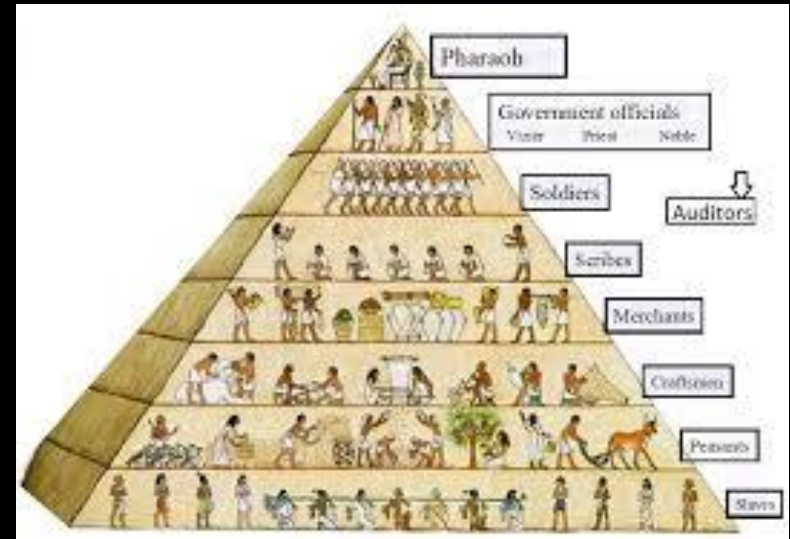


Exploring Complex Societies



Social Complexity

- What do we mean by social complexity?
- Why is this an important approach for examining Bronze Age society in the East Mediterranean?
- Rise & fall of civilisations is the main metanarrative applied to Bronze Age societies in the region



Egyptian hierarchy

Early Civilisations

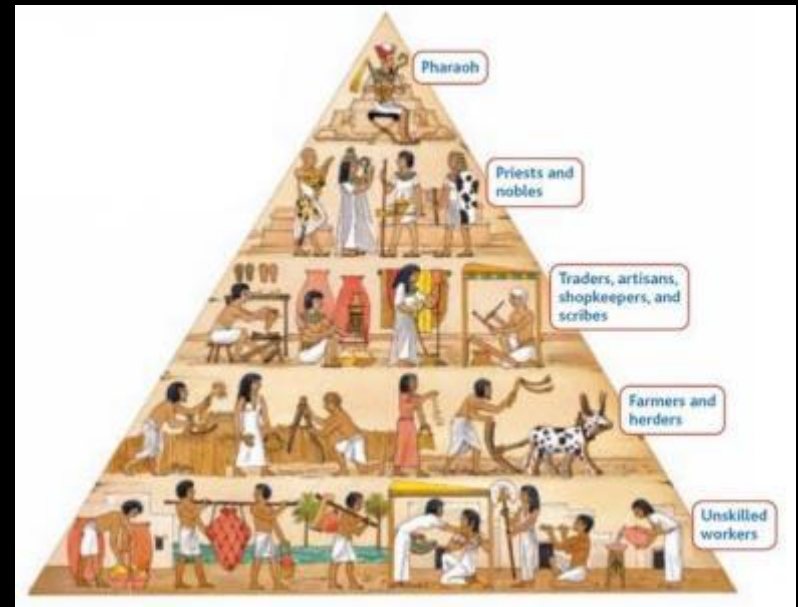
- Defining civilisations...
- “‘Early civilization’ is undeniably an evolutionary concept” (Trigger 2003: 40)
 - Assumes less complex societies evolve into more complex ones
 - How do we define complexity?



Great pyramids, Giza

Early Civilisations

- Hierarchical organisation
 - Unequal divisions of power, wealth & social prestige
- Small ruling class (**the elite**):
 - Controls resources
 - Manipulates ideology to maintain position
- Full-time specialists (who serve ruling group)
- **Class** displaces **kinship** as main organising principle



Egyptian social classes

Cultural Evolution

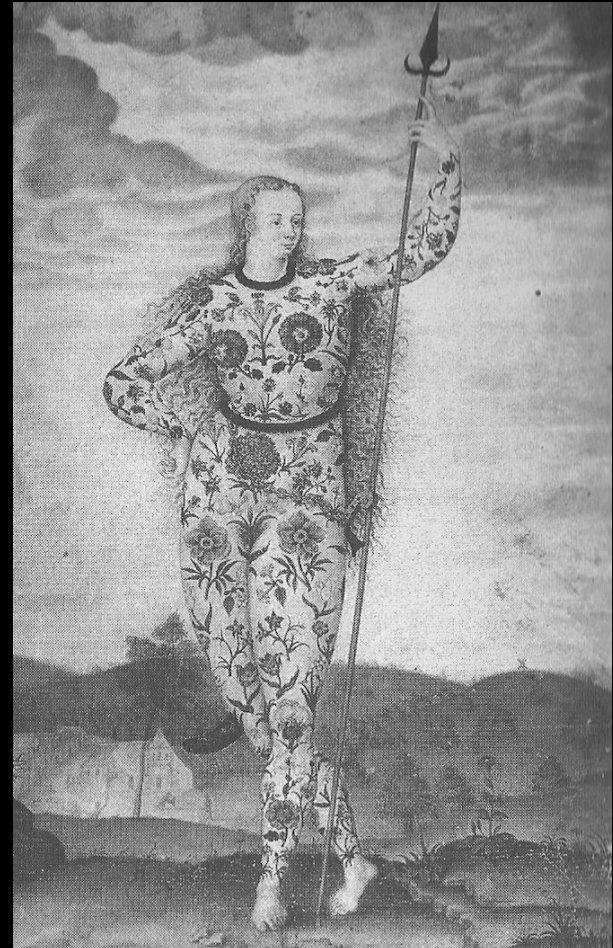
- Tylor 1871: *Primitive Culture*
- Different contemporary societies were at different stages of evolution
 - “simpler” contemporary societies were thought to resemble ancient societies



Native American
16th century representation

Cultural Evolution

- Morgan: 1877 *Ancient Society*
- Divided human culture into three separated stages:
 - Savagery
 - Barbarism
 - Civilisation
- Drawing upon Enlightenment thought (Montesquieu)



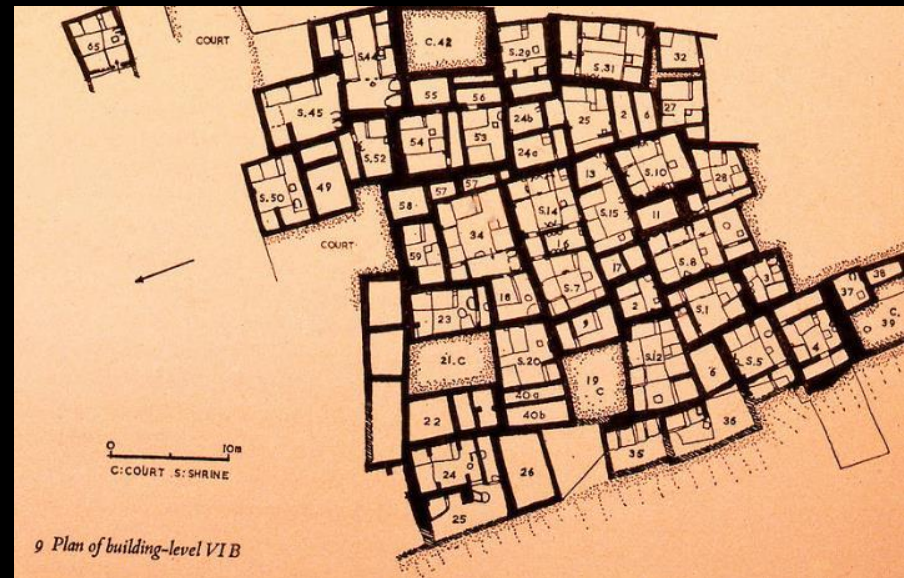
Ancient Briton

Neo-Evolutionism

- Elman Service 1962. *Primitive Social Organisation*
 - **Bands:** hunter-gatherers
 - **Segmentary society:** early Neolithic communities & nomadic pastoralists
 - **Chiefdoms:** ranked societies with ceremonial/ritual centres
 - **Early states:** development of economic bureaucracies

Segmentary Societies

- A tribal grouping
 - “an association of a much larger number of kinship segments that are composed of families. They are tied more firmly together than are the bands...” (Service 1962: 111)
- Sedentism
- Adoption of agriculture / pastoralism
- Neolithic communities & pastoral nomads



Attributes of Chieftdom

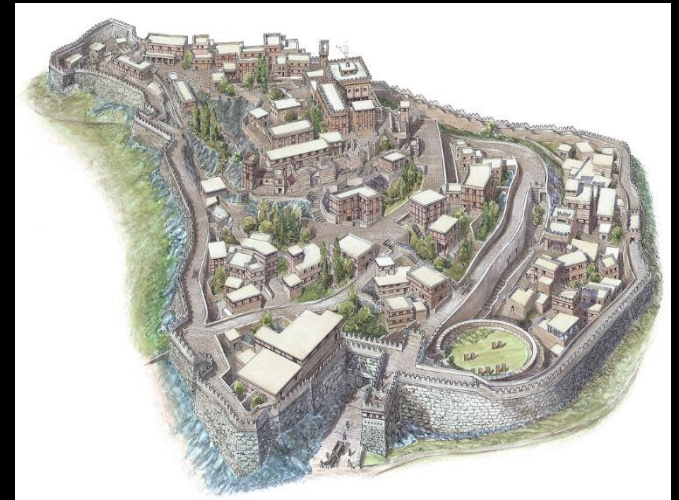
- Kinship-based ranking
- Hereditary leader (chief!) with religious duties
- Cultic & religious elaboration
- Specialisation of activities
- Central accumulation of goods
- Fortified centres & ritual centres
- Large-scale monuments



Stonehenge

Attributes of State

- Hierarchical society ruled by king/emperor
- Centralized bureaucracy, taxation & law codes
- Craft specialisation
- Urbanised society & complex settlement hierarchy
- Priestly class
- Monumental constructions
- Evidence of growth, flux, collapse



Reconstruction of Mycenae

Emergence of Elites

- Key characteristics of urbanisation/civilisation:
 - Control of economic resource
 - Employment of craft specialists
 - Bureaucracy / administration
- Archaeological criteria to identify emergence of elites?
 - High status “art” objects
 - Rich burials & monumental burial facilities
 - Monumental architecture (temples & palaces)
 - Writing



Queens of Ebla

Neo Evolutionism

- State is distinguished from chiefdoms by 2 criteria:
 - Use of legitimised force to establish & maintain authority of leader
 - Specialised bureaucratic government
- Literacy & military: key tools of state?



Sargon of Akkad

Decline and Fall

- Evidence of growth, flux & collapse of civilisations can be charted historically & archaeologically
- Cyclical view of world cultures:
 - Origins
 - Zenith
 - Fall
- Inevitable process?



Trojan horse

Problems

- **Descriptive** not explanatory
- **Reductive** view of the past:
 - Tick box criteria to explain social change
 - Ignores individual peculiarities
- Ignores human action & choice: views evolutionary change as an inexorable process
 - What about modern hunter-gatherer societies?



!Kung San hunter

Urbanisation

- What do we mean by urbanisation?
- How do we define a town?
- Where do towns first develop?
 - And why?



Umm el Marra

Childe's Urban Revolution

- Transformation of small, non-literate village communities into large, socially complex, urban societies
- Childe applied concepts & theories from the social sciences to interpret archaeological finds
- Developed model of urban revolution
 - With ten separate criteria



Childe's Urban Revolution

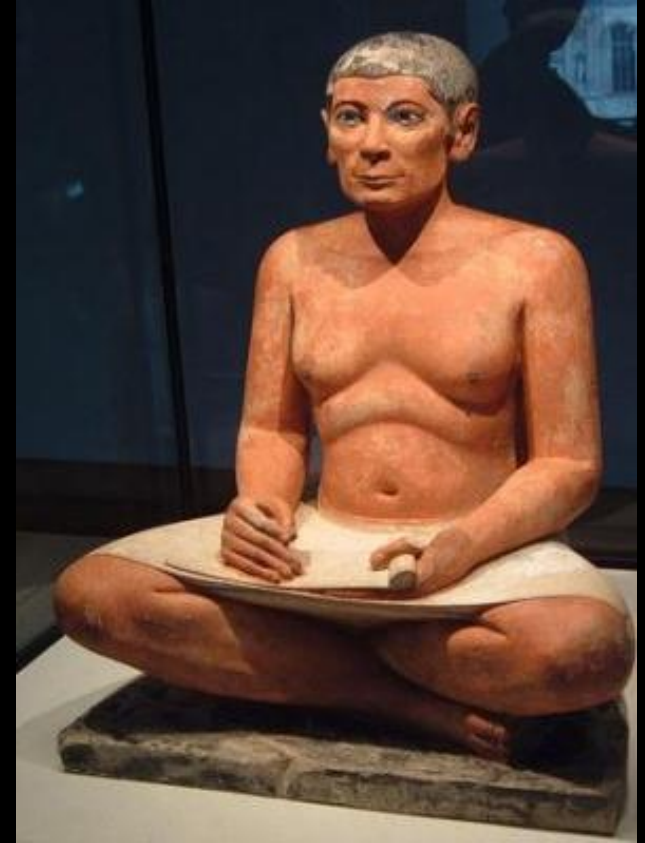
- Large population & large settlements (towns)
- Full-time (craft) specialization & division of labour
- Production of agricultural surplus to support state & specialists
- Monumental public architecture
- A ruling class (elite)



Reconstruction of pithos hall, Kalavassos

Childe's Urban Revolution

- Writing:
 - Bureaucratic system of government
- Exact & predictive sciences
 - Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, calendars
- Sophisticated art styles
- Long-distance trade (for luxuries)
- The state
 - Attached specialist craftsmen



Egyptian scribe

Summary

- Archaeology in the East Mediterranean is interpreted within an **evolutionary** framework
- Emergence of apparently complex, hierarchically organised societies in the 3rd & 2nd millennium BC
 - ...and their subsequent disappearance
- Urban centres, temples & palaces, literacy
- Commonly characterised as “early civilisations”...
- How useful is this model?