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CHIEFDOMS: POWER, ECONOMY, AND  
IDEOLOGY

EDITED BY  
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A SCHOOL OF AMERICAN RESEARCH BOOK



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## Preface

Chiefdoms are intermediate societies, neither states nor egalitarian societies. The understanding of them and their dynamics lies at the base of recent attempts to study the evolution of complex societies. Earlier concepts of chiefdoms, deriving especially from the work of Service and Sahlins, have been much criticized, and many have advocated abandoning the chiefdom concept and similar evolutionary typologies. This general theoretical dissatisfaction, coupled with extensive new archaeological and historical studies of such societies, made me realize that a reconsideration of chiefdoms was overdue.

In late 1985, I talked over with Jonathan Haas, then director of programs and research, the idea of an Advanced Seminar on chiefdoms at the School of American Research. He was encouraging and helped me develop the seminar proposal and participant list. The goal was to bring together scholars with archaeological, historical, and ethnographic research on chiefdoms from around the world.

The seminar, "Chiefdoms: their evolutionary significance," was held January 18 to 22, 1988, at the School of American Research. Discussions were lively, ranging widely over many intellectual perspectives and geographical areas. Both American and European intellectual traditions were represented, although some bias towards a "Michigan/Columbia school" might be apparent. Most would consider themselves materialists although the diversity was clear in discussions, at times heated, among those whom others might label marxists, structural marxists, and cultural ecologists. Geographically, North

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America, Mesoamerica, South America, Europe, and the Pacific were particularly well covered; major gaps, however, were apparent in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, where the chiefdom concept has been little used. The participants in this seminar were primarily archaeologists, largely because of the recognition broadly within anthropology that evolutionary approaches require a long-term diachronic perspective. Sáenz, the one ethnographer, analyzed the historical sources for the Saharan society with which he works; Ferguson, a political scientist, provided a valuable perspective from outside anthropology in addition to his historical analyses of Greece and Italy.

All of the contributors to the present volume were participants in the seminar. In addition, Jonathan Haas, whose own work on social stratification was a keystone for several arguments at the seminar, sat in on many of our discussions and we tried actively to involve him. Winifred Creamer joined us for several meals and added important insight from her own research on chiefdoms. As can be seen in Chapter 1, which summarizes the seminar discussions, participants came to the seminar with quite divergent views on chiefdoms; at times everyone appeared to be talking at once, or at least trying to be recognized. In the end everyone was heard and we arrived at a degree of agreement that could not have been anticipated in the early discussions.

With only one exception, participants prepared papers before the sessions in Santa Fe and these were circulated to all. Vincas Steponaitis, who was both moving to a new job and becoming a first-time father, agreed to join after considerable cajoling but without written seminar paper. All of the papers included in this volume have evolved significantly from their seminar drafts, enriched from the productive interactions of our week together.

All who have participated in the Advanced Seminars at the School of American Research seem to come away with the memory of a charged intellectual event. Our group melded together for that week into a community of scholars that we will always remember. The School's staff pampered and supported us in such a utopian environment that it spoiled us for the real world. I thank Jonathan Haas, Douglas Schwartz, and the smoothly working team of the SAR for this remarkably productive experience.