Anthropology 3804, Section 10
Origins of the State and Urban Society
Fall 2013, T & Th 11:10 – 12:25
Duques, Rm. 360

Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Blomster E-mail: blomster@gwu.edu
Office: 303 HAH (2110 G St.), 4-4880
Office Hours: Tues, 2:30 – 4:30, or by appointment.

Course Description:
Complex societies, particularly the state, comprise the dominant forces in the modern world system, and command a great (some would say disproportionate) amount of the theoretical and empirical discussion in anthropological, sociological, and historical scholarship. The rise of complex societies marks a profound transformation in all aspects of human culture. Since the advent of modern *Homo sapiens*, human have primarily lived in small, mobile groups. Only relatively recently (around 10,000 years ago) have humans undergone the kind of radical transformations that culminated in the urban societies that dominate the world today. The origins and nature of the state and urban civilization are the foci of this class. We first examine early ranked societies (sometime called chiefdoms) before exploring the structure of early states and evaluate competing hypotheses that seek to explain the development of centralized political organization and institutionalized relations of social inequality. Because the phenomenon of “state” encompasses a huge time span, we focus on pre-industrial states.

Archaeology, with its ability to encompass large spans of time, is particularly well suited to explore the origins and processes in the development of complex society. In this class, we will focus on how archaeology informs us on the initial development of social complexity and the state. We examine theories but also look at the nature of the data archaeology generates. Such research is also informed by historical and ethnographic cases, and these sources will further enrich our study. After defining complexity and the formation of chiefdoms, issues to be examined include: trade and interaction, the nature of cities, administration, power, literacy and specialized knowledge, monumental art and social boundaries, and the importance of religion, cosmology, and ideology.

This class balances both anthropological theory and specific case studies and is explicitly comparative. Throughout the class, reference will be made to 6 of the states focused on in the Trigger text: Aztec, Egypt (Old and Middle Kingdom), Inka, Maya, Mesopotamia (Early Dynastic III to Old Babylonian), and Shang/Western Zhou. In addition, topics that we consider will be exemplified by in-depth lectures and readings on the following civilizations and/or sites: Indus, Hawai’i, Northwest Coast, Olmec, Celts/Iron Age Europe, Bali/Negara, Monte Albán, Chavin, Tiwanaku, Mokaya and Etlatongo. This class will be conducted as a mix between lecture and seminar. Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to engage in a well-informed discussion.

General Learning Outcomes:
This course will contribute to student competence in:

- critical thinking skills, where critical thinking is defined as analyzing and engaging with the concepts that underlie an argument and in which the logic and evidence underlying an interpretation is evaluated in terms of the conclusions reached. Students will be able
to analyze and evaluate abstract information; understand and analyze scholarly literature and arguments, and formulate a logical argument based on that analysis.

- written expression and oral communication skills, in which these ideas are communicated in an effective and coherent way.
- cross-cultural perspectives, where international institutions, practices, and sites are analyzed, compared and contrasted. The importance of cultural knowledge is emphasized as a fundamental aspect of human nature, as students identify and analyze the impact of diverse experiences and/or cultures upon human behavior, thought, and expression, while also using cultural comparison as a tool for understanding how social, cultural, or economic contexts shape understandings and behaviors. We explore how different groups contest and claim the past as well as how different theoretical paradigms have been applied cross-culturally.

Specific Learning Outcomes:

- Students will engage with the primary theoretical literature on the rise of the state and evaluate the different models which account for this transformation.
- Students will compare and contrast pre-industrial states and urban societies, looking at similarities and differences in the rise of socio-politically complex societies. We explore both local and global processes.
- Students will analyze the power bases underlying complex societies, which has relevance to both ancient and modern states.
- Students will be able to critically evaluate how evidence is employed to construct arguments which contribute to high-level archaeological and anthropological interpretation and theory.
- Students will practice oral communication skills by focused summaries and critiques of critical readings as well as a substantial presentation on an ancient civilization.

Prerequisites:
There are no prerequisites for this class. Please see me (or ask in class) if you hear/read about unfamiliar terms or concepts. The *Etlatongo* book is assigned as it describes the kinds of evidence archaeologist employ in order to engage in discussions about complex societies.

Grading:
Grades will be calculated based upon the following weighted distribution:

- State Presentation – 15%
- Midterm – 20%
- Czar Essay – 10%
- Negara Essay – 20%
- Final Paper – 25%
- In-class Discussion/Participation – 10%

Textbooks - 3 required books are at the bookstore:
The remainder of the readings for this course will be available on Blackboard.

**Course Schedule and Readings:**

**NOTE: only numbered readings will be discussed in class!**

**Date** | **Topic, Readings, and Assignment** (complete each reading by the date on which it is listed!)
---|---
8/27 | **Why Study States? Anthropological and Archaeological Perspectives.**
| T | Blomster, Chap. 1 and 2; Trigger, Chap. 1.

8/29 | **Concepts of the State and Civilization: Introduction, Disclaimer and Comparative Studies.**
| Th | Trigger, Chap. 2.

9/03 | **Equality, Stratification and Social Rules. Case Study: Çatalhöyük.**

9/05 | **Emerging Complexity, Competitive Displays and Pathways to Inequality. Case Studies: Mokaya and Northwest Coast.**

9/10 | **Archaeological Approaches to Chiefdoms and Transegalitarian Societies. Case Study: Longshan and Hawai‘i.**

9/12 | **An Archaeological Study of Complexity – Etlatongo, Oaxaca.**
| Th | 1. Blomster, Chaps. 3-6.

9/17 | **Origins of the State: Basic Concepts, Theories and Classic Approaches.**
| T | Trigger, Chaps. 3 and 4.
9/19 Origins of the State and Social Evolution: Unilinealism and Myths of the Early State.

9/24 Recognizing a State (or: Is it a State Yet?): From Settlement Patterns to Palaces.
   T Case Study: The Olmec.
   Blomster, Chap. 8.

9/26 Old World States.
   Assignment: Presentations on Trigger’s case studies: Southern Mesopotamia (Early Dynastic III to Old Babylonian); Egypt (Old and Middle Kingdoms), and Shang/Western Zhou.

10/01 New World States.
   Assignment: Presentations on Trigger’s case studies: Inka, Aztec and Classic Maya.

10/03 Origins of Urbanism and Types of States: Territorial and City-States. Case Studies: Uruk and Ur.
   Th Trigger, Chap. 6.

10/08 Comparative Ancient Urbanism. Case Studies: Inka and Shang/Western Zhou.
   T Trigger, Chap. 7.

10/10 Kingship, Order, and Administration: Egypt and Mesopotamia.
   Th Trigger, Chaps. 5 and 10.

10/15 Sociopolitical Organization and Incorporation: Family, Class and Gender Roles. Case Study: Inka.
   T Trigger, Chaps. 8 and 9.

Th  Trigger, Chap. 19.

10/22 Cosmology and Cosmogony: Political Manipulation and Displays of Power. Case Study: Shang.
T  Trigger, Chap. 20.

10/24 Cult, Sacrifice and Incorporation. Case Study: Chavín.
Th  Trigger, Chap. 21.

Assignment: Paper Topics Due!

10/29 Case Study: Were there States and Urbanism in Iron Age Europe?
T  Guest Lecture: Dr. S. Johnston

10/31 Midterm!
Th

11/05 Public Rituals and the State. Case Study: Bali.
T  Trigger, Chap. 22.

Th 1. Geertz, Chap. 4 and Conclusion.

T  Trigger, Chap. 16.
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>11/14</td>
<td><strong>Warfare, Military Organization and the State: from Longshan to Qin in Northern China.</strong> Trigger, Chap. 12.</td>
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<td>11/19</td>
<td><strong>Monumental Art, Style and Social Boundaries in the Rise and Expansion of the State.</strong> Case Study: Tiwanaku.</td>
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<td>11/28</td>
<td><strong>No class.</strong></td>
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<td>12/03</td>
<td><strong>No class. GW make up day.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12/12</td>
<td><strong>Final Paper due in Anthro Dept by 4:30!</strong></td>
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