

## THE ORGANIZATION OF ANCIENT ECONOMIES

In this book, Kenneth Hirth provides a comparative view of the organization of ancient and premodern society and economy. Hirth establishes that humans adapted to their environments, not as individuals but in the social groups where they lived and worked out the details of their livelihoods. He explores the variation in economic organization used by simple and complex societies to procure, produce, and distribute resources required by both individual households and the social and political institutions that they supported. Drawing on a wealth of archaeological, historic, and ethnographic information, he develops and applies an analytical framework for studying ancient societies that range from the hunting and gathering groups of native North America to the large state societies of both the New and Old Worlds. Hirth demonstrates that despite differences in transportation and communication technologies, the economic organizations of ancient and modern societies are not as different as we sometimes think.

KENNETH HIRTH is Professor of Anthropology at Pennsylvania State University. An economic anthropologist who has conducted archaeological research in Mexico, Honduras, Peru, and Turkey that has spanned 12,000 years of human development, he has authored, edited, and coauthored nineteen books on different aspects of Mesoamerican society and economy. Hirth is currently a Senior Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks Library and Research Collections in Washington, DC. He has received the National Geographic Society's Career Achievement Award in Archaeology (2000) and the Excellence in Lithic Studies Award from the Society of American Archaeology (1998).

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*A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE*

KENNETH HIRTH

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## CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Maps</i>	xi
<i>List of Tables</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
1 THE STRUCTURE OF ANCIENT ECONOMY	1
What Is the Economy?	3
Comparing Ancient, Modern, and Premodern Economies	6
Reconstructing Ancient and Premodern Economies	8
A Comparative Framework: Domestic and Institutional Organization	10
The Framework of Discussion	12
2 THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY	17
The Concept of Household	18
Households and the Domestic Economy: Seven Dynamic Features	20
Household Subsistence Diversification in 16th-Century Central Mexico	26
Textile Production and the Diversified Household Economy	32
Indian Households, Textiles, and the World Economy	34
The Role of the Household in Institutional Development	36
The House Model Paradox	38
Summary	41
3 THE COMMUNITY OF HOUSEHOLDS: INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS	43
Reciprocal Household Labor Exchanges	45
Obtaining a Spouse: Household Reproduction	50
Forging Social Networks	54

	Social Networks and Informal Institutions for Acquiring Children	56
	Feasting between Households	60
	Trade and External Resource Procurement in Prehistoric North America	62
	Households and Networks of Emergency Support	67
	Summary	73
4	FROM HOUSEHOLDS TO PALACES: LEADERS, CHIEFS, AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS	76
	Formal Institutions and Group Size	77
	Kinship and Descent Group Organization	80
	Forces of Institutional Development	81
	Resource-Holding Associations	81
	Institutions for Mutual Protection	84
	Landesque Capital, Resource Control, and the Intensification of Production	88
	Regularizing Relationships with Neighboring Groups	89
	Institutional Leaders and Leadership	91
	The Palace as a Visible Institution	94
	Summary	106
5	FINANCING FORMAL INSTITUTIONS: SYSTEMS OF DIRECT PRODUCTION	109
	The Cost of Institutional Complexity	110
	Sumerian Temple Estates	117
	Aztec Prebends and Prebendal Estates	123
	Production Monopolies and the Chinese Institutional Economy	129
	Redistribution, Zoarites, and the Inka State	133
	Peripatetic Consumption and the Gafol	146
	Summary	149
6	TAXATION, RENT, AND PATRONAGE: MOBILIZATION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES	154
	What Constitutes Tax? The Landscape of Transfers	155
	Liturgies and Compulsory Patronage in the Greco-Roman World	160

## CONTENTS

vii

Euergetism and Voluntary Patronage in the Greco-Roman World	165
Tolls and Tariffs	169
Agrarian Land Taxation: Taxing Farmers	172
Empires, Tribute, and Taxation	177
Methods of Tax Collection	184
Rents and Leases	188
Summary	192
<b>7 THE ROLE OF MERCHANTS AND TRADE IN ANCIENT SOCIETY</b>	<b>194</b>
Who Is a Merchant?	195
Factors That Shaped the Merchant's World	198
The Perception of Merchants	206
The Merchant's Dilemma	209
Merchants, Institutional Affiliation, and the Luxury Trade	211
Merchant Partnerships: The Commenda	214
Family Firms, Merchant Houses, and Merchant Guilds	215
Merchant Organizers: The Putting-Out System	217
Merchant Diasporas	218
Merchant Speculators and the Futures Market in Ancient Rome	225
Temples as Commercial Institutions	226
Merchants on the Road: The Aztec <i>Pochteca</i>	229
Summary	234
<b>8 THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF INDEPENDENT CRAFT PRODUCTION</b>	<b>237</b>
The Nature of Noninstitutional Craft Production	239
Perspectives on the Origin and Importance of Craft Production	240
Risky Business, Specialization, and the Craftsperson's Dilemma	243
Overcoming Craft Risk	246
The Organization and Scale of Noninstitutional Craft Production	250
The Craft Guild	263
<i>Verlagssystem</i> , Industrial Housework, and the Putting-Out System Revisited	266

viii	CONTENTS	
	Periodic Pie Making at Harmony Methodist Church	270
	Summary	271
9	ON MARKETS AND MARKETPLACES	275
	Markets, Market Exchange, Market Economy, and the Marketplace	277
	The Form and Function of the Marketplace	280
	Unplanned Spontaneous Marketplaces	282
	Periodic Marketplaces in Small-Scale Societies: The North American Rendezvous	284
	Place and Marketplaces: Pilgrims and Border Markets	287
	The Retail Marketplace	289
	Entrepôts, Specialty Markets, and the Wholesale Trade	298
	Market Systems	302
	On the Origin of Marketplaces	306
	The Marketplace as an Intersecting Institution	313
	Summary	315
10	ON FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ANCIENT ECONOMY: A CONCLUDING DISCUSSION	317
	First Principles: Diversity and the Domestic Economy	319
	The Realm of Institutions	321
	Merchants, Craftspersons, and the Marketplace	326
	On Economic Plasticity	331
	A Final Word	334
	<i>Notes</i>	337
	<i>Glossary</i>	373
	<i>Bibliography</i>	377
	<i>Index</i>	435

## FIGURES

1.1	20th-century <i>dhoukani</i> threshing sled with close-up of its stone chert blades (Photographs by Nicholas Kardulias. Photography on top modified by author with permission of Nicholas Kardulias)	page 8
1.2	The organizational relationship between the domestic economy and formal and informal institutions (modified from Hirth 2016: Figure 2.1)	13
2.1	Domestic activities of households in addition to farming in AD 1560 in the community of Santa María Acxotlan, Mexico (Illustration redrawn from page 628v of the Matrícula de Huexotzinco by Karin Dennison and author)	29
2.2	An Aztec woman weaving on a backstrap loom (from Hirth 2016: Figure 2-5)	32
3.1	George Caitlin portrait of Eh-toh'k-pah-she-pee-shah, Black Moccasin, aged chief holding his calumet (Reprinted with permission from Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.)	64
3.2	Ceremonial presentation of a calumet to initiate interaction between Chitimacha Indians and Europeans in Louisiana (AD 1758) (Redrawn from Brown 1989:Figure 4 and Le Page du Pratz 1758:1: facing 105 by Shae Rider and author.)	65
4.1	The Narmer Palette (Redrawn from Flannery and Marcus 2012: Figure 59 by Shae Rider and author)	99
5.1	Men and women of the Zoar community collectively harvesting one of their communal grain fields in AD 1888 (Photograph courtesy of the Ohio History Connection (AL00003) (Photograph dated AD 1888)	135
5.2	A cross-section of major environmental resource zones in the Andes (Redrawn from D'Altroy 2002:Figure 2.1 by Shae Rider and author)	138
5.3	An Inka <i>kipu</i> with a close-up showing the different types of knots tied in different colored and textured strings (Photograph taken by Joanne Pillsbury)	143
5.4	The <i>aqllakuna</i> chosen women of the Inka (Redrawn from Guaman Poma de Ayala 1980 and D'Altroy 2002:Figure 8.3 by Shae Rider and author)	145
6.1	The Province of Tepequacuilco tribute leaf from the Codex Mendoza (Reprinted with permission from Berdan and Anawalt 1992, volume 4: Folio 37r)	181



6.2	The monument for the Athenian grain tax-farming law of 374/3 BC (Stele I 7557) (Image courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations)	188
7.1	Aztec <i>pochteca</i> merchants carrying merchandise with a tumpline (from Hirth 2016:Figure 4.1)	230
8.1	Dedication monument by the cobbler Dionysios showing his workshop, first half of the 4th century BC (Bottom: Photograph of the dedication monument courtesy of Mark Munn.)	253
8.2	The house of Simon the cobbler in the Agora of Athens (Image courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations)	254
8.3	<i>Tabernae</i> represented on the Marble map of ancient Rome and a line drawing of the plan by Shae Rider and author. Bottom: Photograph of Marble plan (Photograph © Roma, Superintendent of cultural heritage).	254
8.4	Photograph of a <i>terra sigillata</i> red-ware modiolus cup manufactured in the production center of Arezzo, Italy, between AD 5 and 40. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Item 17.194.896).	256
8.5	Ceramic production at Ching-te-chen, China (1816) (Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.)	262
8.6	Preparing a kiln for ceramic firing at Ching-te-chen, China (1816) (Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.)	263
9.1	Five different periodic rendezvous or trade fairs held in the area of what is currently the western United States before European contact. (Illustration modified from Wood (1980:Fig 1) by Dylan Davis. Service Layer Credits: ESRI, USGS, NOAA.)	286
9.2	The array of utilitarian items and wealth goods sold in the Tlatelolco marketplace in Tenochtitlan, Mexico. (from Hirth 2016: Figure 3.2)	291
9.3	An Aztec woman selling maize by dry volume (From Hirth 2016: Figure 5.2)	292
9.4	A boundary marker from the southwest corner of the Agora of Athens. (Photograph by Mark Munn, used with permission)	293
9.5	Map of the Agora at Athens (Image courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations)	294
9.6	The port of Piraeus, Greece (Redrawn from Garland 1987:Fig. 1 by Shea Rider and author)	300
9.7	Merchant circuits between large and small markets across three different environmental zones (Illustration by Dylan Davis and the author 2019)	305

MAPS

1	Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East	<i>page</i> xviii
2	India, Asia, and the Pacific	xx
3	The Americas	xxii
4	Africa	xxiii

## TABLES

2.1	Households involved in nonfarming income activities in Huexotzinco	<i>page</i> 30
2.2	Summary of household economic activities in Huexotzinco	31
3.1	Most common events associated with the calumet ceremony	66
4.1	Common functional areas found within palace complexes in chiefdom- and state-level societies	96
5.1	Types of land in preconquest Central Mexico	126
6.1	Annual tribute paid to Tenochtitlan listed in the Codex Mendoza	182
9.1	Differences in the structure, location, periodicity, and operation between domestic- and sector-oriented marketplaces	281
9.2	Theories for the development of marketplaces	307

## PREFACE

A book can be written for many different reasons. It can chronicle the life and times of notable individuals, tell a spellbinding tale, or follow a personal quest of the author. This book fits in the latter of these three categories. I was fortunate to be raised on my family's 1850s homestead farm in southern Wisconsin. Nothing was ever thrown away in my German–American family. The farm was overflowing with wooden tools (mallets, flails, pitchforks, pulleys), farm implements (sickles, ropes, draw knives, adzes), crocks and caskets, harnesses and the equipment to go with our two working horses, and an endless supply of 19th- and early 20th-century items squirreled away in corners of the barn, outbuildings, and the attic and cellar of our stone house. The abundance of old items sparked my curiosity in what they were and how they were used. Fortunately, my grandfather and grandmother still had one foot planted in the late 19th century and could explain how all the old technology was used to plant, harvest, butcher, preserve, and manage a farm household before the advent of hybrid seed, store-bought food, and electrical appliances. With the vantage of hindsight I realized that they also imparted an understanding of how a self-sufficient family farm needed to operate in order to survive. This was my introduction to history and the beginning of an academic career as an archaeologist and anthropologist that sought to understand how ancient societies were organized to get work done.

This book was written with two audiences in mind. The first is that group of general readers who are interested in how ancient societies developed and produced the food and other resources needed to support themselves, build civilizations, and engage in long-distance trade using simple preindustrial technologies. Although not written for the classroom, these topics can be of interest to eclectic students and lifelong learners interested in the broad sweep of economic history. We have all grown up with a basic understanding of 20th- and/or 21st-century capitalistic society. But does that understanding overlay neatly onto the past? This volume explores how ancient and premodern societies were similar or different from the modern one in which we live.

The second audience is comprised of my archaeological colleagues who are interested in the economy and comparative analysis but have to put the majority of their efforts into developing an up-to-date mastery of the culture

areas where they conduct their research. Developing a detailed understanding of a single past society is a full-time job for scholars pursuing serious research. This book uses a comparative approach to summarize alternative forms of economic organization found in both large- and small-scale societies. All ancient and premodern societies were economically plastic with different forms of organization coexisting and operating simultaneously in different contexts and levels of society. The comparative approach reminds us to beware of monolithic models that propose an ideal form of economic organization without taking into consideration the heterogeneity inherent in both the domestic and institutional economies. The examples provided are intended to help researchers think broadly about the economy of the societies that they study.

All authors have their biases. My family heritage together with professional training in business administration, anthropology, and archaeology have shaped the presentation and rationale of this book in several ways. My upbringing along with later experience in sales and marketing had taught me the importance of organization in shaping the cost and operation of economic enterprises. Anthropology and archaeology have provided insight into the structure of small-scale societies and illustrated how simpler forms of organization continued unchanged over long spans of time enabling households to adapt to changing cultural and environmental conditions. The anthropologist in me believes in the inherent value of the cross-cultural approach for understanding the diversity of ways that human societies developed over time. In this sense it runs contrary to historical particularism that views all societies as intrinsically unique and unable to be compared with one another in structural terms.

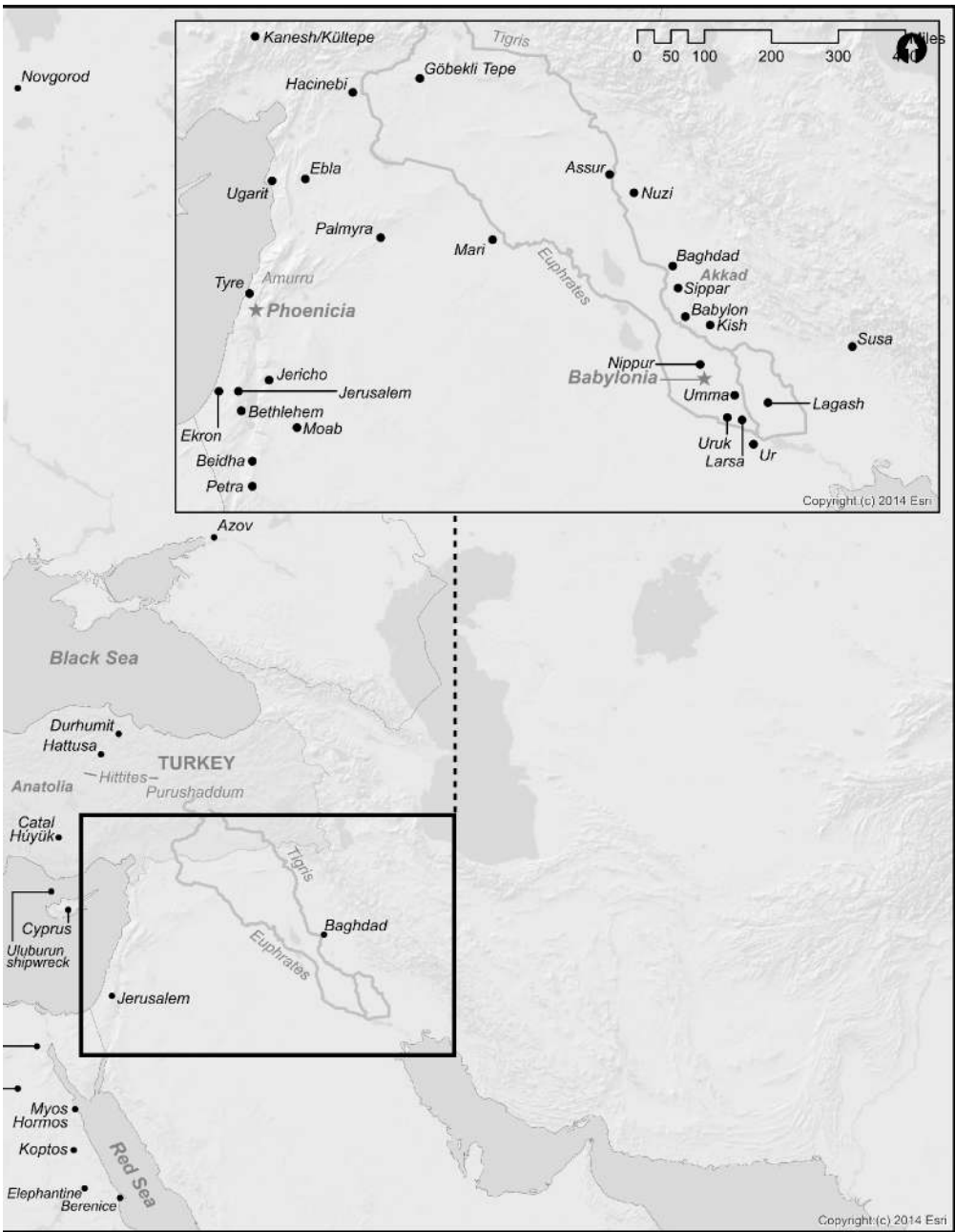
The format of the volume follows anthropological conventions. In-text citations are used for bibliographic references, and endnotes provide supplementary information not included in the text. One of the distracting aspects of a cross-cultural and comparative approach is keeping track of the many different societies where parallel and divergent cultural practices are found. There is no easy solution to this, and I do not assume that readers have a global knowledge of all the place names, provinces, and ethnic groups that existed in the ancient and premodern past. As a partial remedy to this issue, four maps are located at the end of this Preface that provide general locations for the more than 250 archaeological sites, regions, and ethnic groups mentioned throughout this volume. Finally, I feel that the examples used in the comparative discussions are one of the most valuable aspects of this volume. They naturally reflect my research interests, which are centered on state- and chiefdom-level societies more than on foraging or pastoral groups. Nevertheless, research suggests that there are similarities in organization across both small- and large-scale societies that fit within the analytical framework for studying the economy proposed here.

Albert Einstein believed that time was an illusion. Calculating time in a uniform way is a problem that archaeologists are intimately familiar with despite the many ways we have for counting it. Time can be calculated in tree ring growth, radiocarbon years, geological eras, and atomic clocks using uranium isotope decay, potassium–argon ratios, paleo-magnetic measurements, and thermo-luminescence differences. Once calculated, time can be expressed in different calendar series including BP (before present), BC/AD (Julian calendar), BCE/CE (modified Julian calendar), and calibrated or uncalibrated radiocarbon years. Preference for one calendar scale over another depends on the age of the material studied and the regional or academic traditions of the investigators that use them. I have chosen to express time in Julian calendar dates (BC/AD) because they are well established in the archaeological and historic literature in both the New and Old Worlds. Rather than tracking time with chronological charts for each area discussed, dates and time spans are identified within the discussion by the century or millennium BC or AD. When a specific archaeological period or phase is used (e.g., Ur III or third dynasty), the time span is provided in parentheses (e.g., 2112–2004 BC) to contextualize the discussion.

Finally and most importantly I want to thank my family and colleagues for the advice and assistance they have provided over more than a decade of reading and research that led to this volume. First in line is my wife Susan, who fueled this research with gifts of books during holidays and other family celebrations, which dealt with merchants, trade commodities, and general economic history. Her encouragement and interest in my work have endured despite being subjected to reading drafts on all manner of tedious economic topics ranging from lithic technology, craft production, and market development to the present volume. A shout also goes out to all of my archaeological colleagues in Mesoamerica with whom I have conducted research and exchanged ideas over the years, including Ann Cyphers, Jorge Angulo, Raul Arana, Frances Berdan, David Carballo, Susan Evans, Norberto Gonzalez, David Grove, George Hasemann, Gloria Lara, William Sanders, and David Webster. Economic anthropology provides the theoretical foundation of this volume, and I thank Timothy Earle, Thomas Hakansson, Paul Durrenberger, Donald Kurtz, and Della McMillan for our many stimulating discussions about the economic organization of ethnographic societies. Finally, I want to thank Mark Munn and Gonzalo Rubio for their comments on Classical Mediterranean society, and my son Colin Hirth for many insightful and invigorating discussions on medieval Icelandic and European society and economy. I thank them for their contributions and recognize any errors in describing the ancient economy are my own creation.



1 Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East



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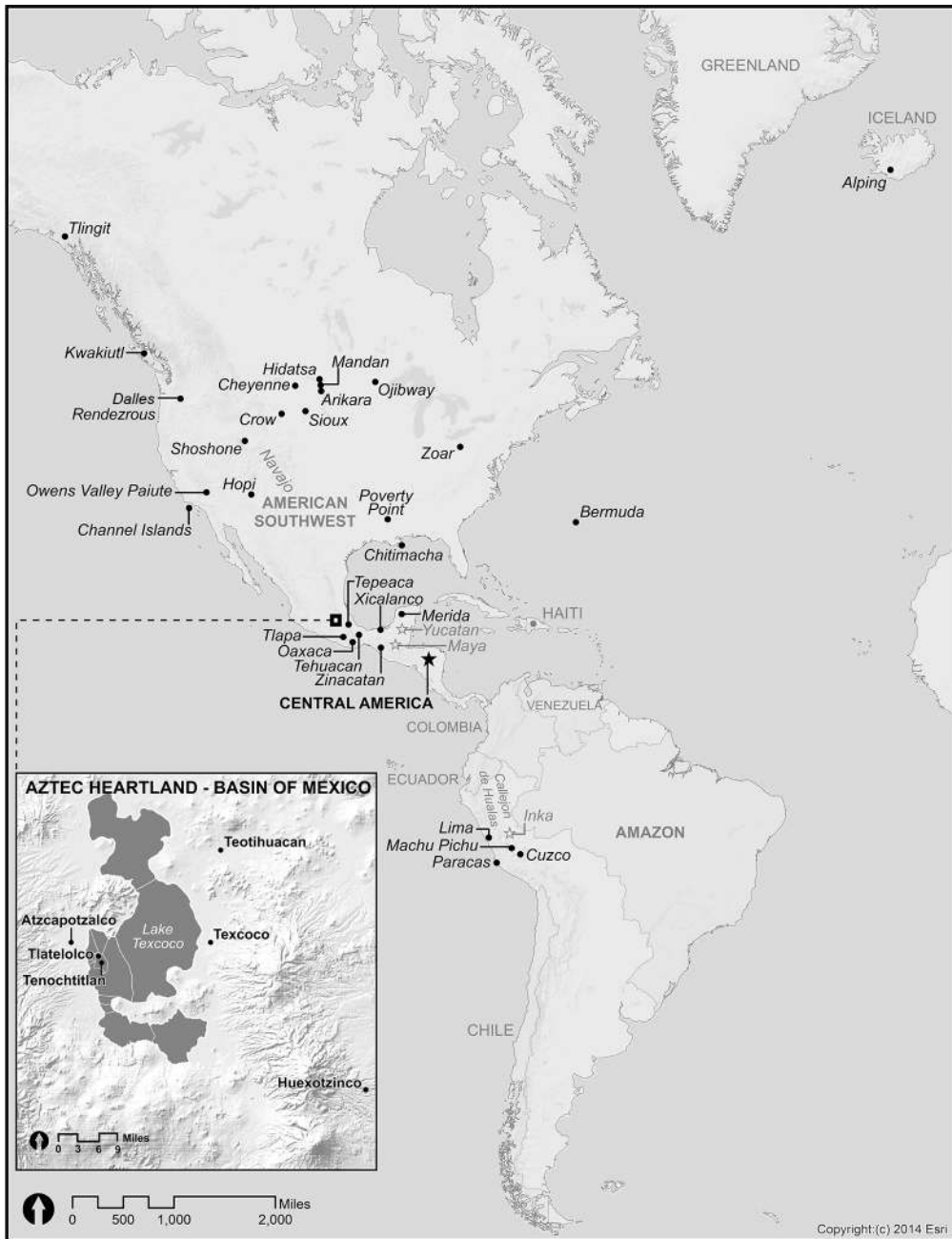




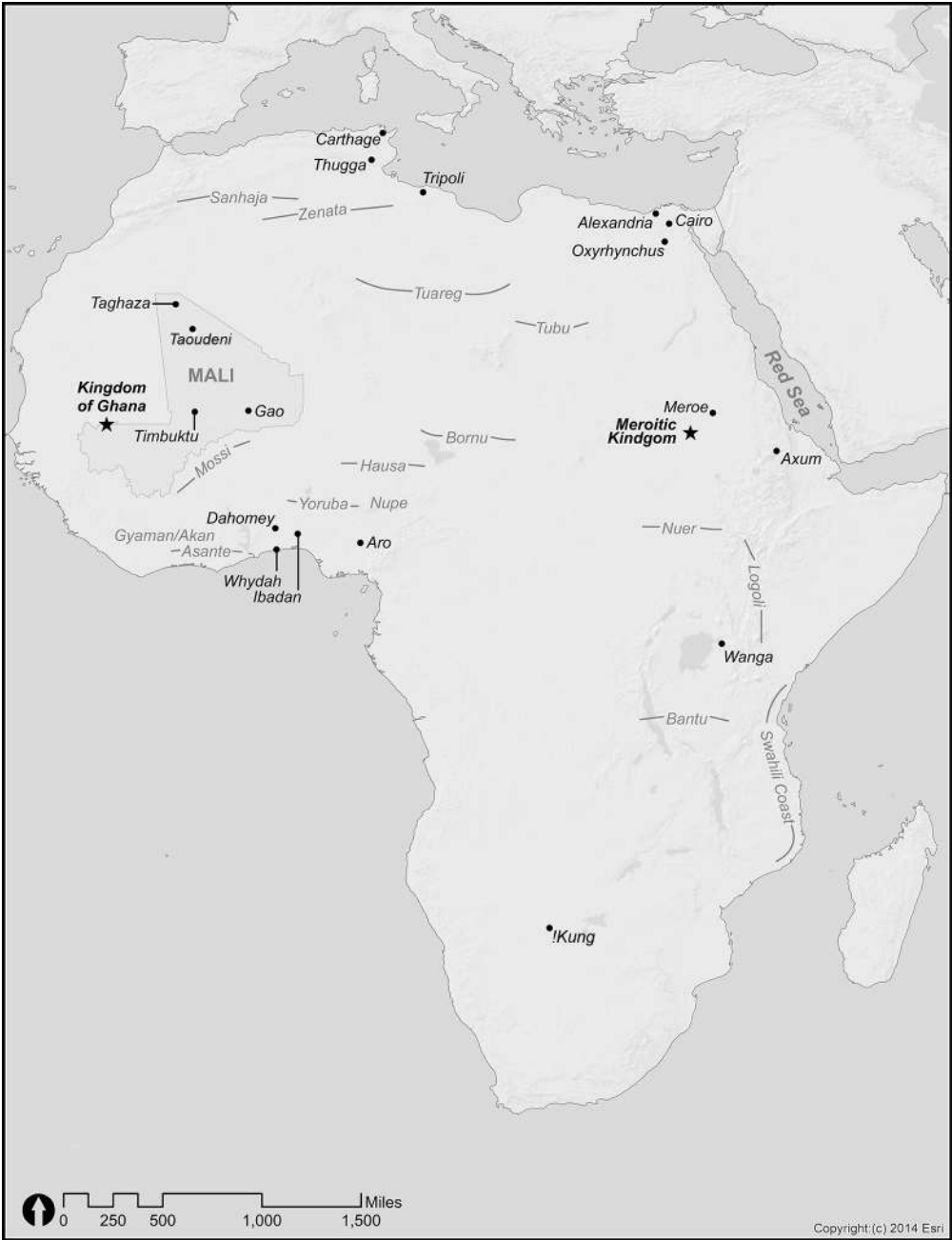
2 India, Asia, and the Pacific



2 (cont.)



3 The Americas



4 Africa