## POWER FROM BELOW IN PREMODERN SOCIETIES

This volume challenges previous views of social organization focused on elites by offering innovative perspectives on "power from below." Using a variety of archaeological, anthropological, and historical data to question traditional narratives of complexity as inextricably linked to top-down power structures, it exemplifies how commoners have developed strategies to sustain nonhierarchical networks and contest the rise of inequalities. Through case studies from around the world – ranging from Europe to New Guinea, and from Mesoamerica to China – an international team of contributors explores the diverse and dynamic nature of power relations in premodern societies. The theoretical models discussed throughout the volume include a reassessment of key concepts such as heterarchy, collective action, and resistance. Thus, the book adds considerable nuance to our understanding of power in the past and opens new avenues of reflection that can help inform discussions about our collective present and future.

T. L. Thurston is Professor of Anthropology at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. His main interest lies in the interface between people, places, and governance in late prehistoric and historical Europe, often in comparison with other regions, cultures, and times. He finds that questions linking large-scale sociopolitical conditions with the life-course experiences of individuals and groups are best addressed with mixed research methods that unify quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Manuel Fernández-Götz is Reader and Head of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh. He has published widely on Iron Age and Roman societies in Europe, the archaeology of identities, and conflict archaeology. Among his main publications are the edited volumes *Eurasia at the Dawn of History: Urbanization and Social Change* (2016) and *Conflict Archaeology: Materialities of Collective Violence from Prehistory to Late Antiquity* (2018).

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## THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL COMPLEXITY IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

*edited by*

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# PREFACE

The chapters herein offer clear evidence that economic, political, and social power take many forms and is never entirely hierarchical, even in the most autocratic states. Instead, the authors argue that stable collaborative governance has a long history, that both hierarchical and heterarchical relations are complex, and that together they enable the analysis of shifting forms of power over time.

In the 19th century, hierarchies were widely assumed to be the epitome of social evolution and the very definition of progress (Nisbet, 1980); it followed that "complex" societies (e.g. Western nation-states) were more advanced than "simple" (e.g. pastoral) societies. This assumption provided the intellectual and moral rationale for scientific racism, colonialism, and other forms of domination. The antidote to this perceived underdevelopment was the use of force through conquest and rehabilitation.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, social science disciplines – including archaeology – became the professions we recognize today, still trailing vestiges of earlier ideas. Hierarchy has remained a controlling model in the social sciences: ubiquitous, unchallenged, and all but invisible (Clarke, 1972; Crumley, 1987:157). The architecture of power has been routinely described as hierarchical: that is, tiered and ranked. This description does not incorporate the current realization that collective and dynamic social arrangements and management strategies undergird diverse forms of exchange in all societies.

As Ostrom and colleagues (1990) demonstrate, communities have found ways to organize their collective and individual tasks without central authority. They identify 'design principles' of stable common-pool resource management that include local knowledge, clear rules, effective communication, monitoring, sanctions, paths for conflict resolution, internal trust, and the recognition of self-determination by other institutions.

The old paradigm has given way in part due to archaeologists' realization that many of them have spent their careers digging sites full of evidence for collaborative management. A new, more balanced paradigm has begun to take its place, one that sees many sources of power and new implications for governance. This paradigm shift started several decades ago but has found

acceptance only in the past decade. It is important that this dynamic moment and its implications be fully examined.

Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962, 1970) has thrilled generations of young scholars with the prospect that their work would revolutionize their chosen field. For Kuhn, *paradigms* are universally recognized scientific frameworks that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners (Kuhn, 1970: viii). Kuhn's book introduced into common usage the term *paradigm shift*, meaning a fundamental change in a widely used model or perception. Kuhn defines *scientific revolutions* as "when . . . the profession [adopts] a new set of commitments, a new basis for the practice of science. The extraordinary episodes in which that shift of professional commitments occurs are the ones known . . . as *scientific revolutions*. They are the tradition-shattering complements to the tradition-bound activity of normal science" (Kuhn, 1970: 6).

Kuhn reminds us that there are elements, levels, and dimensions of paradigmatic methods and theories, each of which must be retained, modified, or disassembled with due consideration (Kuhn, 1970: 34). So, it behooves us to hold *revolutions* – scientific or otherwise – in abeyance and take the time to proceed carefully.

Accordingly, the enormous body of work that has focused on hierarchies of power need not be jettisoned. Rather, as several chapters in this book demonstrate, the uncovering of alternate paths to power marks the beginning of a more complete understanding of how societal governance is achieved and what can emerge from the transtemporal examination of political forms and their fluctuating utility in environmental, social, and other contexts.

Nonetheless, grander social implications could reverse understandings that have prevailed for millennia. One example is the ongoing global shift in the understanding of sex and gender. In archaeology, despite several early 20th-century pioneers such as Dorothy Garrod and Kathleen Kenyon, the climate for women in archaeology was chilly through the 1980s. As womens' presence in the field was accepted, new ways of seeing sex and gender in the archaeological record emerged (Gero & Conkey, 1991; Spector, 1993).

Similarly, this volume's authors question aggression as a central driver toward centralization. They argue that individual power requires social interaction and the social recognition of roles. Compliance built on trust makes strong communities. Collectively organized centers enjoyed longer apogees than their autocratic neighbors. As one traces shifting power relations over time, the changing roles of food storage units, enclosures, and *oppida* lead to a more robust explanation of the motivations for monumental construction. The authors further question earlier characterizations of particular peoples and eras as bellicose, demonstrating that new evidence points instead to

community-based defense. This approach supports a new appreciation of the importance of trust in social and political relations.

The next steps are to extract this knowledge from the archaeological, historical, and contemporary record, and to learn how to grow and integrate frameworks that include both ranked and nested structures along with those that are flatter and networked, and forms that are yet to be recognized. This book, balancing social, geographical, and temporal diversity with conceptual coherence, points to a clear way to proceed. It is in this manner that revolutions can happen and a new vision of the world order can be achieved.

Carole Crumley

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