

## CHAPTER ONE

# MATERIALITIES OF COMPLEXITY IN ANCIENT EURASIA

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### LINKING PAST AND PRESENT: EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF THE MODERN WORLD

Our current world is characterized by life in cities, the existence of marked social inequalities, and a growing process of individualization (Clark 2013; Hernando 2012). But when and how did these phenomena arise? What was the social and economic background for the development of hierarchies and the first cities? How did mental structures, identities, and the perception of space change as a result of so many people living together in comparatively small areas? In which ways did the evolution of more impersonal relationships associated with urban ways of life affect social organization (Figure 1.1)? According to the concept of materiality (Hodder 2012; Maran/Stockhammer 2012; Olsen 2010), people create material culture while at the same time material culture creates them, making them who they are and conditioning the way they experience the world. Consequently, material culture actively constructs identity, whether through pottery production, the wearing of jewellery, the building of sanctuaries and the like (Malafouris 2013). Just as the invention of the modern car in the nineteenth century dramatically changed the perception of time, space, and the landscape, we can imagine, for instance, the major impact that the domestication of horses, the development of the wheel, and the use of chariots would have had in ancient Eurasia (Anthony 2007). Accepting this premise, one of the starting points of this work is that



(a)



(b)

1.1. (a) A modern urban landscape: Aerial view of Chicago (Photo: M. Fernández-Götz); (b) Early urbanism in ancient Europe: idealized reconstruction of the Heuneburg agglomeration in the 6th century BC (after Krause et al. 2016).

the basic structure of perception of the world is transformed as the material world changes, at the same time as the latter – the realm of things – changes as the subjective/cognitive world alters (Hernando 2002; see Chapter 4 in this volume).



1.2. The Hohmichele mound near the Heuneburg, one of the largest Early Iron Age tumuli in Central Europe (after Krause et al. 2016).

In many parts of Eurasia, the last few millennia BC marked a fundamental turning point that was accompanied by the appearance of a whole range of phenomena that were to play an important part in shaping our world. Some of the key elements are early state formations, urbanization, writing, and inter-continental trade networks (Kristiansen/Larsson 2005; Wilkinson et al. 2011). This age of increasing mobility of people, ideas, and goods saw the development of city-states as a framework for community life, the first empires, the appearance of sumptuous aristocratic and royal burials, large-scale colonization throughout the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the development of bronze and iron technology, the widespread adoption of the alphabet, and the earliest coinages, to name just a few examples (Figure 1.2). In other words, it was a period of growing connectivity and increasing socioeconomic and technological complexity. At the same time, it was also a key period from the perspective of philosophy and the history of religion. This is particularly true for the centuries around the middle of the 1st millennium BC, which saw the teachings of Confucius and Lao-Tze in China, the development of Buddhism in India, and the rise of Greek philosophy. Although these phenomena are very different in content, they are testimony to a change in human thought and perception that was both an expression of and a catalyst for deep-seated social and historical developments. Although the creation of concepts such as the ‘Axial Age’ may lack the necessary nuances (see Assmann, Chapter 12), nevertheless they are a clear indication of the overwhelming importance of this

period for the development of humankind (Arnason et al. 2005; Bellah/Joas 2012).

*Eurasia at the Dawn of History: Urbanization and Social Change* is centred on the processes of centralization, cultural interaction, and social differentiation that led to the development of the first urban centres and early state formations of ancient Europe – although from a marked comparative perspective that includes both broader theoretical-methodological reflections on urbanization dynamics and individualization, as well as comparisons with areas such as the Near East, Egypt, and China (for recent overviews on the comparative archaeology of complex societies, see Smith 2012; Trigger 2007). Its analysis not only applies the conventional perspective of settlement research but also puts the emphasis on the preconditions and consequences of urbanization from a cognitive perspective (see Renfrew, Chapter 2). In this sense, not only do writing and its implications play a major role (see the later discussion) but so does the visual world in general, from everyday tools to elaborate prestige objects and monumental fortifications (Wells 2012; see Chapter 26). Central concepts of the volume are the long-term and grand narrative; its geographical limits are China and the Atlantic coasts, although with a greater emphasis on Europe. Following Cunliffe (2008), Europe is understood here as a ‘peninsula’ or subcontinent of the larger Eurasian continent. The chronological framework goes from the Neolithic to the Late Iron Age, with a focus on the early 1st millennium BC.

The present volume looks at the larger picture of the transition between late prehistory and early history, although with a very different focus and content than that attempted in works from V. G. Childe’s seminal book *The Dawn of European Civilization* (1925) to more recent volumes such as C. Broodbank’s *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World* (2013). Although we agree that there is a need for more detailed analyses of specific contexts, we are also convinced that it is essential to use medium- and large-scale studies to understand specific social phenomena and recognise converging and diverging patterns. The main aim of this book is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the processes that led to the evolution of the first cities and to the integration of local and subregional groups into larger communities. The initial thrust came from a conference organized in February 2013 in Stuttgart with the support of the German Research Foundation and the Ministry of Finance and Economics<sup>1</sup>. The contributions presented there have been enriched by additional parts and chapters.

What preconditions were necessary for the development of large agglomerations? What was the role of religion in bringing together groups that previously had for the most part been scattered? What effects did the distribution and spread of goods and ideas have during the course of Phoenician and Greek colonization? Can we identify structural similarities between the early

urbanization processes that took place in Greece, Etruria, or southern Germany? What were the conceptual background and the inspirations behind new directions in art; for example, the La Tène style? These and other questions are discussed and compared during the course of the book.

For practical reasons, the volume is divided into eight parts:

1. *Between Myth and Logos*: After this introductory chapter by the editors, the first part continues with Colin Renfrew's (Cambridge) overview on the main approaches and fields of study offered by cognitive archaeology. David R. Olson (Toronto) examines the role of the invention of writing in the development of those cognitive functions that we take as characteristic of modern forms of rationality. On a similar line, Almudena Hernando (Madrid) discusses 'individuality' as the result of an individualization process that transforms personal identity.
2. *The Development of Social Differentiation*: At the beginning of the second thematic block, Jean Guilaine (Paris) considers the impact of social differentiation throughout the Mediterranean Neolithic. John Chapman and Bisserka Gaydarska (Durham), meanwhile, present the spectacular results from recent research at the 4th-millennium BC Trypillia mega-sites of Eastern Europe. On a broader basis and presenting examples from Bosnia, Ukraine, and Germany, Johannes Müller (Kiel) interprets late prehistoric centralization processes as triggers of social control in nonliterate societies.
3. *Approaching Social Complexity*: The development of early state formations represents a much-debated but fundamental aspect of growing complexity. Fred Spier (Amsterdam) analyzes this question from the point of view of 'big history.' Gary M. Feinman (Chicago), for his part, explores how ancient economies worked and varied and how the diversity of economic arrangements can underpin societal change and variation.
4. *Urbanism through the Ages: Concepts, Models, and Definitions*: This part is devoted to comparative urban studies, both through theoretical discussions and concrete examples from different parts of the world. Michael E. Smith (Tempe) reviews three main approaches used by archaeologists to define and identify early cities, advocating the use of a polythetic set of archaeological attributes to study the nature and intensity of ancient urbanism. Equally refreshing is the chapter by Hans Peter Hahn (Frankfurt), who examines the dynamics of urbanization in the global context on the basis of African examples.
5. *Ancient Civilizations at the Turn of the Axis*: This part starts with Jan Assmann's (Heidelberg) discussion of the concept of the 'Axial Age' proposed by Karl Jaspers. Whereas his chapter is mostly centred on Egypt, the next contribution by Mario Liverani (Rome) distinguishes between 'conservative' and 'innovative' cultural areas in the Near East in the period

between ca. 800–400 BC. Moving on to the Far East, Alain Thote (Paris) traces the growing trend towards individualization visible in elite burials of 1st-millennium BC China. Also thematically closely linked is the next chapter by Svend Hansen (Berlin), who studies the giant tumuli of the Iron Age using the key words ‘tradition,’ ‘monumentality,’ and ‘knowledge transfer.’

6. *Times of Connectivity: The Mediterranean on the Move*: The 1st millennium BC was a period of increasing connectivity in the Mediterranean and its surrounding areas. John Bintliff (Leiden/Edinburgh) analyzes the topic of social change in the European Iron Age through the use of the Annales historians’ concept of structural history as well as recent developments in neuroscience. Of central importance for this period was the impact of Phoenician colonization, which is addressed by María Eugenia Aubet (Barcelona). A comparative view of the Mediterranean and temperate Europe is offered by John Collis (Sheffield), who contrasts two different traditions of urbanization.
7. *Early Urban Cultures from South to North*: Following on the previous chapter by Collis, this part presents four case studies of centralization and urbanization processes in the Mediterranean and Central Europe. Jonathan Hall (Chicago) explores the origins of the Greek *polis*, Massimo Osanna (Matera) analyzes the settlement structures in the hinterland of the Ionian coast of Southern Italy, and Simon Stoddart (Cambridge) outlines the development of political landscapes in Etruria. That similar processes also took place north of the Alps is shown by Manuel Fernández-Götz’s (Edinburgh) and Dirk Krausse’s (Esslingen) chapter on the development of urban centres in the Early Iron Age of temperate Europe. Finally, Martín Almagro-Gorbea (Madrid) summarizes the evidence for founding rituals and myths in the so-called Celtic world.
8. *Changing Symbols, Changing Minds?*: The last thematic block uses the example of La Tène art to discuss the cognitive dimensions of changing visual representations. At least in the beginning, it was a ‘grand style’ – to use Earle’s (2002) expression – which strengthened the bonds between dominant persons who shared the same language, endowing them with a symbolic capital that distinguished them from the common people of their communities. Rudolf Echt (Saarbrücken) describes the transition from the Hallstatt to the La Tène period, understood as an ‘axis displacement’. Otto-Hermann Frey (Marburg) analyzes the cultural influences and symbolic motives of the new art style, whereas Peter Wells (Minnesota) concentrates on the cognitive implications of the changing visual world. To conclude, Pierre-Yves Milcent (Toulouse) proposes a new ‘multipolar’ model for the origin of the La Tène cultures, in a setting where the Atlantic regions also play an important part.

On the basis of the ‘History of Culture’ perspective adopted in this book (Morris 2000), the objective is that these different sections will attract different types of readers: Some may be interested only in the theoretical and methodological contributions on comparative urbanization, individualization, or writing; others may prefer concrete case studies such as those on China, Ukraine, or southern Italy; and still others may want to read about specific aspects related to the development and cognitive implications of La Tène art. Although this book does not pretend at any time to provide a complete picture – neither thematically nor geographically – of ‘Eurasia at the dawn of history,’ it aims to contribute to the development of ‘grand narratives’ that help to make archaeological and ancient historical research more accessible for the broader discussion in the humanities and social sciences (Broodbank 2013; Renfrew 2007; Scarre 2005). In what follows we comment on individualization, urbanization, and the fractality of power.

#### RELATIONAL AND INDIVIDUALIZED IDENTITIES

B. Olsen (2007) has recently stated that if there is one social trend that runs through the whole of humanity, it is increasing materiality. Although this is true, a no less significant development should be added: the growing importance that individualism has acquired in comparison with relational identity (Hernando 2002, 2012). Societies always combine features of both modes of identity, but in varied ways – there is no white or black, but shades of grey (Fowler 2016). Thus throughout history we find multidimensional degrees of relational personhood, ranging from more ‘relational’ identities to others that put greater emphasis on individuality; in the latter, the sense of an interior ‘I’ that is separate and distinct from the rest of the world is more developed (Dülmen 2001; Hernando 2002; see Chapter 4). As different studies have shown, the process of individualization occurred as the identity counterpart of greater socioeconomic complexity and hence the increasing division of functions (Elias 1994; Hernando 2012). In fact, it was not until the seventeenth century that the term ‘individual’ was applied to persons, which indicates that only then were the degree of individualization and the number of people affected sufficient to be recognized as a reality by language (Elias 1991; Hernando 2002).

In present-day state societies, the individual human being depends more on him- or herself (i.e. the individual has a growing number of alternatives and a greater range of choice). In contrast, in societies with a lower level of socioeconomic complexity the basic structure of personality tends to show a greater consonance with the basic structure of the social group in question (Elias 1991). Identity in these communities is much more relational; that is, it is more determined by relations with the group: People know who they are more as a result of their identification with the group than through the differences that mark

them out within it. An interesting example can be found in Leenhardt's (1979) study of the Kanaks of New Caledonia, where nobody knew who he was as a separate individual, but each was defined through his relationship with others: A person was the father of his son, the son of his father, the nephew of his uncle, the brother of his sister, and so on. Therefore, the major criticism that can be made of current applications of so-called action theory is that it establishes the 'individual' of modernity as the main protagonist throughout history, without paying attention to other ways of perceiving reality and therefore constructing identity (Fowler 2004; Harris 2009; Thomas 2004). The way in which the peoples of Antiquity perceived the world and acted in it was very far removed from our modern Western rationalism, and it has to be stressed that not only their technology – as often thought – but also their *mentality* and *being-in-the-world* were different (Chic García 2014; Hernando 2002) because, as the concept of materiality shows, the material and the cognitive spheres are not separate but inextricably linked (see the earlier discussion). As Wells (2008: 58–59) has rightly stated, 'the brains of infants in Iron Age Europe developed their cognitive maps differently from the way our brains do today'. Instead of projecting our modern reasoning and emotions onto the past, we should start by recognizing that the past was 'a foreign country' (Lowenthal 1985), a world of 'otherness'. Although we still lack many keys to understanding the past, acknowledging its complexity is a good starting point.

Closely linked to the process of individualization is the way in which reality is represented, in which two basic mechanisms can be recognized: metonymy and metaphor (Hernando 2002; Olson 1994). Whereas in the first the symbols or signs used to represent reality are part of that reality (e.g. a tree, a rock, the sun), in the case of metaphor reality and the signs that represent it are different things (e.g. a map, a clock). In practice, all societies use both forms of representation, but they do so to varying degrees: Oral societies favour metonymy and contemporary societies metaphor. In this context, writing and its derivations (mathematical and chemical formulae, etc.) imply a qualitative change that transforms people's relationship with the world, because they are forms of representation that use abstract signs invented by the human mind (Goody 1986; Harris 2009; Olson 1994, 2016; see Chapter 3). By increasing the degree of the metaphorical representation of reality and therefore rationalization and abstraction, the feeling that an 'I' exists that is distinct from the rest of human and nonhuman nature also increases: Thinking becomes less 'globalizing' and more 'fractured.' In simple terms we could say that whereas written knowledge – transmitted through solitude, reading, and writing – favours individualization, orally transmitted knowledge – repeated and passed on through communication with others – reinforces relational identity. Given that the chronological framework discussed in this book includes the invention and spread of the first writing systems starting from areas such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China

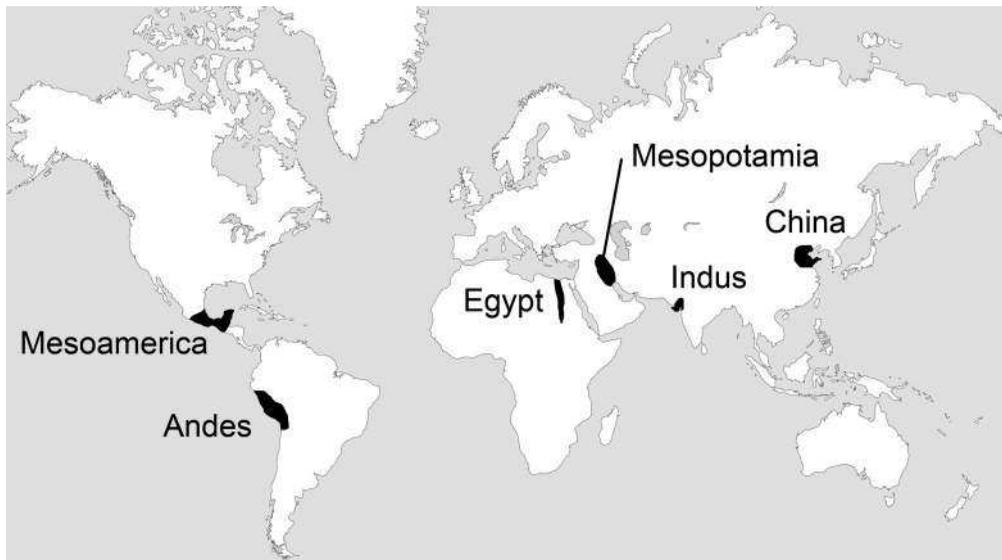
(Powell 2012), these reflections appear to be fundamental to understanding cultural change and identity transformation (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Oral tradition is the realm of the emotional mind, expressed with symbols and myths, so in preliterate societies the qualitative prevails. In contrast, breaking down reality into the smallest units, into phonetic letters visible to the eye, involves developing a linear perception of the world, with some things appearing after others: This inevitably means that quantitative elements play an increasingly important part in the way in which reality is perceived. Therefore we could say that writing is both a consequence of the increasing division and specialization of labour and one of the main means by which that process is accelerated (Hernando 2002). In this sense, the societies analyzed in this book remained more myth based and displayed a less advanced process of individualization than our modern Western societies. However – and although their perception of the world was very heterogeneous and displayed different degrees of individualization – they were also a very long way from the ‘eternal present’ that characterizes groups like the Pirahã of the Amazon, whose language has no numbers, colours, or tenses and who, when asked about creation, respond ‘everything is the same’ (Everett 2005). Indeed, the development of hierarchies and of relationships of marked subordination and dependence, both inside and amongst groups, is a characteristic phenomenon of large parts of Eurasia in the last few millennia BC, although inequality and centralized control did not always increase in a linear manner, but were sometimes followed by periods of decentralization and greater social isonomy (see the later discussion).

#### URBANIZATION AND CENTRALIZED CONTROL

The phenomenon of early urbanization has been a matter of considerable discussion amongst scholars of archaeology, ancient history, and anthropology (Creekmore/Fisher 2014; Fernández-Götz et al. 2014; Gates 2011; Marcus/Sabloff 2008; Smith 2003; Yoffe 2015; see Smith, Chapter 10). The notion of urbanization as a continuous, impartible process was recently stressed by Osborne (2005) in an introductory discussion of ancient Greek urbanization. As a phenomenon that admits of degrees, urbanization exhibits a gradual, transformative character. Cities are not static entities that suddenly appear, but interactive organisms that emerge and develop in relation to their social, economic, and political environment. This leaves room for either temporal decline or an increase of urban standards. Ultimately, even occasional ruptures and breaks in settlement evolution are part of urban settlement history.

From a conventional perspective, Europe has not been considered to be one of the world’s regions where the ‘urban revolution’ took place independently (Figure 1.3); however, this view may need to be revised in light of the new



1.3. Locations of the six areas where the ‘urban revolution’ took place independently (after Smith 2009).

discoveries made in the Trypillia mega-sites of Ukraine, which provide evidence for low-density urbanism in the 4th millennium BC (Müller et al. 2016; see Chapman/Gaydarska, Chapter 6 in this volume). The size and complexity of settlements like Nebelivka or Taljanky are comparable with the Early Bronze Age city of Uruk, implying the possibility of state-level societies in Eastern Europe around or soon after 4000 BC (Chapman et al. 2014). However, this first wave of centralization was followed by a period of decentralization: After some centuries of use, the Trypillia mega-sites were abandoned, and the settlement pattern reverted to smaller sites, in what constitutes a specific case study of the nonlinear nature of history (Müller, Chapter 7 in this volume).

All over ancient Eurasia – for example, in the Mycenaean world or the area of the Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène *Fürstensitze* (see Hall, Chapter 19, and Fernández-Götz/Krause, Chapter 22) – there are cases where it is not possible to speak of a linear and continuous evolution from more decentralized and egalitarian forms to others that were more centralized and hierarchical (i.e. ‘from villages to cities’ or ‘from chiefdoms to states’). It is true that, from a long-term perspective, a trend towards the development of more hierarchized and centralized social structures can be seen, but this was neither a teleological nor a linear process. Instead it included cycles of regression, crisis, times of reduced hierarchization, and demographic decrease. Moreover, it must be assumed that the changes did not always take place peacefully and that conflict – either from inside or from outside – was often involved (Müller forthcoming). In this sense, we can subscribe to the following reflections offered by Kristiansen (1998: 417):