

Critical evaluation on Steadman and Ross' 'Ancient Complex Societies'

Chapter 2

Ross, J.C. & Steadman, S.R., 2017. 'Human Cultural Institutions-Critical Elements in Complex Society' in, Ancient Complex Societies. New York. Routledge, pp6-15.

The text is about all the different components that make up a complex society. The main points that the authors touch upon are the different sections of society such as kingship, labour, religion, technology and craft, and much more. They believe that all these factors contribute and make up a complex society in the ancient times. The authors have used the viewpoints of many other authors to form their own. These topics are important to discuss as they are the factors that contribute to modern civilisation and it is good to go back to look forward.

Firstly, the text begins by discussing kingship and its role in society they say that kings "provide social identity and confer status (...) and often dictate proper methods of worship and ritual behaviours" (Steadman et al, 2017) (6). When comparing this to the ancient Egyptian culture this quote is very accurate especially when looking at the 18th dynasty as Shaw writes about the pharaoh Akhenaten who changed the religion in Egypt from polytheistic to monotheistic (the worship of a single god) and everyone in Egypt would worship Akhenaten and his wife as they acted as intermediaries between the people and the Aten (the sun god), (Shaw,2000). This can also be linked to later on in the text when Steadman et al discuss that some societies worship more than a single god which the Egyptians worshipped a pantheon of hundreds of gods (Steadman et al,2017) in many different forms.

The author also makes an interesting point about religion in complex societies and that their religion is very reflective of the culture itself and writes that "cultures relying on agriculture might emphasise fertility and the growth cycle in their belief system" (Steadman et al,2017) (7). Ancient Egyptian culture relies on fertility and the growth and rebirth cycle heavily and there are any different aspects of that culture which show this for example the Egyptians would inundate the river Nile by throwing offerings to the river god Hapi in order for the river Nile to flood and provide them with fertile soils to grow their produce (Mark, 2009).

Steadman et al write that the ideology of some civilisations has an effect on the culture saying "value is embedded in a culture's ideological and economic systems" (Steadman,2017). This is again true when discussing the ancient Egyptians although they had more religious value on items rather than economic as they value gold due to the fact gold has a strong link to the gods as their skin is supposed to be the colour, this is the reason why many of the pharaohs wished to be buried with gold.

One major theme throughout the whole text is that political organization is a major component in complex societies and that most civilisations there was one leader that had control and all these other factors would come into play for example the leader would control the work force and get them to build monuments (Steadman et al 2017), similar to this Mark,2016 writes that a king ruled in Egypt by mandate and they were the link between the people and the gods, he writes that the government and its policies change over time between the different periods but he also writes that the laws the the kings make the gods approve of them and they have sole control over everyone (Mark,2016).

This text is extremely useful as it provides an insight as to what makes up a complex ancient society, it is a very well written source and very clear, the authors have supported their points by using other influences from other writings. It is very helpful as this source allows me to compare it to my chosen culture and it fits in well and can help me come to the conclusion that the ancient Egyptian culture was very complex. This also makes it factually accurate as many of the factors that have been mentioned in the text can be linked back to a complex society. Although, this text is short compared to some of the others and instead of giving a definite answer and is more open to interpretation than other sources.

Bibliography

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