, its wild and domesticated animals (especially its pigs) and its people. The magical powers associated with this knowledge and ritual practice, along with the myths through which these powers are affirmed, are the ultimate sources of the superiority of elder over younger brothers. Juniors are dependent on elder brothers for the reproduction of life, and give them their labour when required. While the latter are responsible for gardening and family life, the elder brothers engage in hunting. Such superiority of age and kinship is frequently cited in African ethnographies, in which, for example, the superiority of elders over juniors is based on the control of bridewealth in return for labour.

Inequalities and gender relations have been studied for other areas of Melanesia (e.g. Strathern 1987). For example, in Kwaio society there are inequalities between males and females in the control of resources such as pigs and valuables, in magical knowledge, in access to public ceremonies, in the control over weapons, and so forth (Keesing 1987). Elsewhere debate has taken place on the extent to which gender hierarchies and lower status for women occur, or occurred, in all societies. In particular the degree to which women's status changed with the emergence of the state (taking up a

tradition of thought initiated by Engels) has been the focus of recent differences of opinion (Silverblatt 1988). Current thinking is against excessive generalization. Leacock (1983) cited examples of stratified West African societies in which women hold positions of public authority. Nelson (1998) argues against any universal subordination of women to men in state societies: she notes the examples of ruling women in a variety of early state societies, from the European Celts to early Sumer, Japan and Korea. The Silla state of the first to seventh centuries AD in Korea is notable, among other things, for the fact that the largest and most distinguished of the royal tombs was constructed for a woman. Gender inequality as a whole appears to have been absent.

Social inequalities, then, can occur in all societies and are negotiated and contested within the context of everyday interpersonal relations and practices. They are also resisted, as we have seen in Chapter 3, although this capacity varies according to, among other things, the effectiveness of physical and ideological coercion. Inequalities take different forms, and the presence of one form (e.g. economic inequality) need not necessarily imply the presence of another (e.g. political inequality). This reminds us of Hastorf's 'decoupling' concept, which was mentioned in Chapter 3. Whatever their form, such inequalities occur, somewhat confusingly, within what are usually described as egalitarian societies.

More than anything else, this distinction of egalitarian as opposed to stratified society highlights the ways in which inequalities are organized (Berreman 1981). In so-called egalitarian societies inequalities are unranked, status is based upon criteria such as age, gender and personal characteristics, and reciprocity and generosity are valued more highly than selfish accumulation of wealth and resources. In stratified societies inequalities are institutionalized: they occur 'as a result of rules that act effectively to bar part of the population from social, economic, or political resources' (Jones 1981: 151). Such rules divide society into non-kin-based classes, which can be further divided into the exploiters and the exploited. Persuasion has now given way to coercion. Such stratified societies can still include egalitarian social relations and practices, albeit under the control of the dominant economic relations. One of the challenges for archaeology is to trace changes in the forms of social inequality, and the extent to which these forms coexisted in the same societies, while at the same time analysing major transformations in social structure.

Hierarchy and heterarchy

The integration of hierarchy into the structure of society, as proposed for stratified as opposed to egalitarian societies, was central to the study of early states by Henry Wright and Greg Johnson, which was discussed in Chapter 3. They argued that the problems posed by greater information communication and regulation in larger-scale societies required the emergence of centralized and specialized administrators and decision-makers. 'Decision-making hierarchies essentially allow the co-ordination of a large number of activities and/or integration of a larger number of organizational units than would be possible in the absence of such hierarchies' (Johnson 1978: 87). Societies were divided vertically into different administrative levels, with higher levels integrating, co-ordinating and regulating the activities of lower levels, and horizontally into different administrators responsible for different activities. These hierarchies of decision-makers were now integrated into the structure of society, rather than simply pursuing interpersonal relationships. For Wright and Johnson, these decision-making hierarchies were most clearly identified in the archaeological record in hierarchies of settlement area sizes, which served as a proxy measure of population size. All political and economic activities were centralized within such hierarchies.

Johnson (1982) also made a terminological distinction between the hierarchies present in these stratified societies and those that existed in the interpersonal relations of non-stratified societies. Simultaneous hierarchies

are hierarchies of the familiar sort in which system integration is achieved through the exercise of control and regulatory functions by a relatively small proportion of the population. Such functions may be exercised simultaneously at a number of hierarchically structured levels of control. As such, the entire control hierarchy 'exists' at any given time.

(Johnson 1982: 396)

In contrast, the decision-makers in sequential hierarchies are not specialized, and different leaders emerge in different contexts (e.g. resolving disputes, leading warfare, organizing exchange, etc.). Consensus may be negotiated initially within nuclear families, then extended families, the village, and so on. The development from sequential to simultaneous hierarchies was a central focus of

Johnson's research, and has subsequently been pursued by other scholars (e.g. Paynter 1989: 382; Aldenderfer 1993; Spencer 1993).

But need all stratified societies be centrally organized, such that a single, regional, decision-making and settlement hierarchy coordinates and integrates all aspects of political and economic activity? This is the question raised by a different concept, that of heterarchy, which was introduced into archaeology by Carole Crumley (1979), who queried the automatic correlation of social and spatial hierarchies. Her definition of heterarchy was 'the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked . . . when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways' (1979: 144). Crumley used the example of an automobile company which

may be seen as hierarchically organized in terms of corporate decision-making, and heterarchically organized in terms of the production of an automobile: into the final product goes the expertise of administrative, research and design, assembly and sales departments. If the unit of study is the automobile, all aspects are equally important. If the study has as its focus departmental efficiency or an interdepartmental softball tournament, however, the departments might be variously ranked.

(1979: 144)

According to this perspective, aspects of hierarchy and heterarchy may be present in the same society, while political centralization need not be as pervasive as is implied in the decision-making model outlined above. Multiple, parallel hierarchies can exist within the same society: for example, there were lay, Church and craft hierarchies within early medieval Ireland (Wailes 1995). Among the lowland Maya there were hierarchical settlement and ceremonial centres (e.g. Tikal, Palenque, etc.), but economic and craft production were not automatically subject to central control: whereas politically and ritually valuable items were probably under central control, community specialization near to the key resources accounted for mass-produced pottery and lithics (Potter and King 1995). A stratified political system coexisted with a horizontally structured economic system.

Levy (1995) argues for the existence of chiefdom society in Bronze Age Denmark, most conspicuously visible in the hierarchical burial treatment. In contrast, there is only what Levy describes as a 'limited and flat' settlement hierarchy. She argues that the basis of

the chiefs' power was not one of economic control: for example, the evidence for metalworking on almost all Later Bronze Age settlements argues against the existence of attached specialists. There was no centralized control of the main subsistence and productive resources. The basis of chiefly power, according to Levy, was in the control of ritual and esoteric knowledge.

Similar issues are raised for early states in South-east Asia by White (1995), who argues that control over commodity production and distribution was not the main basis of the political power of regional élites. Craft specialization and long-distance exchange were decentralized. Metallurgy was based on household production, and there was community specialization in the types of metal artefacts produced. In the absence of centralized control, ritual activities may have served to solve occasional inter-community conflict. There was even evidence for decentralized rice production and irrigation systems. As White points out, such heterarchical structures occurred in state societies in which there are examples of non-hierarchical factors such as age and 'virtue' being used to decide on succession to office. White argues that hierarchical and heterarchical relations belong on a continuum within complex societies, and that an awareness of heterarchy allows us to bring into our analysis of specific cases the possibility of flexibility in social status, gender relations, political relationships and rules for individual behaviour, as well as decentralized economies and multiple ideologies (1995: figure 9.2).

This perspective on hierarchy and heterarchy, coupled with the earlier discussion of equality and inequality, allows us to pursue more subtle analyses of social systems than those based on societal typologies. It also has implications for our conception of the term complexity, to which I now turn.

A complex issue?

Price (1995: 140) is of the opinion that 'there seem to be as many definitions of complexity as there are archaeologists interested in the subject.' While there are clearly divisions as to the degree of complexity shown by particular societies (e.g. whether they should be regarded as chiefdoms or states), there is some unanimity among Anglo-American archaeologists as to how complexity is defined and measured. Price's preference for the dictionary definition – 'things complex have more parts and more connections between parts' (1995: 140)– has much in common with how complexity has been studied during the last three decades. It is also in accord with the

wider usage of the term 'complex' within archaeology: we refer to simple/complex house and settlement plans, architecture, pottery designs and forms, technologies, rituals, artistic motifs on rock art, and so forth.

Flannery (1972) initiated this tradition of thought. For him state societies were complex systems (in line with his cultural ecology approach, see Chapter 3), and complexity was measured in terms of two variables. *Segregation* was defined as the degree of differentiation and specialization within an individual system ('more parts'), while *centralization* referred to the degree to which the internal parts of a system were linked to each other ('connections') and to different levels of social control. These variables became the basis of subsequent analyses of decision-making hierarchies in early state societies (see Chapter 3). Later authors used Flannery's definition as the basis for the distinction between horizontal and vertical dimensions of complexity: the former focused on the individual parts of a system and the degree to which they were functionally specialized, while the latter was concerned with ranked differences between the individual parts. Perhaps the clearest example of this distinction is seen in Blanton *et al.*'s (1981) study of the development of the early state in Mesoamerica.

McGuire (1983) followed this line of thinking in arguing that complexity must be divided into its component variables before being subject to archaeological analysis. He distinguished two major variables, namely heterogeneity ('the distribution of populations between social groups') and inequality ('differential access to material and social resources within a society'). Inequality is further divided into absolute, proportional and relative forms (McGuire 1983: 102), and the difference between the two variables is expressed as follows: 'whereas heterogeneity indicates how many individuals have comparable access to resources, inequality measures how much difference there is between comparable levels of access' (McGuire 1983: 102). The key point of McGuire's argument is that these two variables are not positively correlated, so that an increase in heterogeneity accompanies an equivalent increase in inequality. He uses the example of Predynastic and Dynastic Egypt to propose that the construction of the pyramids marked the development of a relatively high degree of inequality, but a lower degree of heterogeneity.

The argument that complexity must be broken down into its constituent variables, so that different forms of complex society can be distinguished, and different degrees of complexity can be

measured, is widely held in Anglo-American archaeology. Recently, for example, Nelson (1995) has listed a number of characteristics of complexity, including large populations, horizontal and vertical social differentiation, hereditary ranking, and élite appropriation of production, which need not all be present in all examples of complex society. He focuses attention on two variables, scale and hierarchy, and argues that these need not be positively correlated with each other: for example, the pueblos of Chaco Canyon, in the American South-west, show larger scale, in terms of population and spatial size, while the monumental centre at La Quemada, in northern Mexico, shows evidence of a more hierarchical structure. For Nelson these differences are those of different types of chiefdoms (collaborative vs coercive).

In all of these studies a distinction is made between the 'surface' traits (e.g. hereditary ranking) and the 'deep' variables (e.g. differentiation, integration) which archaeologists use to identify more complex societies in the past. Some authors (e.g. Minnegal and Dwyer 1998) have criticized the focus on these traits and variables at the expense of a clear statement as to what complexity actually *is*. For Flannery, as we have seen, the focus was on early states as examples of complex systems. This followed the divide between state and stateless societies initiated by Fortes and Evans Pritchard (see above, page 72). Archaeologists and anthropologists have raised two major problems with this dichotomy during the last three decades. The first problem concerns the status of hunters and gatherers as the 'simple' baseline from which all human societies evolved. The second problem focuses attention directly on the state–stateless divide and the definition of the state.

Hunters and gatherers: the 'simple' baseline?

Lee and Devore (1968: 11) set our image of hunter and gatherer societies in the much-cited observation that '(1) they live in small groups and (2) they move around a lot.' This emphasis on the small-scale and mobile aspects of hunters and gatherers was emphasized within the neo-evolutionist concept of band societies (see Chapter 3). Although exceptions such as the North-west coast Indians were recognized, the sub-Saharan African and Australian hegemony of hunter-gatherer studies in the 1960s only allowed neo-evolutionists to speculate that band societies may not have been universal in the Palaeolithic.

Anthropological research in the 1970s posed problems for this

model of 'simple' hunters and gatherers. The extent to which hunters and gatherers practised a traditional lifestyle, fossilized and isolated from more 'complex' societies, was subjected to radical criticism. Their coexistence with agriculturalists and pastoralists (often in close proximity and marked by exchange relations) was shown through historical and ethnohistorical analyses (e.g. Headland and Reid 1989). Even the Kalahari San Bushmen, the archetypal isolated, mobile, small-scale hunters and gatherers, have a history of herding and planting activities (Schrire 1984). As we have seen already, inequalities in such basic aspects of life as food sharing were also documented among the 'simplest' hunters and gatherers.

The biggest challenge to the African/Australian model of hunters and gatherers came from ethnographic and ethnohistoric research along the Pacific coast of North America. The north-west coast groups such as the Haida, Tlingit and Tsimshian have long been characterized as having hereditary social ranking, sedentary villages and dense populations, part-time craft specialization, intensive warfare, ownership of productive resources (whether individual or private), wealth differences and even slavery (Maschner 1991; Lightfoot 1993). The presence of such characteristics of complex societies among non-agricultural groups made the north-west coast Indians very much an anomaly. However, the publication of ethnographies of Californian Indians in the 1970s showed that a wider pattern of behaviour could be seen along the length of the Pacific coast. Evidence was cited of intensified subsistence strategies (including management of nuts and seeds), sedentary villages and dense populations, craft specialization, long-distance exchange (including prestige goods), regional alliances, hereditary chiefs and (more rarely) social classes (for references, see Lightfoot 1993).

These temperate hunters and gatherers were very different from those in sub-Saharan Africa and Australia. They exhibited characteristics normally associated with tribal rather than band societies, and provided a challenge for neo-evolutionary typologies (see Chapter 3). The implications for archaeology were clear: more 'complex' hunters and gatherers may not have been such an anomaly in the past, especially in the kinds of temperate environments in which hunting and gathering was more widely practised before the advent of agriculture. The case studies published in Price and Brown (1985) highlighted these kinds of societies, in which complexity was expressed in terms of their increased scale, size and organization. Demographic, environmental and social causes were sought for the emergence of such societies. In the majority of cases these societies were

dated to the Holocene and included famous examples from the American Mid-west (Late Archaic and Early Woodland), southern Scandinavia (Ertebølle), the Near East (Natufian) and Japan (Jomon). Bender (1989) looked for the roots of social inequalities (especially in the access to ritual knowledge) in the Upper Palaeolithic, while Soffer (1985) inferred the existence of 'nascent' hierarchies and some specialized production before 18,000 BP and intensified procurement and storage, limited residential mobility, increased population aggregation and hierarchical social and economic relations after that date.

Of course it could be (and was) objected that the American Pacific ethnographic record, which stimulated the growth of archaeological research on 'complex' hunters and gatherers in other parts of the world, was the outcome of European contact: 'complex' hunters and gatherers were a modern creation. The answer to this challenge lay in archaeological research in the Pacific region itself. Lightfoot (1993: 177–85) summarizes the evidence for changes in variables such as subsistence intensification, long-distance exchange, population aggregation, social ranking and warfare in different regions of the Pacific coast of North America. For the north-west coast, for example, there are claims for the existence of social ranking by 500 BC (Maschner 1991). Along the length of the Pacific coast, the time lag between the earliest hunters and gatherers and those that are called 'complex' varies from *c.* 5000 to *c.* 9500 years. What is more, the different aspects of complexity listed above do not develop together within this time span (Lightfoot 1993: 182).

Arnold has placed her research on the archaeological sequence in southern coastal California within the broader context of the whole coastal region. She defines complexity in terms of 'chiefdom like organisation', which she argues had three basic characteristics: hereditary inequality, hierarchical organization (including some multi-community political authority) and the ability of elites to manipulate domestic labour (Arnold 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996a, 1996b). Arnold centres her attention on the third of these characteristics: 'the separation of household labor or products from head-of-household management – where individuals outside family units begin to manipulate these resources – represents a significant restructuring process' (1992: 62). This control of labour was used to mobilize surpluses that were then invested in social strategies of competition through such means as feasting and exchange. Comparative analysis shows that variation existed in such factors as the

extent of elite authority, the means by which labour was appropriated, wealth disparities and societal scale (Arnold 1996b: 79).

The archaeological record of the Pacific coast challenges neo-evolutionist thought (hunter-gatherer chiefdoms?), while at the same time maintaining it and using one of its basic concepts. However, before we get carried away with the complexity of American Pacific coast hunters and gatherers, it is worth noting that their spatial scales and degree of hierarchization do not approach those visible in the archaeological and ethnographic records of the agricultural societies in the American South-west, South-east and Mid-west. Regional political units here were organized on a larger scale, with settlement hierarchies and public monuments. The larger population densities of the Pacific coast at the time of European contact did not translate into the kinds of polities seen in these regions. As Lightfoot argues (1993: 183–5), the labour control and surplus mobilization strategies used by Pacific hunter-gatherer élites were unable indefinitely to support the kind of social intensification which was open to agriculturally based economies. The Pacific ‘complex’ societies ‘represent the upper range of socio-political development supported by hunter-gatherer economies’ (Lightfoot 1993: 185).

These ethnographic and archaeological examples show us that the description of hunter-gatherer societies as ‘simple’ fails to do justice to empirical variation. In the archaeological cases it is now recognized that arguments for complexity proposed in the 1970s were overstated: recent analyses of Natufian mortuary practices, for example, reject the inference of hereditary social inequalities and chiefdom-like society (Byrd and Monahan 1995) and focus on the use of communal rituals to promote social integration (Kuijt 1996). While we now hear reference to more ‘complex’ hunters and gatherers, their forms and structures are light years away from those of state societies. Indeed the dichotomy between states and stateless societies, as proposed by Fortes and Evans Pritchard, emphasized the scale of such differences, defining stateless societies, as we have seen, by the characteristics of state societies that they *lacked*. This implies a clear grasp of what states actually *are*, and an assumption that the emergence of the state was the major structural change in cultural evolution. Thus the state should be different from all other forms of society.

States and the Great Divide

There is no one definition of the state on which all scholars agree (Claessen and Skalkin 1978: 3), whether they are historians, anthropologists, sociologists (Abrams 1988: 59) or archaeologists. This observation should not surprise us, given the different theoretical perspectives that scholars bring to bear on the different kinds of data they study. But problems of definition do not exist only between disciplines. Within archaeology there have been major differences of opinion as to whether particular societies were, or were not, states. If such disagreements stem from a desire to fit a given society into one or other of a series of evolutionary stages, as part of a typological exercise, then they can become what Kohl (1984: 128) has called 'tiresome disquisitions', which emphasize the description of societies and the simplification of reality. But the definitions and concepts we use determine our ability to undertake comparative research: if societies A and B are defined as states, then we can compare and contrast their forms and structures, learning more about such societies in the process. The concepts we use initiate, rather than conclude, analysis.

Let us look at three examples of disagreement between archaeologists as to the existence of state societies. The first concerns the monumental centre of Cahokia (Figure 4.1), where more than a hundred earthen mounds are known within an area of 10sq km of the floodplain of the Mississippi River, just outside the city of St Louis (Milner 1998). During the eleventh century AD there was rapid population nucleation at this site, with the most recent calculations proposing that a maximum of some 10,000 people lived here during the next two centuries (Pauketat and Lopinot 1997). Other calculations of the population have reached as low as 500 and as high as 50,000 people. It is these calculations, along with the population nucleation, the construction of the impressive monumental architecture (the central focus of Monks Mound, seen in Figure 4.2, with its surrounding palisade and plazas, each of which was surrounded by smaller mounds), the settlement hierarchy and layout, the evidence for social hierarchy, centralized economic control and regional trade which have led some scholars to argue that Cahokia was the 'urban center of a theocratic state' (see Emerson 1997 for a discussion and critique of this proposal). Critics of this view disparage it somewhat as the 'little Teotihuacan-on-the-Mississippi' model (Pauketat and Emerson 1997: 3).

In spite of the characteristics listed above, as well as the symbol-

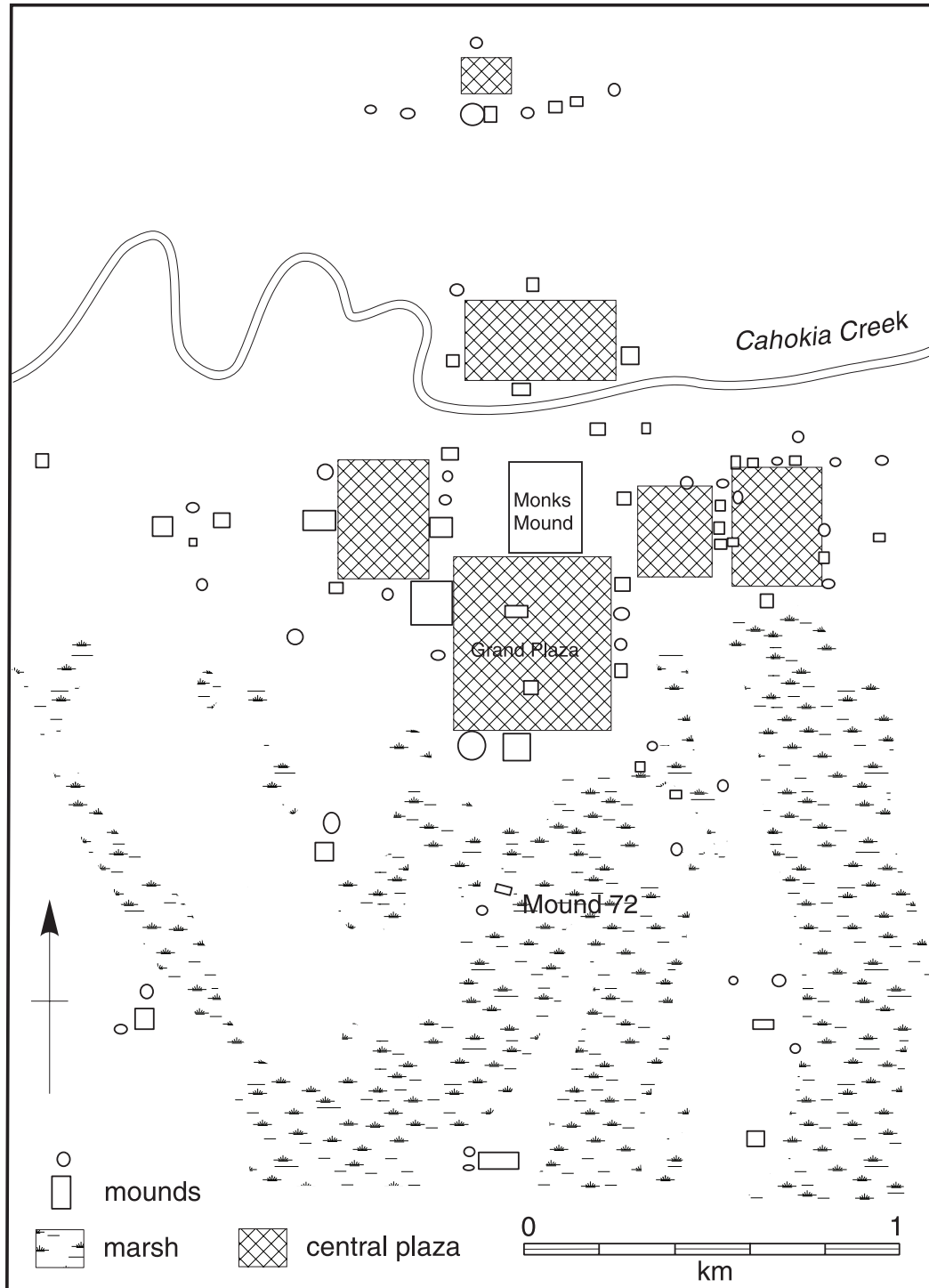


Figure 4.1 The central mounds and plazas of Cahokia in the eleventh century AD (adapted from Pauketat 1998: figure 3).

izing of coercive force in the central burials (and the far from symbolic evidence for violent deaths and dismembering in Mound 72), the use of such force to direct population nucleation at Cahokia, and evidence for the appropriation of labour in both monument



Figure 4.2 Monks Mound, Cahokia. (Photo by the author.)

construction and craft production (Pauketat and Emerson 1997: 47), most scholars now argue that Cahokia was a complex/paramount chiefdom. For example, Emerson (1997) uses Wright's definition of a complex chiefdom (see Chapter 3) to propose that Cahokia evolved from a simple to a 'sacral paramount chiefdom, perhaps on the verge of becoming a state' (1997: 251). The inference of 'specialized ritual and political functionaries', which Emerson interprets as 'the institutionalization of non-kin forms of leadership and *power over*', leads him to make the following suggestion: 'at its height, Cahokia may have had some characteristics of an incipient state that died "aborning"' (1997: 251; cf. Hall 1991: 33 on 'a city-state in process of formation' and Kehoe 1998: 171 on Cahokia as a 'secondary state of Early Post-Classic Mesoamerica'). Even proponents of the complex chiefdom model for Cahokia accept that, in social evolutionary terms, it was only just 'this side' of a state.

The influence of Wright's complex chiefdom model, and of Wright and Johnson's information-theory approach to early states (see Chapter 3), is also evident in another debate over the existence, or not, of state society. In this case it concerns the Huari polity of the Middle Horizon period (AD 550–950) in the central Andes. Isbell and Schreiber (1978: 372) began by stating what they called 'agreed' criteria for state definition.

First, the state exercises a monopoly upon the right to use force in the execution of decisions and in the maintenance of order. Second, the state defends a territory against encroachment upon its sovereignty. Third, a state administers public affairs within its territory through a hierarchy of officials. Additional special interests may also appear, such as private property, control of foreign trade or formalization of law. Such criteria are often difficult to identify from the archaeological record.

The last sentence is critical. As we saw in Chapter 3, Wright and Johnson's model of decision-making hierarchies in early states finds its main archaeological application in the analysis of site size hierarchies. These are based on data from excavations and surface survey, and are analysed for the Ayacucho valley, providing the main support for the inference of statehood (Figure 4.3).

The attribution of statehood to pre-Hispanic societies more widely in the Andean region has also been the subject of disagreement. For example, was Nasca society on the south coast of Peru in the first seven centuries AD a state or a complex chiefdom? Carmichael (1995) uses mortuary analysis, the absence of full-time craft specialization and commitment to monumental architecture, and the evidence of settlement patterns to argue that the best description of Nasca society would be that of a simple chiefdom. This recognizes the 'tremendous range of social formations' (1995: 181) which can be included under the title of chiefdom. But just when these chiefdoms, of whatever level of complexity, gave way to states in the Andes depends on how one defines the state. The studies contained in Haas *et al.*'s (1987) edited volume used different criteria (e.g. site hierarchies, labour control, monument size) to place the appearance of the state anywhere between c.2500 BC and AD 500 (Bawden 1989).

Third, there is the example of the Olmec culture of the Gulf coast of Mexico c.1150–300 BC. For some, the Olmec, with their ceremonial centres, public monuments, colossal carved stone heads, mobilization of public labour, and evidence for craftsmen, were Mesoamerica's first state society, its 'mother culture' (see sources cited in Grove 1997). Clark cites the existence of social stratification, an upper class of kings, nobility and priests, as well as craftsmen and traders, the upward mobility of tribute and labour to legitimize élites by the construction of public monuments, to propose the existence of a 'kingdom', which could be either a complex chiefdom or a state in the ethnographic record (1997: 215). Elsewhere he

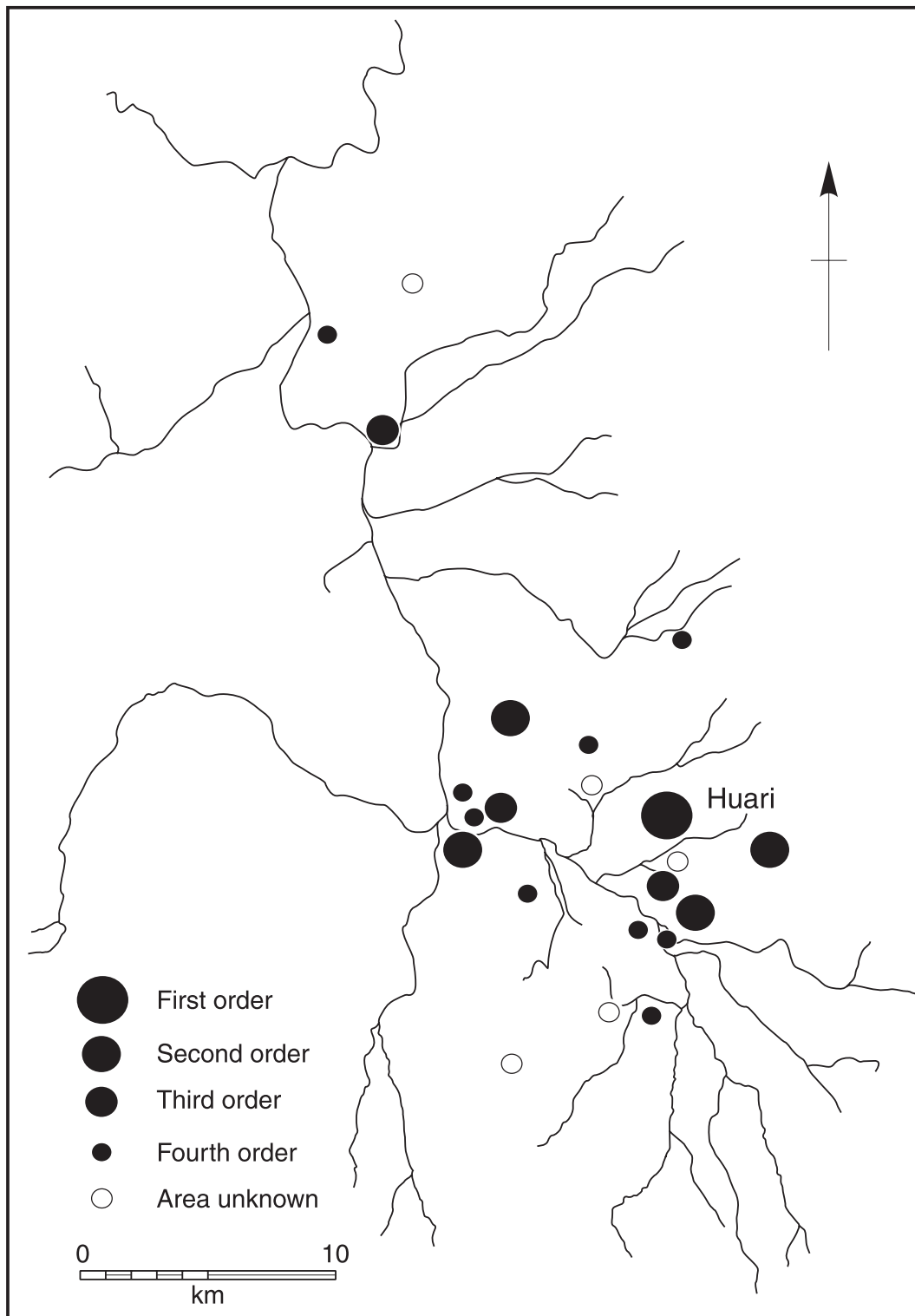


Figure 4.3 Four-level settlement hierarchy based on site size in the Middle Horizon period in the Ayacucho valley, Peru (adapted from Isbell and Schreiber 1978: figure 3).

suggests that future research will produce evidence of more than one state within the Olmec heartland (Clark 1993: 167). However, Flannery and Marcus (2000) argue strongly that the Olmec are to be classified within the range of chiefdoms known from ethnographic and archaeological records: 'they built mounds and plazas like Tongan chiefdoms, carved jades and wooden statues like the Maori, erected colossal heads like Easter Island, and concentrated thousands of farmers, warriors and artisans in sprawling settlements as the chiefs of Cahokia did' (2000: 6). The Olmec do not compare, in terms of complexity, with the urban and primate political centres of the Monte Alban and Teotihuacan states. Instead of being the 'mother culture', they argue, the Olmec were just one of the regional chiefdoms of Mesoamerica prior to the emergence of the state.

These examples, as well as the history of neo-evolutionary studies (see Chapter 3), could suggest that the categories chiefdom and state have become so inclusive as to be 'catch-all' social types. Marcus and Feinman (1999: 5) acknowledge the heterogeneity of societies classified as chiefdoms and states, but how much of this heterogeneity is necessary before new types need to be created? Rather like the term 'postprocessual archaeology' (see Chapter 2), it has been argued that there is more variation between what are called state societies than exists between states and other types of human societies (McGuire 1983: 115; cf. Keech McIntosh 1999a: 2, on the variation in societies defined as states by Fortes and Evans Pritchard). And if the criteria for defining states keep changing, then it is no surprise that archaeologists differ about the distribution of such societies in the past. For some the focus is on the emergence of legitimized force and bureaucracy (e.g. Service 1962, 1975), and there is a sharp divide from chiefdoms. For others the development of stratification marks the beginning of state formation, even though that may not happen for some time (e.g. Fried 1967: 185; cf. Wright's view that class formation preceded state formation in Mesoamerica and Mesopotamia, 1984: 69; Claessen and Skalník 1978: 20). A further source of difference lies in the view that what some call complex chiefdoms should in fact be regarded as archaic states, with social stratification and economic exploitation, but lacking the bureaucratic structure of 'full' states (Kristiansen 1991: 18). These examples also highlight divisions over the extent to which state formation is a result of continuous evolution or a major structural change: as further examples of the latter, Gledhill (1988: 10) refers to a 'rather substantial jump' from complex chiefdom to state, and Kohl (1987: 29) uses the concept of punctuated equilibrium in relation to state formation. For the

majority of scholars, early state formation, however defined and however rapidly it occurred, was a rarity in social evolution.

This exclusive club, which resists the addition of further members (e.g. Cahokia and the Olmec), has its membership defined mainly in two ways. First, there is the presence of decision-making hierarchies (see Chapter 3), through which political and economic activities are centralized and specialized. These are expressed in regional settlement hierarchies. More than three levels in such hierarchies are required before a state can be recognized (most recently, see Marcus and Feinman 1999: 6–7). However, it has been argued that decision-making hierarchies are not always expressed in settlement hierarchies (e.g. Cordy 1981; Brumfiel 1995), and that centralization of economic activities is not necessarily associated with political hierarchies: rather than a regional hierarchy, there can be multiple heterarchies (see above). Stein (1998: 26) has argued recently that the concept of centralization has been unduly stressed in the definition of the state, and that the extent of such centralization is the outcome of conflict between the interests and power of ruling élites and the resistance of other social groups. As Stein writes, ‘the resulting view of society is a “fuzzy model”, grounded in culturally unique configurations of conflict and contingency, rather than the clean lines of monolithic hierarchy that we might see on a corporate table of organization’ (1998: 27).

Second, the use of decision-making hierarchies, with the measurement of regional settlement hierarchies, has been developed in the study of the so-called ‘primary’ or ‘pristine’ states of Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica. These have long been called the world’s first ‘civilizations’ in Anglo-American archaeology, and the comparative, processual approach to their study as state societies was initiated in Flannery’s classic paper (1972). Given their physically impressive monuments, labour mobilization and large-scale population aggregation, it is no surprise that social evolution seems to be based on the view from the top of the plazas and pyramids of Monte Alban and Teotihuacan or the ziggurat of Ur. This is, literally, a ‘top down’ view of past societies! When it comes to such characteristics as centralization, stratification, specialization, public works, and so on (all in Flannery’s 1972 definition of a state), these sites (as well as those of the Inka Empire and China) are without comparison. If they characterize early states, then it is no surprise that the Olmec and Cahokia are viewed as chiefdoms. When it comes to criteria of size and scale, they just do not cut the mustard; neither does Mycenaean Greek society (described by Renfrew 1972: 369 as ‘something more

than chiefdoms, something less than states'), nor the Harappan civilization of the Indus valley (Possehl 1999).

It is interesting to observe the ways in which regional ethnographic or archaeological records have set the agenda for comparative research on social change. The ethnography of sub-Saharan Africa and Australia gave momentum to the study of band societies until the publication of the North American Pacific coast record of complex hunters and gatherers in the 1970s (see above, p. 85). State societies have been viewed from the perspective of the biggest and most impressive. For chiefdoms and the development of social stratification, there has been what Keech McIntosh calls an 'Oceanic hegemony' (1999a: 4), with political and social systems being viewed in the light of the ethnographic records of Polynesia and Melanesia. This has raised doubts as to the extent to which concepts like chiefdom and state are applicable to African societies.

The distinctive nature of the African ethnographic and archaeological records has been stressed recently (Keech McIntosh 1999b). Of particular interest is the evidence for less economic stratification in agricultural societies (given abundant land and the practice of shifting agriculture), the absence of correlation between population densities and political centralization (Goody 1977), the absence of centralized organization and vertical control hierarchies in favour of heterarchies in some regions, and the presence of only some of the characteristics that are normally used to define more complex societies. For example, the city of Jenné-jeno, in the inland Niger delta (Mali), shows rapid population growth and settlement nucleation, but no evidence for subsistence intensification, impressive public monuments, marked social ranking or stratification (Keech McIntosh 1999c). As with hunter-gatherer studies, comparative research has to take into account such regional variation and not subsume it in over-generalized models.

Alternative states?

Clearly differences of opinion exist as to the definition of, and the transition to, statehood, as well as its material recognition. Most scholars in the Anglo-American world agree that early states were a rarity, usually associated with what are called the world's earliest 'civilizations'. Cherry went as far as to describe the state as 'a particular, highly successful, form of organizational adaptation' (1978: 413). And yet, the state also brings with it success for the few, and oppression, exploitation and coercion for the many. There is a

downside to states! To focus on 'organizational adaptation' is to neglect these relations of inequality. States do not behave adaptively to solve problems; they create problems for population numbers, health, the environment, stability of political units, and so forth. Such problems are recognized within the tradition of historical materialism discussed in Chapter 3, along with the need to focus social analysis on class, conflict, contradiction, physical and ideological coercion and exploitation. We have seen already the effect that historical materialism had on Anglo-American archaeology in the 1980s. Now it is time to examine the approaches to the study of the state, both within and outside Anglo-American archaeology, which this theoretical tradition has stimulated in recent years. As was stated in Chapter 3, there is a diversity of approaches within this tradition. A book would be needed to cover them all in sufficient detail. What follows is selective, but offers a challenge to mainstream thought.

Let us begin with the concept of class.

Class implies a relationship of permanently or consistently unequal control over the goods, resources and labor that ensure the continuity of the social group. In class relations, there is always a power relationship: at least one group is permanently removed from direct production and extracts goods and services from other groups in the society.

(Gailey and Patterson 1987: 7)

Class-based societies are different from kinship-based societies in the exploitation of this power relationship, which is exercised through coercion. This exploitation is not only that of the producing classes as a whole, but, it is often argued, increasingly that of the productive and reproductive capacity of women (e.g. Gailey 1987), although this is by no means universal (see above, p. 79).

For historical materialists class relations are the basis of state societies, and, following Engels (1972, originally published in 1884) and Lenin (1969, originally published in 1917), the state is developed to preserve class society: state formation is 'the emergence of institutions that mediate between the dependent but dominant class(es) and the producing class(es), while orchestrating the extraction of goods and labor used to support the continuation of class relations' (Gailey 1987: ix). The institutions of the state serve to guarantee the interests of the dominant class: as Lull and Risch put it, 'the class which is economically dominant also becomes the class which is politically dominant' (1995: 99). Social coercion, whether

physical or ideological, is the basis of the institutionalized and legitimized power of the state. They follow Gramsci's view that the state is hegemony protected by coercion. State formation follows the emergence of class relations, although by what length of time is a matter for debate. In this respect there is agreement with the neo-evolutionist tradition (e.g. Wright 1984: 69). The critical question here is how long a class system, and particularly the interests of the dominant class, the non-producers and exploiters, could survive without the institutions of the state.

The main interest that the state is intended to guarantee is that of the private property of the dominant class. Private property is, following Marx, 'the most direct expression of the unequal appropriation of human labour and its resulting product, and therefore the cause of the existence of workers and non-workers, or put another way, the cause of the development of a class society' (Lull and Risch 1995: 100). It is argued that property relations are best studied in the archaeological record through analysis of differential production and the generation of surplus (Lull and Risch 1995: 100). In this context surplus is not defined as simply production in excess of need, but as when such excess is appropriated by others than those who have produced it. Surplus is the product of a relationship of exploitation. Property itself may take the form of natural resources such as land (as in the case of feudalism), human labour (e.g. slavery), the means of production (as in capitalism), or the products themselves (for a theory of production and products, see Castro *et al.* 1998a).

The association of class and state societies is not without its problems. Neo-Marxist anthropologists such as Rey and Terray have argued that relations of dominance and exploitation (e.g. by age and gender), namely class relations, exist in all societies. Saitta has defined class in terms of how surplus labour is produced and distributed in society, rather than using property, wealth or power relations (1988, 1992: 889). As a result he argues that 'all societies are class societies, in that every society requires the production and distribution of surplus labour' (1992: 889). At the same time Saitta admits that not all societies are what he calls class-divided, that is with relations of exploitation between producers and appropriators of surplus labour, and thus leaves intact the major structural boundary of class and pre-class societies. Bloch (1985: 83–4) cited some nineteenth-century African states as examples of what he calls classless states, although, as he said, the neo-Marxist argument for class relations not being restricted to state societies reduces the impact of these ethnographic 'spoilers'. On the same pages, Bloch also cited

the example of the Tuareg of North Africa as one of a stateless society with classes.

In spite of these definitional differences and debates over the ethnographic record, it is clear that the historical materialist perspective on states directs our attention to concepts that are not widely discussed in the Anglo-American world. A clear distinction is also made between the structural relations by which the state is defined and the material form it may take in individual cases.

a state structure does not consist of the visible forms of power, pomp and circumstance (e.g. palaces, writing and exotic wealth items), but the systems of exploitation, extortion and physical and ideological coercion which in each case can take distinct forms, given the possibilities of social development which are dialectically related to the needs of the dominant class.

(Lull and Risch 1995: 108)

This distinction between structural relations and material form marks a distinction that is not usually made within the Anglo-American tradition; for example, Flannery (1999) focuses on the recognition of a state in the archaeological record (settlement hierarchies, monumental palaces, temples, priests' residences, royal tombs, etc.) without defining what exactly a state *is*. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 7, the distinction between structure and form leads to claims for the existence of state societies in prehistoric Europe which would be strongly disputed by those looking for the usual neo-evolutionary criteria.

The historical materialist perspective focuses not only on the structure of the state, but also on the structural change(s) which took place between kin- and class-based societies. Rather than quantitative changes in the degree of specialization, centralization and the number of levels in an administrative hierarchy, emphasis is placed on qualitative differences in the emergence of classes, changes in property relations (e.g. communal/private), the allocation and exploitation of labour and so on (e.g. Gailey 1987; Kristiansen 1991). In this sense we are dealing with a structural evolution.

For example, the Chilean archaeologist Bate (1998: 83–94) distinguishes what he calls initial class societies in the following way: they are divided into exploiting and exploited classes (with the former removed from physical production and appropriating the surplus of the latter), have distinct property forms and relations in

different societies, and have institutions of ideological and physical coercion (cf. Bate 1984; Lumbreras 1994). The initial states that supported these class relations were based on upward tribute in return for downward services, and were inherently unstable, as the costs of maintaining the state led to increased tribute demands and conflict (e.g. through expansion of the state) and collapse, before the emergence of more 'military' states. Like Lull and Risch, Bate attempts to reformulate classic Marxist thought in developing his model of class and state. In the Anglo-American world, Gailey and Patterson (1988) share his focus on tribute from producers to non-producers as a distinctive factor in early states: civil production for the state is superimposed on subsistence production for the local communities. These tribute-based states vary in strength according to the level of resistance from these primary producers. Where such resistance increases, the state relies increasingly on appropriating a labour force of captives or slaves, whereas in stronger tribute-based states, it is the products of labour which are appropriated.

Not only does the historical materialist approach define the state differently, using different concepts as well as a notion of structural discontinuity, but it also departs from the 'top down' view of early states mentioned earlier in this chapter. Although it uses concepts such as the state, as opposed to, for example, tribal societies, and can have the same difficulties in dealing with periods of structural change (e.g. Kristiansen 1991 on stratified societies as 'an archaic form of state organisation'), it challenges us to look at our familiar categories of thought and practice in a new light.

Conclusions

The main aim of this chapter has been to introduce the reader to the usage of a range of concepts by archaeologists in social analysis. I emphasize the word 'introduce', as I do not claim the coverage to have been comprehensive. The archaeological literature is full of words like egalitarian, inequality, hierarchy and complexity, and it is important that we understand how they are being used, and the theories that lie behind them.

Many of the examples in this chapter illustrate the need to be wary of dichotomous thinking in social analysis. There are inequalities in egalitarian societies, which exhibit tensions between egalitarian and inegalitarian social relations. Hierarchical and heterarchical relations can exist within the same society. Societies cannot be classified into either 'simple' or 'complex'. And yet we need to use concepts in

order to structure thought and analysis. For many in the Anglo-American world, these concepts are neo-evolutionary and derived from cross-cultural comparison of the ethnographic record. In other areas, such as the Mediterranean and Latin America, the concepts of historical materialism lead us to different representations of the past: for example, what might be classified as a complex chiefdom in one tradition may be viewed as a structurally different state in the other. This may seem like a trivial, semantic argument, but it has very real implications for the kind of history we construct, our ability to compare historical sequences between different regions of the world, and our understanding of the ways in which structural change is given material expression. It is important for contemporary archaeology that we go outside our own, regional traditions of thought and see how others view the past. How far are the different representations of the past mutually exclusive?

In the following two chapters, I want to look at a case study in what has been called 'emerging complexity' in south-east Spain, to see how concepts are used, and what kind of past is constructed; and then to consider examples of social analysis and the use (consistent or not) of concepts such as complexity in other parts of Iberia and the Mediterranean basin. What do these studies tell us about social change in this region and the way it is being studied?