Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States

Edited by
JANET RICHARDS
University of Michigan
and
MARY VAN BUREN
Colorado State University

© Cambridge University Press 2000

Contents

Figures

1
Introduction: ideology, wealth, and the comparative study of "civilizations"

MARY VAN BUREN AND
JANET RICHARDS

Over the last decade critiques of processual archaeology have generated renewed interest in the role of ideology in the development and organization of ancient states. While such a perspective provides an important counterpoint to scholarship that focuses exclusively on demographic and economic factors, it usually leads to an emphasis on the unique configurations of specific cultures, reiterating the division between humanist and social-scientific understandings of past societies. The purpose of this volume is to develop an approach that bridges this dichotomy by using the same conceptual categories to simultaneously examine both the distinctive and common features of ancient civilizations. This is accomplished by applying three analytical concepts – order, legitimacy, and wealth (ideologies of domination and the economic tools with which they are materialized) – to the textual and archaeological records of ancient states as a means of understanding how "high culture," and thus civilization itself, was created and maintained over time.

This approach was initially developed by John Baines and Norman Yoffee in their paper "Order, legitimacy, and wealth in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia" (Baines and Yoffee 1998), which was produced for a School of American Research seminar on archaic states (Feinman and Marcus 1998). In 1994, Janet Richards and Norman Yoffee convened a symposium entitled "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Early States" at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, in order to examine that approach from a cross-cultural perspective. Seven scholars with expertise in Old World and New World states employed the concepts proposed by Baines and Yoffee as a platform for a comparative

method that allows for contrasts as well as commonalities to be identified and explained.[1] How do the concepts of order, legitimacy, and wealth play out in Mesoamerica, in the Andes, in the Indus, in China, or in Greece? What organizational principles are shared? What is truly "unique" in different contexts and why?

The results of the 1994 symposium form the basis of this volume. The model proposed by Baines and Yoffee is summarized here in their chapter "Setting the terms," followed by contributions exploring the central concepts of that debate through a series of case studies that span the ancient world. Elizabeth Brumfiel's final chapter summarizes the findings, evaluates the model from a comparative perspective, and introduces a further illustrative example from the Aztec state. Many of the contributors, in evaluating the operation of the principles of order, legitimacy, and wealth in their own research areas, take a multi-dimensional approach, addressing textual, archaeological, and iconographic data in their discussions, thereby highlighting the interpretive richness in a synthesis of these often disparate sources of data. All touch on issues of discourse and communication in ancient societies, attempting to understand possible points of interaction between elites and the populations they ruled, and the latter's opportunities for and strategies of resistance to ideological and political hegemony.

Order, legitimacy, and wealth in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia: the initial debate

In their initial discussion of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Baines and Yoffee carried out a controlled comparison of these two civilizations (Baines and Yoffee 1998). They considered the commonalities and differences, the relationship between archaeological and historical data, and finally, issues of continuity and change, all viewed through an integrated lens of order, legitimacy, and wealth. Throughout, their interest lay not in the emergence of civilizations, but in their operation and articulation, and the ways in which the monopoly and deployment of social and political power was effected, materialized, and maintained.

Baines and Yoffee approached this problem by identifying and focusing on a nexus of elements that distinguishes civilizations from states and other complex social forms: the distinctive corpus of art, thought, and elite practice that is unique to each. They argue that civilization is, in fact, coincident with high culture, which they define as "the production and consumption of aesthetic items under the control, and for the benefit

of, the inner elite'' (Baines and Yoffee 1998: 235). These products, which range from architecture and sculpture to exotic foods and zoological gardens, are meant for the most elite sector of society, comprised of the highest-ranking individuals in addition to the rulers and the gods. While the specific content of high culture distinguishes one civilization from another, it appears to be created for similar purposes and under comparable conditions. Baines and Yoffee identify three themes that pervade the development and maintenance of high culture and that can be used as terms of comparison to clarify the differences and similarities among early civilizations.

Ideologies of **order** and hierarchy within that order were of fundamental importance to early states in which large populations were organized by novel means, and rulers attempted to maintain control during periods of rapid political and economic change. Civic order resulted from the creation of new institutions, the imposition of laws, and the use of coercion, but worldly order was also generated by incorporating society into a broader, more perfectly ordered cosmological whole. Elites played a critical role in this endeavor as they occupied the point of articulation between society, the gods, and the privileged dead.

Order is distinctively embodied and expressed – materialized (De Marrais *et al.* 1996) – in the high cultural complex surrounding the institutions and lives of the ruling group. High culture is a realm that valorizes the exclusive and expensive, and affirms the necessity of this ruling group to the maintenance of the cosmos. It thus absorbs much of the surplus extracted from commoners, which is used to concretize and inscribe order in a way that may be meaningful only to inner elites. Although elites may assert the opposite, order is fragile, as is the high cultural complex. Both need constant support and ideally expansion. Nonetheless, they can be sustained and recreated through periods of political and economic collapse, but only via the continued existence of an elite cognoscenti. According to Baines and Yoffee, order is threatened primarily by the emergence of a competing order, together with the withering of its predecessor.

Legitimacy underpins order in social and political terms. Legitimacy results from the acceptance of order and the elite's role in it. It is attained in part through the maintenance and manipulation of central cultural symbols, particularly those that represent and integrate the differentiated groups within states, and is thus closely tied to high culture and the defining elements of a civilization. Legitimacy depends on some level of con-sensus, even if incomplete, but Baines and Yoffee propose that the primary audience for most of the aesthetic items that express and negotiate order is, in fact, the inner elite itself. It is on this particular point that many of the volume contributors offer different perspectives.

Wealth plays a critical role in this process, and effectively sustains both order and legitimacy. It is of course an integral part of all civilizations, and its deployment is a clear indication of the high degree of social stratification that characterizes such societies. However, the embodiment of order and its use in legitimation require wealth, and it is usually expended on these sorts of projects. Under such circumstances the amassment of wealth cannot be understood merely as an end in itself, but also as a means of expressing and maintaining order.

The unreliability of directly equating material wealth with status is much discussed in the archaeological literature (see, for instance, Kus 1982; M. Smith 1987; Cowgill 1992a). However, understood as an expression of unequal access to labor and to key resources (Webster 1980; Costin and Earle 1989; Paynter 1989), the relationship of wealth to processes of social and political power emerges more clearly (Mann 1986; Paynter and McGuire 1991). Differential access to commodities, especially those envalued and restricted as symbols of power and authority (Appadurai 1986a), affects the ability on the part of different groups to embody either that power or a competing ideology, placing these groups at a disadvantage both within the political arena, and in terms of their visibility in the archaeological record.

"Civilizations"

These three main terms of analysis – order, legitimacy, and wealth (discussed in more detail by Baines and Yoffee in chapter 2) – thus address intertwined aspects of a civilization's core. Examining the relationship of inner elites to high culture in light of these categories, and, further, the role of competing groups and non-elites within that same nexus, provides a clearer understanding of how civilizations are sustained over long periods of time and vast amounts of space, despite the demise of individual polities. This use of the term "civilization" and consideration of the functioning of civilizational complexes through the lens of order, legitimacy, and wealth, is a rhetoric continued in the contributors' chapters. All of the papers deal with complex societies judged to have attained and/or maintained a "state" level of political organization, and which have

traditionally been and continue to be categorized as "civilizations" in the literature (see, for instance, Sasson 1995; Trigger 1993), despite the negative connotations of that term. Like the concept of "culture," "civilization" has had a checkered history in the discipline; yet, again like "culture", it persists in archaeological discourse.

Our own uneasiness with this term has led us to an interest in its genealogy within anthropological and historical study, and to an attempt at formulating a working definition based on its use by the different scholars who have contributed to this volume. Such a definition might be that civilizations are ideological phenomena, typically associated with complex societies, that endure for relatively long periods of time and cover large geographical regions, frequently persisting despite the emergence or destruction of individual polities. Their large scale and lack of congruence with specific institutions makes them especially difficult to characterize, but one recurrent feature is the presence of distinctive and persistent features, both material and ideological.

Why is the term "civilization," uncomfortably reminiscent of imperialist and colonialist rhetoric, itself so persistent? And why perpetuate its use? Part of our own answer, parallel to that of Baines and Yoffee, has lain in a fascination with the longevity of these entities, and a desire to track the components of recurrent and successful strategies in place over time. What makes a complex like ancient Egyptian civilization – embodied in extremely longlived notions of cosmos, kingship and social order – thrive in such a way that it is deployed and contested and redeployed, yet still recognizable in form over thousands of years? "Civilization" as an analytical category transcends the temporal and spatial limits of individual states. Its utility may lie in that quality, as it permits the discussion of the considerable time depth of complex societies; and its persistence may be due at least in part to the increasing interest by modern political groups in controlling the past as a strategic resource (Layton 1988; Meskell 1998), echoing its earlier role in the search for the forerunners of modern "civilization."

Studying civilizations

The study of entities categorized as civilizations has been a part of archaeological research since its inception in the nineteenth century and has been pursued with varying degrees of effort by every subsequent generation of archaeologists. From a disciplinary perspective this preoccupation is due, in part, to the ability of archaeologists to examine the temporal and geographic sweep of civilizations over the last 5,000 years, an interest shared only with historians. Describing and explaining the large-scale patterns associated with complex societies has thus remained central to archaeological investigations, despite sharp differences in theoretical outlook. However, academic concern with the identification and study of ancient civilizations has also been fueled by public fascination with the monuments and treasures they left behind; more subtly, by the role they play in the ongoing discourse over the relationship of Western nations to the societies they have historically dominated; and increasingly by the role which manipulation of the past has come to play in the legitimizing strategies of current political regimes within the territories they occupy. Comparison has been employed in almost all cases, ranging from straightforward applications of the comparative method to identify common processes or historical connections, to its implicit use in framing contrasts and commonalities among ancient and contemporary cultures.

Evolutionary approaches

These concerns are, perhaps, most salient in the work of nineteenth-century cultural evolutionists who attempted to order growing bodies of ethnographic and archaeological information by categorizing and arranging cultures in a developmental sequence. Cross-cultural comparison was crucial to the reconstruction of the successive steps from savagery to civilization, but differences among societies within the same state were not really addressed; instead, it was the contrast between stages as well as the overall unity of the process that was emphasized. Civilization was regarded as the final step in a unilineal process propelled largely by the law of progress, which in its crudest form was defined in Darwinian terms. Only the fittest survived, and the fit were by definition the wealthiest, most powerful, and most "civilized" segments of the world's population. Classical evolutionary theory thus provided a scientific underpinning for the grand narrative of the historical development and expansion of western states. It is this imperialist and capitalist driven understanding that still permeates popular thought and makes the very term "civilization" somewhat suspect among contemporary scholars.

The demise of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory in academic discourse reshaped, but did not eliminate, archaeological interest in civilizations, or in the use of comparison to better understand these phenomena. V. Gordon Childe's work (e.g., 1936, 1944) most clearly carried these concerns into the twentieth century. His

ability to synthesize enormous amounts of data was facilitated by an evolutionary perspective that drew more from Marx and Engels than from Darwin or Tylor. Childe (1951) rejected biological determinism and instead attributed progress to the accumulation of knowledge which leads to greater technical control over nature and the expansion of both human possibilities and populations. Explicitly countering the nationalism of his time, he argued that all people benefit from knowledge developed over the ages as a result of diffusion – both geographic and across generations. Unlike the evolutionists of the previous century or the neo-evolutionists who succeeded him, Childe viewed societies as permeable and susceptible to external stimuli, or, phrased more broadly, open to historical forces generated by interaction with other groups. He also argued that while the comparison of civilizations – such as Egypt and Sumer – could point to common processes and results, most details of economic as well as religious and political systems varied tremendously; thus the histories of individual civilizations could not be subsumed by a single narrative of social change.

Childe (1950) equated the emergence of civilization with the development of urbanism and a series of concomitants such as writing, monumental architecture, and specialized craft production. He believed that progress, or the accumulation of practical knowledge, accelerated with the initial emergence of civilization; periods of arrested cultural growth he attributed, not to racial deficiencies, but to internal and external contradictions generated by the urban revolution itself. Of particular importance in this regard was that neither the producers – who had been reduced to lower status – nor the elites – who relied heavily on religion and superstition for legitimation – were motivated to pursue practical inventions that would lead to further growth.

Childe's explication of the urban revolution has been criticized for its reliance on a trait list that is heavily biased towards the Near East, perceived as the antecedent of European civilization. The latter charge is undoubtedly true, but while contemporary scholars often reduce his characterization of urban development to a list of discrete traits, Childe systematically interrelated most of these variables in a model that stressed the role played by surplus accumulation in the development of dense populations, economic specialization, and class formation, emphases that he occasionally attributed to Marxist theory.

In 1952 Robert Redfield delivered six lectures at Cornell in which he responded to Childe's ideas regarding the emergence of civilization, and specifically objected to his focus on economic factors. These talks were part of a series entitled the "Messenger Lectures on the Evolution of Civilization," established in 1923 "for the special purpose of raising the moral standard of our political, business, and social life" (Hiram Messenger quoted in Redfield 1953: 180). Redfield's argument was explicitly grounded in contemporary Western concerns with the disintegration of the moral order, as well as the potential of civilized societies to shape their own futures. Like Childe, he identified cities as hallmarks of civilization; unlike Childe, he saw them as agents of continuing change, instead of end products of the Urban Revolution. In Redfield's view, cities transform traditional peoples into peasants and constitute one of the key links between urban elites and rural communities. Such a perspective was clearly shaped by his ethnographic study of acculturation among the Yucatec Maya and his use of ethnological data to model prehistoric change.

Redfield's delineation of the interdependence of the "little" tradition of the peasantry and the "great" tradition of the elites (Redfield 1956: 70) – both of which comprise civilizations – is directly relevant to the concerns raised by a number of contributors to this volume who examine the roles played by commoners, literati, and other social "types" in the generation and negotiation of high culture. His work provides insight into the disparate positions voiced by these scholars, on the one hand, and Baines and Yoffee on the other. Redfield argued that:

> Civilization is, of course, things added to society: cities, writing, public works, the state, the market, and so forth. Another way of looking at it is from the base provided by the folk society . . . If we do adopt this way of conceiving civilization, we shall think of Toynbee's twenty-one civilizations as different developments away from the folk society. We see then that civilizations do not depart from the nature of the folk society evenly or in the same way. (Redfield 1953: 22)

Thus the precise nature of the relationship between inner elites and others may be a source of variability among archaic states, rather than a characteristic common to all civilizations as Baines and Yoffee suggest.

The message that Redfield derived from the study of civilizations, like the one promoted by Childe (1936) was one of hope and progress. However, in contrast to Childe's vision of betterment through the practical knowledge produced by economic change, Redfield contended that the ethical perspective which distinguishes civilized from traditional society is the impetus for improvement. He argued that the emergence of civiliza-

tion resulted in the creation of a new moral order forged in urban contexts; the development of political and religious elites, as well as the presence of people with varied traditions, gave rise to self-conscious creativity and the possibility of universalizing ethical programs. Only in these circumstances, Redfield believed, could the great ideas that shape history develop, a process akin to the emergence of axial age civilizations described by Eisenstadt (1986) and others.

The notion that ideas determine the development of humankind was forcefully rejected by the neo-evolutionists of the second half of the twentieth century. As Trigger (1989) has clearly shown, the "new" archaeologists of this generation excluded most historical processes, such as diffusion or internally generated change, as possible sources of social transformation. They also differed from nineteenth-century conceptions in the development of a dual approach to the study of evolution and the rejection of racism as an explanation for cultural differences. However, stage models persisted under the rubric of general evolution, with the schema developed by Service and Fried providing the descriptive framework employed by most archaeologists of the 1960s and 1970s. The notion of civilization was first eclipsed by a narrower focus on individual states, and then by increasingly abstract concepts such as differentiation and centralization. The overwhelming interest was in change, specifically the development of social complexity and the emergence of pristine states. The goal of comparison was to identify universal laws that could account for all such cases, or at least general processes that were commonly associated with them. Multilineal or specific evolution was more concerned with the diversity of cultures than with uniform processes, and relied more heavily on the concept of adaptation. However, as a number of archaeologists have noted (e.g, Flannery and Marcus 1983; Yoffee 1993), archaeologists were often preoccupied with classifying societies according to the categories proposed by Service, rather than with examining and explaining their differences.

Despite the optimism engendered by archaeologists such as Binford regarding the possibility of reconstructing all aspects of prehistoric societies, the focus of neoevolutionists was squarely on ecological factors. Explanations for the development of social complexity almost invariably relied on environmental or demographic variables as well. Surprisingly, despite their ties to functionalism and the extensive use of systems theory, processual archaeologists produced few comparisons of how past civilizations actually operated. They were primarily interested in comparing processes that resulted in state formation, rather than the mature results of those developments.

Research on the origin of the state has declined precipitously over the last two decades. As models of the development of social complexity themselves became more complex, the notion propelling such research – that the causes of social evolution could be clearly identified – lost its attraction. On the one hand, archaeological investigations of these processes indicated that they were complicated, multivariate, and subject to specific historical conditions (e.g., Flannery and J. Marcus 1983; J. Marcus and Flannery 1996; Fowler 1989). At the same time, the positivist program, and neoevolutionary theory especially, was under attack for being a handmaiden to American imperialism (Trigger 1998).

Post-processualists, the primary critics of the "new" archaeology, may recognize the importance of addressing long-term trends (Hodder 1987), but their methods are primarily ethnographic in origin and scope. More than earlier archaeologists, they are concerned with reconstructing whole cultures and understanding them within a contextual, or emic, framework. Furthermore, they reject the notion of a smoothly functioning social system, and examine, instead, the continual contestation of power within cultures (e.g., D. Miller 1989). Ideology, and its role in maintaining and transforming social relations, is thus of particular interest. A holistic approach with an emphasis on ideology creates a possible point of convergence between post-processualists and scholars with an interest in civilizations. However, more than any of the earlier schools of thought, interpretive versions of post-processualism eschew comparison because meaning – which is viewed as the source of all social action – is culture specific.

Culture history and civilizationist studies

Another intellectual current in the study of ancient civilizations flows from history, but occasionally intersects with anthropological work on the same subject. Most famous, of course, are the comparative historians Arnold Toynbee (1934–1961) and Oswald Spengler (1922). Both of these scholars conceived of civilizations in organic terms and emphasized their unique qualities, while at the same time analyzing them comparatively in order to uncover underlying similarities in their development and decline. Their interest in the internal dynamics of civilizations has been carried on by scholars such as William Eckhardt, Matthew Melko, and David

Wilkinson (Sanderson 1995) as well as other participants in the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations.

Less well known, perhaps, is that a number of anthropologists, including Alfred Kroeber (1957, 1962) and Philip Bagby (1958), are also identified as "civilizationists." Kroeber (1957), for example, touched on many of the issues being raised today with regard to the study of civilizations, including the distinction between civilization and society, the processes underlying cultural continuity and change, and the systematic comparison of whole cultures rather than parts. His main focus, however, was always on style. Kroeber defined civilization as a collection of styles, and believed that it was best understood in terms of the creative and cultural activities – ranging from visual arts to fashion – that are stylistically distinct. He argued that since these creative products express values, and values allow civilizations to cohere, style would be the most appropriate way to delimit, characterize, and even compare civilizations.

This thesis is in some ways comparable to the argument advanced by Baines and Yoffee. One of the most important differences, however, is that Kroeber understood style almost exclusively in terms of creativity, rather than as the product of social interaction. Like Spengler (1922), he employed an organic analogy to describe and explain the growth and death of civilizations, which he attributed to "creative exhaustion." Kroeber's understanding of culture as transcending individual action left little room for social agency of any kind; accordingly, for the archaeologists inspired by him, artifact patterning was completely conflated with historical process. Bennett (1948), for example, promoted the concept of the co-tradition for characterizing distinctive, long-lived cultural traditions that were shared by interacting groups, a definition that included, but was not limited to the civilizations associated with complex societies. Co-traditions could be compared in terms of their centers, size, complexity, and rate of change, and also in order to determine specific historical relationships among them. However, the absence of a model relating material culture to social practices led to the treatment of such traditions as associations of unconnected traits, and the objects themselves, rather than the underlying social relations, became the focus of study. This virtually complete separation of material culture from human behavior was one of the primary criticisms of the subsequent generation of archaeologists.

World-systems approaches

The most prevalent archaeological approach to the study of civilizations today is the world-systems perspective elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein (see Trigger 1993 for an important exception). Wallerstein (1974) sought to utilize Fernand Braudel's notion of the *longue durée* (Braudel 1994) to explicate the development and long-term characteristics of capitalism. Archaeologists have directly applied ideas from the Annales school (Bintliff 1991; Knapp 1992) as well as world-systems theory in their studies of ancient states and civilizations, but the most common strategy is the use of a world-systems perspective that has been modified to accommodate the analysis of pre-capitalist social formations (e.g., Peregrine 1996).

The world-systems perspective emerged, in part, from a critique of development models that were predicated on evolutionary theory and that attributed the lack of economic progress in some countries to the inertia of national elites, the traditionalism of peasant cultures, or other internal problems. Instead, Frank, Wallerstein, Amin, and others regard underdevelopment as the result of a nation's historically constituted role in a global economic system. This fundamental shift in the unit of analysis is one of the primary advantages of the world-systems approach, and something that archaeologists have attempted on a more modest scale with interaction sphere and peer-polity models (Renfrew and Cherry 1986; Rowlands *et al.* 1987). World-systems, of course, are not entirely coincident with civilizations, but often substantially overlap with them. Hall and Chase-Dunn (1996: 12–13), for instance, define world-systems as "intersocietal networks in which the interactions (e.g., trade, warfare, intermarriage, information) are important for the reproduction of the internal structures of the composite units and importantly affect changes which occur in these local structures." They go on to propose that these interactions can involve political or military relations, as well as the exchange of bulk or prestige goods, and information.

Such a definition differs from the concept of a civilization as used in this volume in two important ways. First, networks are not always associated with complex societies, and second, civilizations are usually conceived in terms of the last type of exchange, information, broadly construed to include ideology, religion, and culture. Civilizations, then, are a subset of the larger and more diverse class of world-systems. In recognition of this fact, attempts have recently been made to establish explicit conceptual links between world-systems theory

and the work produced by civilizationists (Sanderson 1995). While civilizationists tend to focus on the cultural aspects of early civilizations, and world-systems researchers on the linkages underpinning the modern global economy, the two approaches do have points of convergence. These relate primarily to broad-scale features of these networks, such as size, developmental patterns, and internal settlement hierarchies, all of which can be systematically compared (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995). However, many of the phenomena which interest civilizationists have been largely ignored by world-systems scholars: the latter have been criticized for their inattention to culture as well as the role of ideology in the hegemonic relations that characterize the modern world system.

Civilized discourse

Most approaches to the study of civilizations, then, have focused on their emergence, growth, or decline, taking change, either linear or cyclical, as the primary object of investigation. Baines and Yoffee's work (1998), however, raises a different question: what accounts for the relative continuity of civilizations through time and across space, despite the fact that they encompass diverse groups who are potential sources of competing ideologies and alternative world views? Part of the answer lies in the way in which past civilizations are perceived in the present, both contemporary times and previous "presents." Civilized elites often attempt to create a legitimizing cultural genealogy, even in the face of variation and discontinuity, in order to generate the illusion of great antiquity (Helms 1993). So, for example, ancient Egyptian literature was rarely set in a contemporary "present"; rather, stories or didactic texts not infrequently recounted events in the past, which deftly foreshadowed or legitimized shifts in political power (Baines 1989; Parkinson 1997). Thus this strategy of a call to archaism entails, at times, the self-conscious rewriting of history and the erasure of competing views – but more often a less conscious emphasis on events or objects that are conceived as signposts to the present. Such processes acting in the past would have obscured archaeological and textual evidence for ruptures of various sorts; acting in the present they inhibit the ability of scholars to perceive or describe such discontinuities (see Richards, chapter 2 in this volume).

Baines and Yoffee recognize that such processes occurred, but offer a different, if related, answer to the question of continuity. They identify inner elites, and their role as the exclusive carriers of high culture, as key to the maintenance of civilization in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, arguing that "in most cases, a civilization's style . . . is more or less coterminous with its extent in space and time. The style is created in a high-cultural context, is sustained by an elite that commissions and consumes the works that transmit the stylistic tradition, and incorporates fundamental values . . . This value-laden stylistic complex is crucial to the transmission of the civilization's essence through time" (Baines and Yoffee 1998: 237). While Baines and Yoffee explicitly characterize high culture as a communicative complex, they argue that this discourse is restricted almost entirely to the inner elites, their rulers, and gods. People outside this small circle play little if any role in the creation or consumption of high culture, even as audiences for legitimizing performances:

> The division of elite and the rest leaves open the question of whether the rest have a different culture or values from those of the elite . . . So far as relevant archaeological and epigraphic evidence in Egypt and Mesopotamia goes, that does not seem to be the case. Rather elite high culture appears to stand in contrast to a poverty or an absence of distinctive materialized ideology for others . . . Essential factors favoring the persistence of high culture in Egypt and Mesopotamia seem to lie in the lack of available effective alternatives within the same culture and, until the first millennium BC, even in neighboring cultures. (Baines and Yoffee 1998: 45–46)

In contrast to the highly exclusionary position asserted by Baines and Yoffee, the importance of communication between inner elites and others can be argued on logical as well as empirical grounds. Emergent elites had a limited array of strategies available to them in order to maintain their class position: they could actively convince their subordinates of the legitimacy of their demands for labor and goods; their subordinates could share such beliefs already; elites could engage in a limited reallocation of resources; or they could use coercion. While the latter certainly occurred (although, interestingly, not a factor addressed in depth by any of the contributors to this volume), it is neither cost effective nor a sustainable means of surplus extraction when used alone. The complete separation of elites and non-elites posited by Baines and Yoffee is thus unlikely to have persisted for long periods.

In fact, the majority of contributors to this volume emphasize that inner elites constitute only one set of actors in the broad arena in which civilizations emerged and endured. In the societies examined by these authors,

the creation and maintenance of civilization involved a diverse array of players and processes. These cases indicate that while ancient civilizations are not entirely comparable to modern ideological or socio-political phenomena, non-elites were more important, and communication among different groups more intensive, than Baines and Yoffee propose. However, neither the participation of diverse actors, nor resistance by them, necessarily resulted in gross spatial or temporal discontinuities in the high cultural complexes that distinguish civilizations.

Attention to the communicative aspects of high culture, its link to legitimation, and to ideological and social discourse in general, encourages a more complete understanding of the dynamics of early civilizations, and particularly how challenges to the status quo could result in continuity of style or world view, if not political substance. This occurred, in part, because of the discursive nature of ideological transformations, the need to engage or at least address current belief systems in the course of promoting new ones. Such a process must have been present even during the rise of civilizations, when ruptures with previous conceptions of order and aesthetic principles are most apparent. While the development of extreme inequality was associated with the advent of novel ideologies and associated aesthetic principles, the disjuncture between new and previous world views was not complete. Extant beliefs and practices would have formed the raw materials from which emergent inner elites constructed a new order. For instance, it has been suggested that the cosmologically charged pyramidal form associated with the graves of ancient Egyptian rulers from the third and second millennia BC had its origins in the folk traditions and mortuary practices of non-elites (Hawass and Lehner 1994).

At the start of this process, the selective and exclusive arrogation of such concepts would have been critical to legitimizing the elite's novel role in society (D. Miller *et al.* 1989b). However, as Baines and Yoffee note, elites sometimes had a vested interest in obscuring the connection between civilization and the "chaos" which preceded it, and of that between high culture and folk tradition, thus rendering such continuity archaeologically ambiguous or invisible. Exclusionary ideological control of these concepts was also subject to repeated challenge over time, potentially obscuring even further the origins of key ideological elements.

The last several years have seen an increasing emphasis in the literature on the concept of social negotiation, and all it implies regarding communication, resistance, factionalism, and the role of diverse groups in the functioning of complex societies, and the effect of these factors on dominant ideologies (e.g., D. Miller *et al.* 1989b; Brumfiel 1989, 1994; Chase and Chase 1992; De Marrais *et al.* 1996). One focus is the consideration of factions within elites, subgroups competing for power within political, religious or social arenas, leading more often to the usurpation or capture of ideology, rather than its complete replacement (Brumfiel 1989). In the context of empire or state, such competition could lie at the level of dynasties, cities, or states; or among provincial or lower elites emulating inner elites in attempts to gain status or grace through imitation.

Another strong current has been a call to recontextualize elites within society as a whole, considering their interactions with "the masses" in discussions of power and ideology (Kowalewski *et al.* 1992; G. Marcus 1992; Cowgill 1992a; De Marrais *et al.* 1996). Alternative world views almost certainly existed among non-elites, alongside the "state" formulations. In a recent volume on sorcery in modern day Sri Lanka, Kapferer points out that subordinate groups, while aware of the hegemonizing ideology of the elite, "do not necessarily internalize the themes stressed by those who command dominant institutions . . . subordinated groups are far from duped by controlling ideas and practices and are able to penetrate them" (cf. Scott 1985: 314–350). In Sri Lanka, local sorcery shrines "can become places . . . that are vital centers for the expression and formulation of a resistant consciousness" (Kapferer 1997: 256). In fact, he suggests, "the persons who are hegemonized are the ruling classes themselves" (*Ibid.*). In the study of past societies, alternative ideologies are inevitably difficult to track given the inability of poorer or marginalized groups to materialize ideology in a lasting form; but the reality of multiple arenas for action (Brumfiel 1998), the crucial role of oral communication in these diverse arenas (see Heyer 1988; Lasswell *et al.* 1979; Goody 1986), the issue of differential literacy and access to power (e.g., Bowman and Woolf 1994), and the potential for contestation of hegemonic ideologies, reminds us that commoners as well as elites were active participants in social negotiation.

The case studies

The case studies which follow Baines and Yoffee's "Setting the terms" essay (chapter 2) employ the concepts of order, legitimacy, and wealth as an interrelated medium within which to consider the functioning of

several different civilizations. Additionally, a number of the themes discussed in the preceding sections crosscut these discussions, complementing those set forth by Baines and Yoffee: the notion of a "civilization" and what causes it to endure; the power of archaism as a legitimizing tool; the role of actors and factions other than inner elites, including provincial elites, artisans, tradesmen, scholars, and non-elites; the crucial issue of communication and points of articulation between different levels of society, and of resistance and negotiation; and the tantalizing relationship between archaeological and textual evidence in reconstructing these patterns.

The case studies begin with a series of papers which debate or expand upon Baines and Yoffee's original Egypt–Mesopotamia comparison. Two papers on Egypt explore the interplay of order, legitimacy, and wealth in the Egyptian Nile Valley from the early third through the mid-second millennia BC. David O'Connor explores the ambiguity of the ideology of order in early Egypt (the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom periods, 3100–2260 BC), arguing that it may have been a society-wide preoccupation as opposed to a strictly elite concern. Through general consideration of the range of archaeological data present for the period, and detailed analysis of a provincial elite monument erected during a centralized period of ancient Egyptian civilization, he considers the role of the individual actor within the ideology of cosmological order (*ma'at*) promulgated by early elites, and contests the notion that maintenance of this order was presented or perceived as completely exclusive. Rather, he suggests, every individual had a part to play in the maintenance of cosmic order, in regional and local landscapes.

Working within a later time span than that considered by O'Connor, Janet Richards examines the changing patterns of access to key symbols, commodities, and ritual landscapes in the First Intermediate and Middle Kingdom periods in Egypt (2250–1650 BC), and the concomitant effect on legitimizing strategies of the inner elite. Also questioning the notion of uncontested domination and completely exclusive high cultural ideology, she considers archaeological and textual evidence for the communicative interplay over time between ruling elites and other social groups, and the effects of shifting access to symbolic and material resources on the discourse of inequality and power.

In a paper on law courts, social conflict, and the institution of *nadītu*s (female testators assigned to temples and forbidden to marry) in Mesopotamia, Norman Yoffee considers the instability of Mesopotamian political systems in the perspective of the struggle to produce wealth, to maintain symbols and systems of knowledge, and to construct order. Instituted during a time of unprecedented economic and social mobility, this strategy was one way in which elites mediated potential dislocations of "cosmic" order, and reaffirmed traditional ideologies through deliberate archaism, a call to the most venerable symbols.

Subsequent chapters move beyond the spatial and chronological framework of the original comparison. For the New World, Rosemary Joyce examines the construction of categories of value in Mesoamerica and their relationship, over time, to the definition of wealth and order. Focusing on the elite's creation of an aesthetic of beauty, she addresses the social process by which value was assigned not only to materials used to communicate status and exclusivity, but the different contexts within which these high cultural forms were consumed, and the contribution of these forms to the continuation of a "civilizational order" of Mesoamerica.

Within the framework of an empire incorporating multicultural groups and diverse territories, Mary Van Buren investigates the relationship between inner elites and the production of high culture in the Andes, suggesting that provincial elites and commoners played important roles in the creation and transmission of Andean civilization. In delineating the political strategies of imperial expansion by the Inka, she considers the co-existence within the empire of both coercive and ideological control (the latter manipulating existing concepts both of the sun cult, and of envalued technologies relating to textiles and metal), and of indigenous resistance to that control. Through the use of ethnohistorical data she is able to track the persistence of specific "civilizational traits" into the present, examining issues of transmission and change in meaning over time.

Additional case studies of Old World civilizations include the Indus Valley, the Roman Empire, and Han Dynasty China. Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, working from a substantial fund of archaeological data, examines the creation of wealth and its role in the legitimation of power as reflected in material culture and technology during the rise of cities in the Indus Valley traditions. Tracking the development of order, legitimacy, and wealth from the Neolithic through the Harappan periods, a time span of nearly six thousand years, his contribution provides a telling contrast to patterns in Mesopotamia and Egypt, against which the Indus has been either traditionally or unconsciously measured. In highlighting the roles of merchants and artisans in the development and control of technology and craft pro-

duction, Kenoyer stresses the importance of looking at non-exotic goods, and of considering the different arenas within which a discourse of status and power exists, both public or private. He concludes, contrary to most approaches to wealth and its relationship to status, that in the Indus wealth was explicitly equated with status, and with a legitimizing ideology of authority.

Susan Alcock discusses the uses of power and nostalgia in negotiating order and legitimacy in the Roman revival and use of Greek "high culture," and the strategies used by Greeks of the imperial age to create an alternative framework which allowed both the accommodation and rejection of Roman rule. Highlighting the importance of ideological inversion and its use in contestation, she uses the evidence of both material culture and literary works to argue that the Greeks, despite a transformed political order and cultural identity following their incorporation into the Roman empire, were able to actively negotiate notions of order and legitimacy through the retrospective use of classical "high culture."

Finally, Bennet Bronson discusses order, legitimacy, and wealth in early Han China, highlighting contrasts in these principles to the early states of the Mediterranean world. Specifically, he explores the role of the intelligentsia in constructing and regulating the dominant ideology of rule, and their potential, through the power of privileged knowledge, to resist hegemony, and to affect the legitimacy and efficacy of the elite wielding political power. What is particularly intriguing in Bronson's contribution is the self-consciousness of the discourse regarding order and what constituted appropriate legitimizing strategies, an insight not salient in the various contemporary and ethnohistorical sources bearing on other discussions in the volume.

In her closing discussion, Elizabeth Brumfiel synthesizes and broadens the themes addressed throughout the volume. She considers the preceding papers within the general context of the study of complex societies and the specific advantages of returning to the topic of "high culture," and supplies a further example of the political uses of high culture to manage factional competition within the Aztec elite stratum. She considers the concept of *tonalli*, a crucial heat–light–energy force, its relationship to an ideology of cosmic warfare, and its materialization in objects of skilled craftsmanship. Finally, she demonstrates that Aztec rulers, by manipulating these factors, averted contestation among young nobles and transformed them into political allies, providing a vignette of a functioning arena in which power was built and resistance managed and negotiated.

Conclusion

The spectrum of complex societies represented in this volume ranges from nonliterate arenas such as the Andes and the Indus Valley, where reliance on archaeological or ethnohistorical data is pronounced, to literate states such as the Roman empire or ancient Egypt, for which scholarship has been traditionally dominated by humanistic or historical approaches. In the multidimensional approach taken by the various contributors, and their use of the order–legitimacy–wealth platform as a point of departure from which to consider the functioning of "civilization" in their particular research areas, they have offered fresh perspectives and questioned long held assumptions. Especially fruitful is the recurrent stress in the volume on communication within social and political networks, and on all of the various groups between which communicative discourse takes place, whether or not they are archaeologically visible. In this volume, the concept of "civilization" is used in its most inclusive and dynamic sense, as a complex of ideologies and arenas created, perceived, inhabited, and negotiated by living people of all different social, economic, and political levels.

Note

1 Jonathan Mark Kenoyer joins the session participants in this volume with his chapter on the Indus Valley.