PATHWAYS TO POWER

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND HIERARCHY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

PROGRAM AND ABSTRACTS

NOVEMBER 4–5, 2011

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

CONFERENCE CO-ORGANIZERS
GIL J. STEIN, ABBAS ALIZADEH, AND YORKE ROWAN
This conference brings together twenty leading international researchers to compare the development of incipient complex societies across the Near East — in Egypt, the southern Levant, Syria, Anatolia, the southern Caucasus, Mesopotamia, and Iran — during the sixth and fifth millennia B.C. Our goal is to gain a synthetic, comparative understanding of the different pathways by which leadership, economic stratification, and political structures developed and laid the foundations for the later emergence of the first state societies.

Between 5500 and 4000 B.C., a series of incipient complex societies developed in parallel across the Near East, diverging from their Neolithic village predecessors and laying the foundations for the first urbanized states in the fourth millennium. Despite its importance, the initial emergence of social complexity in the Near East remains poorly understood at every level — theoretical, processual, and empirical. Traditional models of “chiefdoms” do not seem to fit the Near Eastern data very well. The tremendous range of variation in the incipient complex societies of the Near East suggests that there were marked differences in the processes and strategies through which leadership, hierarchy, and socioeconomic differentiation first emerged and were then formalized. For this reason, we can only hope to understand the emergence of incipient complex societies in the Near East by examining this process in a comparative framework that can identify processual similarities while also recognizing multiple possible developmental pathways, and the importance of historical contingency in each region.

PROGRAM

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2011

9:00–9:30 Gil J. Stein, welcome and introduction

SESSION 1 :: IRAN & “GREATER MESOPOTAMIA” (I)

Chair: McGuire Gibson

9:30–10:00 Abbas Alizadeh, “The Convergence of Oppositional and Complementary Subsistence Strategies in Prehistoric Southwest Iran”
10:00–10:30 Joan Oates, “Early Settlement in Sumer and Central Mesopotamia”
10:30–11:00 Coffee Break
11:00–11:30 Peter Akkermans, “Emergent Complexities? Community Organization in Sixth-Millennium Upper Mesopotamia”
11:30–12:00 Hasan Fazeli Nashli and Roger Matthews, “From Subsistence to Prestige Consumption: Settlement, Subsistence, Trade, and Mortuary Practices during the Transitional Chalcolithic Period on the West-Central Plateau of Iran”
12:00–12:30 Questions and discussion moderated by session chair
12:30–2:00 Lunch Break

SESSION 2 :: IRAN & “GREATER MESOPOTAMIA” (2)

Chair: Jonathan Haas

2:00–2:30 Gil Stein, “Slippery Characters: Looking for Leaders in Ubaid Greater Mesopotamia”
2:30–3:00 Salam al-Quntar, Clemens Reichel, and Khaled Jayyab, “Craft Specialization and Urban Growth in Northern Mesopotamia: Late Chalcolithic 1-3 at Hamoukar, Northeast Syria”
3:00–3:30 Coffee Break
3:30–4:00 Mitchell Rothman, “Perspectives on Developments in the Piedmont of Northeast Iraq and Southeast Anatolian Hill Country in the Fifth Millennium B.C.”
4:00–4:30 Barbara Helwing, “Clusters of Complexity: Sixth–Fifth Millennium B.C. Communities in Iran and South Caucasia”
4:30–5:00 Questions and discussion moderated by session chair
5:00–6:00 Reception for participants and attendees in the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery, Oriental Institute Museum

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2011

SESSION 3 :: CAUCASUS, ANATOLIA & THE LEVANT

Chair: David Schloen

9:00–9:30 Catherine Marro, “The Emergence of Social Complexity in the Highlands (Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus): Questioning the Dynamics of the Late Chalcolithic and Kuro-Araxes Socioeconomic Systems”
9:30–10:00 Rana Özbald, “Social Complexity in Central versus Southeast Anatolia in the Sixth–Fifth Millennia B.C.”
10:00–10:30 Coffee Break
10:30–11:00 Marcella Frangipane, “Different Socioeconomic Structures and Developmental Processes of Early Hierarchies in Anatolia and Mesopotamia”
11:00–11:30 Yorke Rowan, “Leadership in the Southern Levantine Chalcolithic: Ritual Density and the Mode of Production”
11:30–12:00 Questions and discussion moderated by session chair
12:00–1:00 Lunch Break

SESSION 4 :: EGYPT

Chair: Kathleen Morrison

1:00–1:30 E. Christiana Köhler, “The Development of Social Complexity in Early Egypt: Settlements, Technology, and Craft Specialization”
1:30–2:00 Stan Hendrickx, “The Iconography of Social Complexity and Differentiation in Predynastic Egypt”
2:00–2:30 Questions and discussion moderated by session chair
2:30–3:00 Coffee Break

SESSION 5 :: COMPARATIVE PROCESSES & TRENDS

3:00–3:30 Roundtable discussion moderated by Gary Feinman

SESSION 6 :: DISCUSSANTS’ COMMENTS & SYNTHESSES

3:30–5:00 Guillermo Algaze :: Charles Stanish :: Barbara Mills :: Gil Stein, closing remarks
ABSTRACTS

Peter Akkermans (Leiden University)

Title: “Emergent Complexities? Community Organization in Sixth-Millennium Upper Mesopotamia” (Friday, 11:00)

Abstract: In the sixth millennium, Halafian communities in Upper Mesopotamia generally lack evidence for hierarchies or explicit sociopolitical differentiation, primarily because the scale of the communities was too small to permit substantial social distance. Any dependencies were handled face-to-face, rather than in the shape of chiefly ranking or centralized village authorities. Forms of explicit social stratification should be sought for in the fifth- to fourth-millennium settlements in the region.

Abbas Alizadeh (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)

Title: “The Convergence of Oppositional and Complementary Subsistence Strategies in Prehistoric Southwest Iran” (Friday, 9:30)

Abstract: The development of social complexity, and ultimately state organizations, in the region that is now southwest Iran seems to have been forged in a specific environmental context which gave rise to a trajectory that led to a type of state peculiar in southwest Asia, that is, the Elamite state. Tangible archaeological evidence for the increasing social complexity in the region is present from the late sixth to mid-fifth millennium B.C. Archaeological evidence points to a long process of interaction between the settled farming communities of the lowlands and the semi-nomadic herders of the highlands. This proposition and the supporting evidence require that we treat the highlands and lowlands as integral components of a system that combined the resources of the two regions to eventually forge in the third millennium B.C. the durable Elamite state. In this paper I aim to show how the interplay of a number of social, economic, and environmental variables, as well as violence and the threat of violence, led to the establishment of a state that, while always a strong presence in lowland Susiana, was basically a highland state.

Hassan Fazeli Nashli (Tehran University) and Roger Matthews (Department of Archaeology, University of Reading)

Title: “From Subsistence to Prestige Consumption: Settlement, Subsistence, Trade, and Mortuary Practices during the Transitional Chalcolithic Period on the West-Central Plateau of Iran” (Friday, 11:30)

Abstract: During the transitional Chalcolithic period, ca. 5300–4300 B.C., fundamental changes occurred in many aspects of the settlements on the west-central plateau of Iran, including in agricultural production, trade, craft specialization, and mortuary practices. We examine evidence from excavations at sites such as Sialk on the Kashan plain, Zagheh and Ebrahim Abad on the Qazvin plain, and Pardis and Cheshmeh-Ali on the Qazvin plain in order to explore the shift from a subsistence economy to one based on consumption of elite materials and goods. Fundamental shifts in social structure will be connected to broader developments across the contemporary Near East.
Marcella Frangipane (University of Rome – La Sapienza)

Title: “Different Socioeconomic Structures and Developmental Processes of Early Hierarchies in Anatolia and Mesopotamia” (Saturday, 10:30)

Abstract: In this paper, three different regions of the Near East — south-central Anatolia, eastern Anatolia, and Mesopotamia — are compared in terms of their organization, social structure, subsistence economy, food-storage and food-circuit management, and ritual and ceremonial practices in the course of the sixth and fifth millennia B.C. The comparative approach aims to stress the substantial differences in the socioeconomic form of the western (central/southern Anatolian) and eastern (northern and southern Mesopotamian) communities, in turn linked to different environments and production modes, resulting in alternative trajectories and pathways to political power and hierarchies. Eastern Anatolia, still very poor in archaeological data for these periods, is examined in a comparative framework with both regions in order to try to evidence its links and the main characteristics of its development.

Domestic and public architecture, the use of space, the relationship between individual households and the community, data on subsistence economy, storage practices, seals and sealings (their use and function), “prestige” items and their location, as well as ideological and symbolic features are examined for each region in a comparative perspective.

Barbara Helwing (German Archaeological Institute, Berlin)

Title: “Clusters of Complexity: Sixth–Fifth Millennium B.C. Communities in Iran and South Caucasia” (Friday, 4:00)

Abstract: Research into the sixth-millennium B.C. Late Neolithic in the regions north and east of the Fertile Crescent has picked up over the last decade and has now provided a basic chronological and cultural framework for the development of incipient complex communities in the highlands of Iran and beyond, in the south Caucasian Caspian lowlands. Both regions share a rich Late Neolithic occupation with clusters of villages and sites which apparently function as a central place for ritual gatherings. After 5400 B.C., however, occupation in the southern Caucasian regions recedes, while the Iranian highland societies prosper and become internally even more differentiated, with labor division and specialization visible from settlement layout and material assemblages. This paper briefly introduces the current state of research on Late Neolithic to Chalcolithic communities in Iran and south Caucasus, and on this basis discusses the divergent developments in a comparative and complementary perspective. Economic strategies, such as craft specialization, and social practices, such as communal gatherings and feasts as a means to act out leadership claims, are investigated for their potential to maintain and transform these early communities.

Stan Hendrickx (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium)

Title: “The Iconography of Social Complexity and Differentiation in Predynastic Egypt” (Saturday, 1:30)

Abstract: Despite recent efforts, information from fifth- and fourth-millennium settlement sites remains relatively limited in Egypt, especially when compared to other parts of the Near East. Much of the available information still comes from cemeteries, many of which were excavated a century ago. The social stratification of the fourth-millennium Naqada culture has mainly been studied with reference to their tomb size and funerary equipment. This resulted in a picture of growing economic — that is, agricultural — production and increasing social differentiation. However interesting, this approach also has its limitations and the iconography offers the possibility to refine the picture and study a number of particular aspects of the mechanics behind the social structures.

Exceptional objects such as stone vessels or decorated pottery occur already in the late fifth-millennium “Tasian” cemetery excavated at Gebel Ramlah, in the southern part of the Western Desert, and also at Badarian sites. Although these confirm the presence of social differences at that period, the number of objects is limited
and they offer few possibilities for iconographic study. This changes markedly from the early Naqada I period onward. Hunting and military victory are the most remarkable iconographic elements and they continue to be represented into dynastic times. The presence of hunting scenes is particularly interesting because hunting has no economic importance in the Naqada culture. The iconography of hippopotamus hunting can be followed from the early Naqada I period until dynastic times, when it is part of royal symbolism. Desert hunting was part of the elite manner of living and allowed the upper class to show its importance in real life and through visual representations.

During the early Naqada II period, the first iconographic elements that can be followed throughout Egyptian history show up. The most important are the falcon, the scorpion, and the Bat emblem. It is to be noted, however, that they are all first attested at Hierakonpolis, which can hardly be a coincidence given the early royal tombs discovered there. The falcon is especially relevant because it was one of the most important royal symbols from at least the early Naqada III period onward.

The highly standardized visual language present on decorated vessels and other objects dating to the Naqada IIC–D period is especially known by representations on Decorated pottery that refer to the funerary world and the renewal of life. However, this is not the only topic dealt with and the numeric importance of funerary scenes most probably only reflects preferential preservation. The same visual language is used in rock-art scenes, which are not of funerary nature but related to power in a religious context, with many references to hunting. Intellectual access to the iconography and visual language seems to have been general for all of Upper Egypt and at the latest from Naqada IID onward also for Lower Egypt. For the time being, there are in this respect no indications for significant differences between the elite and the rest of the population.

During the final phase of state formation (early Naqada III period), a standardized art developed, with the confirmation of divine kingship as the main objective. The establishment of the formal principles that are fundamental for Early Dynastic (and later) art and iconography must have happened over a relatively short period. Therefore, it is to be accepted as the work of a restricted group, to be looked for in the court circles and eventually the king himself. Control over the iconography must have been fundamental for this elite as it confirmed their privileged position.

**E. Christiana Köhler (University of Vienna)**

**Title:** “The Development of Social Complexity in Early Egypt: Settlements, Technology, and Craft Specialization”  
(Saturday, 1:00)

**Abstract:** Although the mortuary remains of prehistoric Egypt have been the most explored, and hence most productive, source of information regarding the development of social complexity, the domestic sphere can have an equal contribution when considered with a modern archaeological approach. This paper investigates and discusses the evidence derived from prehistoric settlements, material culture, and manufacturing technologies and how it reflects on the division of labor, craft specialization, economy, and trade networks as indicators for emerging social complexity in fifth- and fourth-millennium Egypt.

**Salam al-Quntar (Department of Excavations and Archaeological Research, Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, Damascus), Clemens Reichel (University of Toronto and Royal Ontario Museum), and Khaled Jayyab (University of Toronto)**

**Title:** “Craft Specialization and Urban Growth in Northern Mesopotamia: Late Chalcolithic 1–3 at Hamoukar, Northeast Syria”  
(Friday, 2:30)

**Abstract:** The expansion of specialized production systems and interregional exchange networks were major components of an autonomous process of economic growth. The outcome of this process was the emergence of a political institution that sponsored and administered production and exchange as a strategy for creating and controlling wealth and ultimately for acquiring and maintaining power and authority.
Hamoukar’s Southern Extension, locally known as Khirbat al-Fakhar, is an extensive settlement of 300 hectares, primarily occupied during the Late Chalcolithic 1–2 periods (ca. 4400–3800 cal. B.C.). Recent excavations at the site provide new insight into the development of societal complexity and urbanism in the region. The Late Chalcolithic 1–2 settlement at Hamoukar characterizes the transitional phase in which human communities started to agglomerate, paving the way to urbanism. The unusual type of settlement represents a nucleated specialized community that consisted of extended family units with large courtyards and external spaces. Specialization at the site emerged according to new economic strategies to make use of available local and external resources, namely human resources and imported obsidian raw material. The case of Hamoukar refutes concepts embedded in modern economic theories of rural/urban dichotomy of settlement or that household specialization remains at small-scale production.

Catherine Marro (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Lyon)

Title: “The Emergence of Social Complexity in the Highlands (Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus): Questioning the Dynamics of the Late Chalcolithic and Kuro-Araxes Socioeconomic Systems” (Saturday, 9:00)

Abstract: Several examples of coexistence between Kuro-Araxes groups and local communities have been described over the past few years, whether it be in the Middle Araxes valley (ca. 4200–4000 B.C.), the Upper-Euphrates valley (ca. 3600–2600 B.C.), or the Levant (ca. 2800–2600 B.C.). In two cases in three, this coexistence resulted in the disappearance of the local communities. After a brief presentation of the available data, this paper compares the economic and social structures of the Late Chalcolithic and Kuro-Araxes communities in the highlands in order to understand the dynamics at work in the emergence of Kuro-Araxian hegemony.

Joan Oates (University of Cambridge)

Title: “Early Settlement in Sumer and Central Mesopotamia” (Friday, 10:00)

Abstract: Evidence for the early Neolithic of southern Iraq is minimal; the presence of earlier riverine settlements is virtually certain but almost impossible to find. The earliest excavated levels are to be found at Tell ʿOueili (late 7th millennium), and seem closely related to the Late Samarran of central Iraq as excavated at Choga Mami, where early evidence of irrigation has been found, a technique essential to the support of large settlements in the south. The radiocarbon determinations from ʿOueili provide the only recent and therefore reliable dates for this phase.

The far earlier settlements at Bouqras and Tell es-Sawwan can therefore be dated to the early seventh millennium. Both have levels belonging to the so-called Proto-Hassuna phase, evidence which demonstrates not only the manufacture of prestige goods but, at Sawwan, the presence of large tripartite buildings, a type that persists in Mesopotamia over many millennia. The earliest use of sealings (Bouqras and Sawwan) indicates some degree of economic control, implying also an increasingly complex society. This early phase at Sawwan indicates not only an increasing population, specialized craftsmen, and apparently centralized burial, but the unequal grave goods of the early seventh-millennium graves imply already a degree of social and economic “stratification.”

The presence in the seventh/sixth millennia of larger settlements, specialized craftsmen, and common social and administrative practices suggests that by the sixth millennium society had become highly complex. Indeed at Uqair in the Late Ubaid period there is clearly a monumental building of “administrative” type (also the earliest “mass-produced” Coba bowls). That is, by the end of the Ubaid period the basis for urban society was clearly well established.

Although Warka is unquestionably the greatest early city, earlier sites of urban proportions exist at least in northern Mesopotamia, for example Tell Brak, where, inter alia, the vast variety of early fourth-millennium sealings include “lion sealings.” Not only do these anticipate the later “royal” iconography at Warka but also a highly organized, indeed powerful, “stratified” society. It is also my view that the origin of Warka’s pictographic writing has a longer and more complex “pre”history, of which there is some evidence at Brak by the early fourth millennium.
Rana Özbal (Koç University, Istanbul)

Title: “Social Complexity in Central versus Southeast Anatolia in the Sixth–Fifth Millennia B.C.” (Saturday, 9:30)

Abstract: This paper compares the variability we see between the sixth and fifth millennia both in southeastern and central Anatolia and focuses on aspects like architecture, craft specialization, and burial practices. Overall, the developmental pathways each region follows are analogous in many respects. For the sixth millennium I compare Halaf-influenced sites located in Turkey like Girikihacıyan, Çavi Tarlası, Fistıklı Höyük, Tell Kurdu (Amuq C levels), and Domuztepe with contemporaneous sites in the central Anatolian plateau like Köşk Höyük III, Can Hasan 2B, and Çatalhöyük West. I also include data from relevant sites like Tülintepe and Mersin. My discussion of the fifth millennium will incorporate a comparison of Ubaid-influenced sites like Değirmentepe and Tell Kurdu’s Amuq E levels with sites in the central Anatolian plain Köşk Höyük Level I and Güvercinkayası.

Mitchell Rothman (Widener University)

Title: “Perspectives on Developments in the Piedmont of Northeast Iraq and Southeast Anatolian Hill Country in the Fifth Millennium B.C.” (Friday, 3:30)

Abstract: Despite the focus of anthropological archaeologists on state-level society, middle range societies like those of the fifth millennium B.C. in Greater Mesopotamia, although pre-cursors to states, are not merely “state-light.” To see actual players in pre-state societies as if they are anticipating their eventual metamorphosing into states, I contend, is to focus too intently on those aspects that would emerge as keys after state development. This paper “looks up,” in Vitelli’s phrase, at the adaptations of societies in a sub-region of northern piedmont and hills from the point of view of peoples in this sub-region. This sub-region over time appears to constitute a culture area, distinct from the northern Euphrates steppe, Euphrates highlands of Anatolia, southern Mesopotamia, and central Western Iran. I investigate how social forces emerging from the food and craft production, exchange, religious belief, broad social identity, and scale affect local organization systematically. The focal site for this analysis is late Ubaid and Late Chalcolithic 1 Tepe Gawra (XV–XIA/B), but will include culturally related sites in the eastern Jazirah and Altınova plain.

Yorke Rowan (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)

Title: “Leadership in the Southern Levantine Chalcolithic: Ritual Density and the Mode of Production” (Saturday, 11:00)

Abstract: The late fifth and early fourth millennia B.C., broadly known as the Chalcolithic period (ca. 4500–3600 B.C.) in the southern Levant, marks an era of settlement expansion, agricultural intensification, and increased reliance on fruits and olives. Craft activity increases not only in volume, but also in technological sophistication and the utilization of exotic materials. Metallurgy, easily the most notable technological leap, includes lost-wax casting techniques, demonstrating skills more sophisticated than those known in contemporary Egypt. The introduction of separate cemeteries for secondary burials, which include occasional rich mortuary assemblages and creative iconography, provides at least one avenue for the deposition of prestige objects. These developments suggest incipient complexity, yet there is no consensus on how best to understand these transformations — whether or not these should be considered “chiefdoms.” Many traditional attributes of chiefdoms are absent: there are no monumental constructions, no elite residences, nor concentration of wealth or evidence for control over production. At the same time, rich mortuary assemblages including status goods, some manufactured of exotic materials, suggest long-distance contacts. Field data support an intensification of ritual practice, evident in ritual centers, intra-site specialized areas, and mortuary practices. In this paper I argue that Chalcolithic leadership is based upon increased ritualization, much of it centered on a concern with the proper treatment of the dead. As an alternative to the chiefdom model that posits inherited positions of power arose from a need to manage resource competition, I suggest that rich displays of prestige objects coupled with recurring iconographic elements are indicative of a strong religious
association with power. In this view, leadership remained contingent, linked to performative aspects of ritual practice during a period of heightened religious belief.

Gil J. Stein (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)

Title: “Slippery Characters: Looking for Leaders in Ubaid Greater Mesopotamia”  (Friday, 2:00)

Abstract: The Ubaid material culture assemblage marks the earliest clear evidence for the emergence of social complexity in Greater Mesopotamia in the sixth–fifth millennia B.C., and forms the basis for the subsequent emergence of urbanized state societies in the fourth millennium B.C. Although we have archaeological signatures for the development of many key aspects of social complexity in the Ubaid period, we still lack any clear evidence for institutionalized leadership in the Ubaid, and we do not understand the sociopolitical organization of Ubaid polities. Much of the current archaeological “invisibility” of Ubaid political leaders is probably due to the combination of sampling problems and the probability that political leadership in the incipient complex societies of the Ubaid may well have operated according to different dynamics than those traditionally invoked for chiefdoms. At the same time, local variation across the Ubaid interaction sphere suggests that there may have been significant differences between lower and upper Mesopotamia in the political economy of leadership, and the processes through which it developed.

This paper compares the evidence for complexity in the Ubaid polities of lower and upper Mesopotamia in relation to current models for the emergence and functioning of leadership in incipient complex societies. Because the leaders themselves are so difficult to detect, I use proxy data from Tell Zeidan (Syria) and other sites to focus instead on the different potential forms of power and the strategies through which they might have been concentrated in the hands of aggrandizing individuals and kin groups. The leaders of Ubaid polities in lower Mesopotamia seem to have used corporate strategies and close links to ritual institutions and religious ideologies as a means to mobilize economic surpluses from irrigation agriculture. By contrast, I suggest that the Ubaid polities of upper Mesopotamia were loosely organized small-scale entities whose incipient leaders mobilized economic surpluses from economic specialization in both subsistence goods and crafts, while forging long-distance exchange connections to procure exotic raw materials both within and outside the Ubaid interaction sphere. The mobilization of labor or “wealth in people” through tribal kin connections may also have played a key role in power dynamics. Ritual systems and military power seem to have been less important in the infrastructure of the upper Mesopotamian Ubaid polities. The subsequent Late Chalcolithic 1–2–3 developmental histories of Ubaid upper Mesopotamia in the late fifth and early fourth millennia suggest that the different leadership strategies meant that these polities were ultimately smaller scale, more variable, less centralized, and more unstable than their southern counterparts.
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