

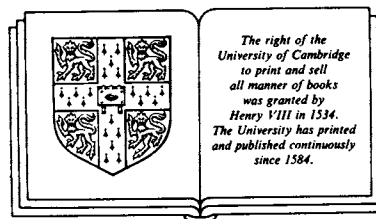
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THE ANCIENT WORLD**

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MOGENS LARSEN AND
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CONTENTS

Preface

Part one Theoretical perspectives

- 1 Centre and periphery: a review of a concept
Michael Rowlands 1

Part two Regional systems and the genesis of dependency

- 2 The ancient economy, transferable technologies and the Bronze Age world-system: a view from the northeastern frontier of the Ancient Near East
Phil Kohl 13
- 3 Cedar forest to silver mountain: social change and the development of long-distance trade in early Near Eastern societies
Leon Marfoe 25
- 4 On tracking cultural transfers in prehistory: the case of Egypt and lower Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium BC
P. R. S. Moorey 36

Part three Regional interaction and crisis

- 5 Commercial networks in the Ancient Near East
Mogens Trolle Larsen 47

- 6 Aspects of ceremonial exchange in the Near East during the late second millennium BC
Carlo Zaccagnini 57
- 7 The collapse of the Near Eastern regional system at the end of the Bronze Age: the case of Syria
Mario Liverani 66
- 8 Center and periphery in Bronze Age Scandinavia
Kristian Kristiansen 74

Part four

Imperial expansion and its hinterland: zonal contrasts

- 9 Imperial expansion under the Roman Republic
Daphne Nash 87
- 10 Culture process on the periphery: Belgic Gaul and Rome during the late Republic and early Empire
Colin Haselgrove 104
- 11 Empire, frontier and the barbarian hinterland: Rome and northern Europe from AD 1–400
Lotte Hedeager 125

Bibliography 141

Index 154

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PREFACE

Many of the papers in this volume were first given at a conference entitled 'Relations between the Near East, the Mediterranean World and Europe – 3rd to 1st millennium BC' which was held at Aarhus in 1980. This was also the occasion when a number of the problems and ideas which are the concern of this volume were first discussed. One of these is characterising forms of fluid and open-ended networks of social relations, usually subsumed in archaeological and historical terminologies by such shorthand phrases as 'exchange', 'interrelations', 'interactions' (either hierarchical or egalitarian systems), 'dependency' or, as here, by borrowing from Immanuel Wallerstein the notion of centre and periphery. All of these terms offend in one way or another and may be said to imply a Eurocentric bias. But this is something from which we are unlikely to escape and our only defence must lie in being clear as to the problem we wish the term to address and help us to understand.

In this volume, we take this to be the nature of exploitation and its manifestations on a regional scale. Wallerstein's concept of centre and periphery has the advantage of asking how exploitation functions in social contexts that are not the products of modern states with their nationalised economies and class structures. It challenges us instead to conceive of local communities as ideologically formed to resist the conditions that promote inequalities and domination. This raises the question of the relation between power and cosmology and how the pursuit of self interest should ideally conform to the maintenance of uni-

versal order. This has of course long been recognised, although not without disagreement as to how one inscribes itself on the other. Even so, an emphasis on transcendent moral authority denies any simple imposition of a rationalist model of conscious power struggles and legitimation in the analysis of premodern (and modern!) forms of domination. In particular, it would disagree with such modernist categories as structure/agency and the consequent tendency to limit culture to the symbolic as the negotiation of meaning and the strategising of power (e.g. Hodder 1982; Miller and Tilley 1984).

Another problem is whether exploitation necessarily depends on coercion. In periods of crisis, this is undoubtedly the case. But in more stable circumstances, repression may be more securely based through establishing a hegemony of shared interests and beliefs in the benefits of maintaining the established order. What are the conditions which promote the recognition of crisis and desire for change in contrast to the desirability of reproducing the same? Narrative prehistories are often structured around such opposing views of stagnation and dynamism.

It also tends to be assumed that different forms of exploitation are contained within 'societies' or 'ethnic groups' which are accepted, rather unproblematically, to be bounded units. Yet modern nation states, as political units, have been unusually successful in developing controls over the material and social resources within their boundaries. Unique developments in state bureaucracies, military organisation, surveillance, transport and communication are crucial factors in explaining their success in contrast to premodern societies. By making complete social boundedness an unusual occurrence whose evolution needs to be explained, we might also account for the fact that the archaeologi-

cal unit of analysis has become more intractable and difficult to define with increasing sophistication in measuring variation in the material culture record.

This certainly affects any literal use of Wallerstein's centre-periphery model in prehistory since it is axiomatic to his definition of exploitation that the relationship should be one of unequal exchange between sovereign units. Yet the unitary models of social stratification on which this relies are not the most helpful for understanding premodern forms of inequality. The idea that widely dispersed elites could recognise themselves as a community forming a network of shared power and meaning precisely to help each other control local hierarchies from which they attempt to be culturally remote and yet upon which they may be quite fragily imposed, is not so rare a feature even in modern European history.

Finally the original geographical definition of the conference has been retained in order to allow for patterns of exploitation in social and political relations that may not correspond to contemporary culture area definitions. This pursuit of the particular is justified by the assurance that understanding the interplay of the abstract and the particular will lead us to useful propositions about the diversity of human societies.

Our thanks are due to all the scholars who contributed to the original conference as well as to the Danish Research Council for the Humanities and to Aarhus University for their financial support. We are also grateful to our editors at Cambridge University Press: Kate Owen and Peter Richards.

*Michael Rowlands
 Mogens Larsen
 Kristian Kristiansen*